

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT S-X IN 20ISH YEARS OF MARRIAGE

<https://fiercemarriage.com/lessons-learned-about-s-x-in-20ish-years-of-marriage>

[00:00:00]

Selena: Ryan's really excited about this episode.

Ryan: Yeah. I'm excited to teach you a thing or two about this topic that we're discussing today, which is lessons we've learned in 20-plus years of marriage, 21-plus years of marriage about intimacy. Selena, it'll be a joy of mine to share with you all the things, all the lessons for you to glean from my wisdom.

Selena: Hmm. We'll see you on the other side.

[00:00:32] <music>

Selena: Can't wait to hear all this wisdom.

Ryan: It is manifold wisdom. Is that it? That's the way you say things, right? Lots of wisdom.

Selena: You're the wise one, so.

Ryan: I'm wise to ask if I don't know the answer to something. If I sound like I've been, I don't know, just hanging out in a casino, it's because we've had a cough thing going on and I've got some congestion.

Selena: Yeah, it's probably the Rona.

Ryan: You think so?

Selena: Probably.

Ryan: No. No.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Okay. I feel fine other than the cough.

Selena: You should wear a mask.

Ryan: Funny story. Should I tell the turtle story?

Selena: I think you've told it already.

Ryan: Have I told the turtle story?

Selena: We don't have time. No time.

Ryan: Anyway, welcome to the podcast. My name is Ryan. This is my lovely wife, Selena. It's our joy to be here with you in this thing we call the Fierce Marriage Podcast, Fierce Families being a ministry that we founded a few years ago. Many years ago, in fact.

Selena: A few many years ago. [laughs]

Ryan: A few many years ago. And behind us, you can see lights and background. That's the Fierce Forge, which is made possible in part by our patrons. So if you want to join the Fierce Fellowship, go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. All right.

We're continuing our series this week. We're going through five areas, kind of what we consider the big five areas of marriage. The first one we talked about two weeks ago was communication. Go back and listen to that if you haven't. Also, conflict was the second thing we talked about. Today, we're covering sex and intimacy. Lessons we've learned. I think we have about six lessons that we've learned. It's probably more, but we've picked six. Next week, we'll talk about priorities, which is a huge, huge thing that people don't even realize many times. So make sure you check out that episode. And then the last one is going to be money. Finances. Big lessons we've learned in 21 years of marriage.

So Selena, do you have anything to say before we get this show on the road?

Selena: No.

Ryan: Okay. You're adding so much to this conversation.

Selena: I'm saving it.

Ryan: Okay. Just like we saved ourselves for marriage.

Selena: Let's start there.

Ryan: It's true.

Selena: It is true.

- Ryan:** So we're talking about sex and intimacy. And with each one of these things, we have a governing principle that we... It governs. It's a principle that governs the conversation. And here it is. Selena, do you want to read that? Are you in a place to read this right now?
- Selena:** The governing principle is God made sex for our good and for His glory.
- Ryan:** Yeah. That has to govern this area. Not anything that we impose on the category of sex. Not anything the world would have us believe. A good sex life is good and right and worthy of pursuit, worth fighting for. And you need not feel shame around it. You need not feel awkwardness around it in your marriage. It's good, right, and beautiful for a married couple to have a healthy sex life. And that is the governing principle. The font from which the rest of this conversation and much of what we've learned flows out of... I'd say, all of what we've learned, actually.
- Selena:** All of what we've learned. Yeah.
- Ryan:** What's lesson number one?
- Selena:** Lesson number one, it gets better and better. I think this was a revelation to us. And we joked before when he said it just gets... Because this was Ryan's. What did he learn? He's like, well, I think it gets better and better. I was like, so what are you saying? That it wasn't better, it wasn't great before? And he's... What did you say? Don't say the things. I didn't say the things.
- Ryan:** I said what I said. I didn't say any of the things I didn't say.
- Selena:** Communication.
- Ryan:** Yeah, exactly. No, it was good.
- Selena:** We didn't know anything else either, which I think is a blessing.
- Ryan:** I think, yeah. You just don't know that it's going to get better with time the way that it does.
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** When you're young you don't know what you don't know when you're first married. You don't know what you don't know until you unknow the things you think you know.

- Selena:** Right. Well, and going through more life experience together, it makes sex that... Because of the various purposes of sex, those roots become deeper. I think the connection becomes stronger. The experience is richer. So it's like good wine, right? It gets better with time.
- Ryan:** So what makes it better? That's the question. If you're a young married couple, what do you have to look forward to after 21-plus years of marriage? What makes it better?
- Selena:** What do you say?
- Ryan:** I clearly, I mean, if your marriage is going strong and you're pursuing one another, you're pursuing the Lord first and foremost, I think it gets better because the depth of connection... we have yet to reach the bottom of that depth of connection.
- Selena:** Right. There's just a...
- Ryan:** We connect more and more.
- Selena:** There's a natural familiarity. So you're already kind of... you grow into... I don't know. I feel like the starting line gets further behind you, if that makes sense. Like we're not starting from a place of unknown. We've learned some things. And so therefore we're a few steps ahead. So the familiarity of getting those few steps ahead I think just takes you further, right, into, like you said, like a deeper experience, more unifying connecting. But-
- Ryan:** I think you learn how to give of yourself.
- Selena:** Well, in the way that your spouse receives it as well. So it's not...
- Ryan:** That's what I mean by "how to give". It's not just like you do whatever comes to your mind.
- Selena:** Yeah. Or whatever you want to do.
- Ryan:** It's more of a dialogue.
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** Becomes more of a dialogue. I'm trying to think how else has it gotten better? I mean, we've kind of just said this so many ways. You just get more skilled frankly. You just get more skilled at it. Get more flexible. I'm kidding. [laughs]

- Selena:** There's a smudginess.
- Ryan:** It just gets better and better.
- Selena:** And how does it get better and better? I would say, number two, more is better.
- Ryan:** Okay. This was Selena's by the way. I'm just saying.
- Selena:** Just saying.
- Ryan:** We've realized that it... we used to have a... you always laugh and you giggle when I say rhythms. We used to have rhythms around our sex life.
- Selena:** Habits or weekly...
- Ryan:** Rhythms where we'd have every two to three days. We knew it was about time to connect. And if we fell out of that, out of those habits, out of those routines, we would feel it. We would feel the disconnection set in. And then we said, you know what, just recently actually... What?
- Selena:** Well, I wouldn't say just... we didn't just feel it physically. We felt it emotionally.
- Ryan:** Of course.
- Selena:** We felt it just mentally. On all fronts. We're just fighting with each other.
- Ryan:** Yeah. And you grow distant and you start to feel that distance, that gap widening, if you will. But I don't know what happened, but it was maybe a year or two years ago. Okay. Again, 19, 20 years into our marriage. I think I came to you... This leads into maybe the fourth or fifth one that's coming up. So stay tuned for that. But I came to you and said, "You know, I think we need to up our game. I think every other day should be our goal. If not, sometimes twice, you know, two days back to back sometimes. I think we should up the end." You remember that conversation?
- Selena:** Sure.
- Ryan:** Okay. Well, we had it.
- Selena:** I do. I mean, yes. Yes.

- Ryan:** It wasn't like this big bombshell thing. It was like, "Hey, maybe we should try for every other day." It was like, "Okay, let's give that a shot."
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** And then it just kind of became our new normal. And we realized, wow, this is actually way better than... it's not leaving the chance for that disconnection to even begin.
- Selena:** Right. And it's just something, you know, you don't know until you know, crossing that threshold of let's try this. Let's try it for this consistency. When I said more is better, I really meant that... we have a lot of couples that write in that they're in basically a sexless marriage. And I'm just like, if you're gonna make a mistake, like do more, not less, right? Like more is always better. There's opportunities for connection, there's opportunities for vulnerability, for reconciliation. I think physical intimacy, you know, it should flow from the spiritual, the mental just connection, right? You should be sharing.
- Ryan:** Yes.
- Selena:** And when it doesn't, then you can still draw from that well, ideally.
- Ryan:** Yes, I agree with that. But there's also a time when you choose it because you know it's healthy and right to do-
- Selena:** Absolutely.
- Ryan:** ...assuming there's nothing else keeping you from it.
- Selena:** There's a dutiful piece of it. Absolutely.
- Ryan:** In other words, just not feeling like it is not always... it's not a valid reason to say no.
- Selena:** Absolutely.
- Ryan:** This will go to number three, which I'm inserting into this. It's not on the list, but the number three is as a husband, it's okay to initiate by saying, Hey, can we be intimate? That's okay. The reason it's okay is because it's right and good for that to be the way the husband feels connected to his wife.
- Selena:** One of the primary ways.

Ryan: Yeah. Okay. I saw this video. It was on Instagram or something, but it was this couple, they were kind of playing out the scenario where the husband goes, Hey, I'd like to be intimate with you. However, he was asking. I don't remember how he asked. But she goes, you know, "No, didn't we just have sex like two or three days ago? I don't really feel like it right now. And you know what? You're fine. I just want to go to bed. I don't feel like it." Obviously he kind of left dejected, feeling like he had been rejected by his wife.

And then this is the wife talking in this scenario and she's talking to the camera now. She says, "How would that be if you were feeling disconnected from your husband and you go to your husband and you say, I feel like we're not connected. Can we just have some time tonight to talk? I feel like we've not sat face to face."

Selena: That's where it's coming from.

Ryan: "And we've not sat face to face and we've not connected." And if he said this, "You know what? Didn't we talk like three days ago? We should be fine. I don't want to talk right now. I'm actually just going to go and play golf. But like maybe tomorrow or the next day we can probably talk if that's..." Clearly, there's something wrong on both sides of that.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: And I think she was trying to illustrate the point that we've gotten okay with wives kind of holding the keys and-

Selena: The cookies as you call them.

Ryan: Wives have all the cookies and husband has to come and beg for the cookie and hopefully if he's good enough, he'll get the cookie. And that's kind of a joke that we have. I'm not talking about begging. I'm talking about going to your wife with a need and saying, "You are the end game for this need. There's no other way."

Selena: There's no other way.

Ryan: You have all the cookies and I have no access to any cookies anywhere, legitimate access. So we've gotten used culturally it being okay for women and wives to withhold. 1 Corinthians 7, it's not okay to withhold. That's not something for a husband to hold over his wife's head, but it's something for sure to be a dynamic in your marriage to realize that there's a reason God said that because it's healthy for that craving and that desire to come up periodically and to be satisfied in one another.

Selena: And we need to battle those disconnects. I think for me it was having you sometimes just say that: "It is good and right for us to do this. We're married. This is what we do." For some reason, sometimes it gets mixed in my head that it's like, "Well, yeah, we just did it. Didn't we? So why do we need to do it again?" And then, you know, we're in our 40s and I'm like, "You know what? We're probably like near halfway through, if not halfway through our lives. One night or one day of not having intimacy is one less day of not having intimacy in our life. Like, well, why would I not want to give myself or..."

I think even there's a counselor, author, podcaster, she had talked about why not at the end of your day would you not want to be close and intimate and experience oneness with the very, you know... basically love of your life? Like, why would you not after a long day of work or whatever, even if it was a great day together, why would you not want to just kind of seal it and end it that way? Which was a great, holy, and challenging thought. We have to battle that conditioning of, well, I don't really feel like it and you need to respect that. I don't believe that that's godly. I think that a wife, when she is loved rightly, she is willing, more willing, I would say, joyfully willing. We shouldn't be joyfully willing all the time, but we're humans. It's hard. There's dynamics.

Ryan: And there's dynamics where maybe the husband's not leading well. He's not loving well. So there's right and good. There's reason that the wife is feeling maybe unsafe or unsafe emotionally. Like she can't confide in him or she can't be vulnerable to him because he's been unloving in some way. So that needs to be taken into account.

But frankly, that's your cue to then work through it. And hopefully that man or that wife, whoever's providing the dysfunction would be willing to come to the table and be humble and be corrected by the Lord, by God's word, by each other so that you can get through it and not just establish a new status quo that is unhealthy and unhelpful and unsustainable in a good marriage.

Selena: Yeah. So come together, talk about it. And don't be afraid to state the obvious. But also put your feelings out there of, I know I feel this way and I probably shouldn't or whatever. Can we just talk about this?

Ryan: It goes back to communication, which is why we covered that one first. So that was number three. And that was it's okay to go to one another and bring that need to them.

Number four, the purposes of intimacy are many, and it doesn't always function in the same way. Now, this is one of those things that was a bit of a light bulb moment for me in that there are many reasons that God has given

us sex. It's not just for physical pleasure. And obviously it's not just for making babies. And it's not just strictly for the connection, emotional connection in your marriage. And it's not just to stave off temptation. It is all those things.

Selena: AND.

Ryan: AND it's for comfort. It's to give glory to God because He's given you this gift for your enjoyment. He didn't make it enjoyable just so you could grin and bear it. He made it enjoyable so that you would enjoy one another. He's even given us a beautiful example of this in Songs of Solomon, the song of all songs as it goes.

Another one is unity. It reinforces the exclusivity of your marriage. Another one I really like is... and we've got some pushback on this one, so maybe I could use a different word, but it's a form of covenant renewal is what we've called it. When you get married and you have sex for the first time, that is a consummation of that marriage covenant. You've made the covenant, now you've consummated it and that's sealed. It's the seal of the covenant. Now you're not having sex to redo the covenant, to remake the covenant.

Selena: It's to remember.

Ryan: It's a covenant reminder. I say renewal and I don't mean renewal that you've taken an old covenant that's bad and somehow made it a new covenant.

Selena: I think it's remembering.

Ryan: Yeah. You're pointing to it and saying, this is still in fact the case that we are in covenant together.

Selena: Which we all need to be reminded of that because it's so easy to fall away from. I mean, clearly, it's so easy to just become enemies, become roommates, become, you know... yeah, we're mom and dad, I guess, but to be in a marriage covenant is such a beautiful thing because it glorifies and emulates the gospel on many levels as well. Which is the next one.

Ryan: One purpose is that it reflects the gospel. And we're not covering these exhaustively. There's actually another whole episode dedicated to this. I think it's right around Episode 357, something along the lines of the purposes of sex.

But how is it a gospel reminder? Well, there's no other time in your marriage that you're so vividly naked and exposed to one another and you're saying, here I am in all my, you know, kind of imperfections. And then you're receiving

this love and you're giving love to one another. And that's just a picture of how we are completely known.

Selena: Fully known.

Ryan: Fully known.

Selena: Like completely loved.

Ryan: Yeah. And still fully loved. So there are a few more-

Selena: One you didn't mention that it was kind of newer to us, so lastly, is just the comfort piece. Did you mention that?

Ryan: I may have mentioned it very quickly.

Selena: Okay. This was brought up by a good friend of ours in one of his groups and just talking about if you're going through grief, you're going through a trial, you're going through something difficult within your family, not necessarily your marriage, but there is comfort to be found in one another. I think those are times that you should not pull away from one another, but should actually be closer and exercising that reminder more than not.

Ryan: Yeah. And that's a biblical case as well. We see that Genesis 24 when Isaac is comforted by Rebecca after his mother's death. It says he took her as his wife and he was comforted after his mother's death. So yeah, that was a pretty profound moment too. Because if you're having a tough time, even at work or whatever the situation is...

I'm on a board for a nonprofit locally and we had something come in today that just took the wind out of my sails in terms of what it means in a lot of regards. Relationally being one of them. There's a bunch of stuff involved in it. I can't talk about it. But the point is, I could look to you and say, man, this is demoralizing to me and I need comfort right now. And it may not be like that moment, but like to take that emotion and that feeling and deal with it together, whether you're talking through it, praying through it, or even just finding comfort in one another's embrace, if you will. So there you go. That's number four.

Number three lesson that we've learned. What say you? Four. Sorry, number five, counting backwards.

Selena: Purity is better than imagined.

Ryan: So what we mean by that is in the purity of our covenant, we've been able to explore and adventure and to enjoy one another without the pollution of perversion. And what I mean by that... and this obviously is assuming that you're not allowing pornography to be a part of your marriage.

Selena: Yeah. Any sort of images or-

Ryan: Yeah. Because you don't need outside input when it comes to your sex life.

Selena: To make it great because it's greater without it.

Ryan: Yes. You don't need outside input when it comes to your sex life. You have everything that you need together in your covenant to work together to make it great and to find... I don't know, to explore, to find delight, to find new ways to enjoy one another and to even... wow, imagine this, talk about it together. Say, what did you think of all of whatever, you know/ Do you have any feedback here? Please fill out this form, get your 10% discount for dinner.

The point is in marriage when you kind of fence off your garden and as we read in Song of Solomon, that you keep the foxes out so that your crop is intact, keeping all the little intruders out, little and big, then you have the room in your marriage to, gosh, and in your sex life to make it better than you ever imagined. And that's by conforming to God's design for it.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Okay. Here's number... What number?

Selena: Six.

Ryan: Six?

Selena: Yeah. You should say this.

Ryan: Yes. We have a whole episode on this. Look it up. The husband is the primary initiator of sex in marriage. We have a whole episode on it and there's a lot of great conversations happening in the chats on that one, in the comments. And what do we mean by that is I think a lot of times husbands feel like they can't initiate. And what it does is it makes the husbands feel awkward when they'd want to initiate, but they don't feel like they can. It also kind of leaves this elephant in the room where maybe the wife kind of knows that the husband's-

Selena: Putting out the vibe.

- Ryan:** ...Putting out the vibe but she's tired, doesn't really feel like she wants to initiate because he didn't really say overtly.
- Selena:** Right. Rejecting the vibe. Subtle rejection.
- Ryan:** And there's selective hearing too or a selective picking up the vibe where you're like, well, I kind of sensed it, but I didn't sense it enough. We've had it in our marriage where-
- Selena:** Are you speaking from experience?
- Ryan:** I don't know.
- Selena:** When I put out the vibe and you're just rejecting it.
- Ryan:** No. Okay-
- Selena:** I put out the vibe apparently. I don't even know I'm putting out the vibe.
- Ryan:** You can't help it. You just exude vibe. You are vibe. [both laughs] Every husband can agree. All right. Wife is vibe all the time. Yeah, there's been times where I'll be like trying to put out the vibe, all right, flirtatious kind of playful, and then you don't pick up on it. At least not consciously. And then later that night, I'm a little bit frustrated because I'm like, you're not telling... I'm playing one-man tennis here. I'm hitting the ball over the net. Nothing comes back. Hitting a ball over the net waiting for them to return, nothing comes back. Keep hitting them over. Eventually it's like, well, she's not even showing up to play today. And then I'll be frustrated and you'll be like, "Why are you so frustrated?" I was like, "Well, I got the sense that you didn't want anything... You're not picking up the vibe." And you're like, "Well, I guess I kind of knew, and I kind of thought." In hindsight, you're like, yeah, well, I figured.
- Selena:** A good husband might be like, "Well, what happened? Why was wrong going on with your day? I'm just kidding. [laughs]
- Ryan:** I could ask that too. It doesn't matter. Hit another one over the net, still nothing back. So this is why this number is... it was an epiphany for us. It's number six of that the husband can be the primary initiator and here's where-
- Selena:** You're the head.
- Ryan:** I said primary. [Selena laughs] Sometimes wives can initiate too. And that's totally fine and awesome and awesome and should be happening. It's so funny we subtext each other while we're talking. And so we had one instance where

it was just like kind of crazy. We're winding down dinner, we had just had a fight, we had just had an argument or whatever and we weren't connecting. It had been like three days, we knew the intimacy would be the thing to like nip this in the bud.

Selena: Weren't you just like, "Kids go watch your show. Mommy and Daddy got a call upstairs. We got some business we got to take care of." Something like that. They are over the moon for a show because they don't get them often.

Ryan: And you didn't know I was going to say that.

Selena: No.

Ryan: But I was like, "Yeah, girls clear the table. I want you to turn on a show. Take care of your sister for-

Selena: 30 minutes.

Ryan: 30 minutes. She was happy. It's not like we're making our children mother their sister. Don't worry about that. But people get all up in arms about that sort of thing. And I said, "Me and your mother need to go upstairs and have a conversation." And you knew what I meant because you were like-

Selena: Oh, I knew. Conversation.

Ryan: Was that freeing for you?

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Yeah, it was.

Selena: Because if I initiate it, then you get all like, "Well, you're just initiating because I'm mad."

Ryan: That's true.

Selena: It's true.

Ryan: Because that is why. Anyway. But that kind of broke the ice.

Selena: And why is that so bad? Like if you're mad and then I'm trying to reconcile.

Ryan: It's not bad. It's just irritating.

Selena: I've been trying to understand it. That makes sense. I'll take it.

Ryan: It's just irritating. That's all.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: You can get over it.

Selena: Number seven.

Ryan: This is the last one. Number seven: the acronym ACT. It sounds so silly, but this is something we've learned.

Selena: Access, communicate, try. I just have Dwight in my head.

Ryan: False.

Selena: False.

Ryan: Yeah. So ACT is an acronym for basically communicating around sex and intimacy, meaning that you can assess how things are going, communicate about it. I feel like it's been a little hit-and-miss. I feel like we can't really seem to find a-

Selena: Routine?

Ryan: A routine that works. There you go. Or Hey, I feel like we've kind of stagnated. I feel like there's more to be had in our sex life. And it's not because I'm trying to somehow... again, purity. I'm not trying to realize some perverse thing that I've observed outside of our marriage and make manipulate you into doing that thing. But it's like-

Selena: Your husband who wants to be close.

Ryan: I want to be closer.

Selena: And I want to connect and you want to.

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: And a wife should desire that as well. I mean, wives want to connect with their husbands and it's like, have sex with them then. That's one way. It's a great connecting point.

Ryan: So you can assess your sex life. "Hey, I feel like it's maybe we were lacking. There could be more. I feel like there's more to be had. Let's talk about it." Communication. And then let's put our-

Selena: Give it a try.

Ryan: Just try. Let's give it a shot. And then repeat. Rinse and repeat. Assess again. Communicate again. Try, try again. So there you go, you guys. Those are some things that we've learned in our 21 years of marriage regarding sex and intimacy. We hope this has been helpful to you. I just can't say this enough. When we realize that God's plan for sex is for us to enjoy it unto His glory and unto our good and that it exists as something He made, that we didn't make it up, it's not perverse. It's not... it's good. That gives you so much freedom to enjoy it, to enjoy one another, to be challenged in this area in a way that's not going to be incendiary, causing fights in your marriage. It can be a joyful part of your marriage.

With that said, we'd like to end these episodes with a call to the gospel. If you don't know who Jesus is or what the gospel is, here it is. The message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, the son of God, came and died for sinners and didn't stay dead, but He rose from the grave, conquered death, and now is calling us into new life in Him. If you place your faith in Him, repent, and believe in Him, eternal life can be yours. It costs you nothing. It's all by grace, all through faith, or by faith alone. And it's by the work of Christ alone, not our works. That's the gospel. It's done. All we need to do is believe in Christ. And even then, the belief is something that He's given to us.

So we pray that this might be the way that God is awakening your heart and leading you to believe in Him. If you want to take a step in that direction, we recommend you talk to a friend who knows Jesus, say, show me Jesus, I want to follow Him. Go to a church that preaches out of the Bible. If you don't have either of those things readily available, go to this website. It's thenewsisgood.com.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you so much for marriage. Thank you for the gift of sex and intimacy. Thank you that you have made it good and you've called it good and you've called us into the enjoyment of this good thing that you've given us in the covenant of marriage. I pray that you'd help couples who are maybe dealing with pain and struggle or strife in this area, that they would see this as a opportunity to work on it, to talk through it, and to begin to reconnect with one another. I pray that you give them flourishing marriages, flourishing sex lives, and flourishing in every other area of their marriage. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Amen. All right. Thank you for joining us for this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast. Next week, as a reminder, we're talking about priorities. It's very, very important, but it's one of these things that you may not click on it because priorities is not necessarily something that's exciting out the gate, unlike sex and intimacy. [laughs] So make sure you check that out because we're going to cover a lot of really baseline important stuff and it'll help you. With that said, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in about seven days. So until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - Exodus 20:17

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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