

LOVE, SEX & RELATIONSHIPS



Finding who we are in Jesus

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We live in a world which is completely confused when it comes to questions around identity, sexuality, gender and relationships.

Over the course of this series, we want to learn and apply what God says when it comes to some of these key issues and allow what He says about us to shape our identity.

To help you prepare and lead, here are the four parts to our series and their key points:

Week 1

God, Sex & Relationships

- What our culture tells us about sex is confusing, distorted and demonstrably doesn't work. God has made us for intimacy, in a way that reflects His nature.
- Sex is sacred and is a picture of the ultimate intimacy – an idea which frees and dignifies us.
- Each of us is valuable, and what we do with our bodies matters.
- Jesus purchased us, and God's 'don'ts' around sex point positively to it's specialness.
- In Jesus, God cleans up our sexual histories so we can **all** be pure before Him.

Week 2

God & Homosexuality

- Our culture makes lots of assumptions about the priority of romance, sex, and sexuality that should be questioned.
- We're all grubby sexual sinners but God loves us more than we realise.
- The modern Western church has not been perfect in responding to the revolution in same-sex relationships and we have things to repent of – including idolising heterosexual marriage and treating gay people badly.
- The clear (and ultimately good-for-us) teaching of the Bible is that sex/marriage is intended for married male-female couples as reflection of God and the Church. We thrive by following God in this.
- Jesus is the model for understanding and responding to views on sexuality – and His way is to die for people in grace and to speak the truth in love.



Week 3

God & Gender Identity

- On the back of the philosophical developments of the last few hundred years, our culture has come to the view that identity is defined by the self – and by our feelings over our biology.
- We all have identity struggles. God gives us our true nature, and He's great news.
- Jesus is the only one who had the 'wrong body' – and it was broken for us.
- The message of the Transgender Movement is in essence: 'First feelings, second biology'. The message of more traditionally minded people is: 'First biology, second feelings'. The message of Jesus is better than either. In a nutshell, it's 'First what God says, secondly everything else'.
- Jesus frees us from stereotypes, promises a new creation, and equips us to love others.

Week 4

God & Singleness

- Singleness is a great calling, from God, and should be honoured.
- The Church has often done a poor job of valuing singleness and loving single people.
- Those who are single should see their singleness as a gift – even when it might have challenges.
- If earthly marriage points us towards the type of new creation relationship the Church will have with our Saviour. Earthly singleness points us towards the new creation relationships that we will have with one another.
- Single people are vital to church life – and should hear it from the rest of the church!
- Jesus is the friend we really need, and the intimacy we really need is to be found through Him and modelled through His people.

TAKEAWAYS

Session 1: God, Sex & Relationships

OUTCOMES

- To see how God gives clear guidance on how we engage with sex, and His words are good news
- To understand and critique some of the strong messages our culture tells us about sex
- To take hold of the Gospel further as we marvel at what Jesus has done for us in our brokenness

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, Matt made the following observations about the values of our culture, and how they affect our views on sex:

- We're hooked on individualism – sex is 'for my pleasure'
- Romance is king – so sex is seemingly 'ultimate'
- Physical reality is all there is – so sex is just an 'appetite' to be satisfied
- We're suspicious of traditional authorities – so sex is not 'limited' by traditional boundaries

SHARE

- Would you agree?
- Where do you see these at play?
- How do these ideas shape what we think and do regarding sex?

READ

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground..."

Genesis 2:18-25

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a

deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

EXPLAIN

Biblically sexuality begins to be understood by the idea; *'let us make mankind in our own image.'* [Gen 1:26]. Humans are made to reflect the nature and character of God himself. Just as God is one yet three distinct persons – the same but different, so man and woman are supposed to be the same yet different when joined together in marriage.

This sets the tone for sex – it is intended to reflect the nature of God. The marriage of man and woman, leaving their parents, united with one another, is a picture of the God who created it.

DISCUSS

- Why does this theology matter when it comes to our views about sex?
- In the garden, naked Adam and Eve *'felt no shame'*. Why was this important for the author to say, and why does it still resonate

to this day? What does it tell us about God's intentions for sex?

- The idea about leaving one's father and mother (ie getting married) is deliberately part of the story. Why is it so important that marriage is a prerequisite for sex?

READ

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

"I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.'

CONTEXT

At the time, the city of Corinth was so famous for sexual promiscuity that someone known to sleep around got a reputation for 'acting like a Corinthian'! Paul writes to a group that had all sorts of sexual experiences – but is not shy of telling them how Jesus can change how they view sex.

EXPLAIN

In brief, Paul's points are:

- The body has value – you are worth something
- Don't 'sell yourself' cheaply – don't undermine your specialness though sexual conduct outside God's intention
- You are not your own - Jesus personally 'bought' you
- Sex is sacred – it is not something that can be engaged in trivially without consequence.

DISCUSS

- How do you see the sort of things the Corinthians said reflected in our own culture?
- How does our God given value shape how we see sex?
- What does it mean to say that sex is sacred?
- What implications does this have for how we conduct ourselves sexually?

EXPLAIN

Many people feel dirty or distant from God due to their sexual histories, because of things they have done or things that have been done to them. But

Jesus is good news for everyone, regardless of what has happened in our lives.

As Matt shared; 'Because of the cross, we get to swap sexual histories with Jesus. He gets all our lust, our selfish extra-marital sex, our affairs, our abuse, our porn addictions. We get His sexual history – self-sacrificial, pure, treating every other person as a human not an object, perfect sexual integrity... All that is transferred to us in the sight of God. Whatever you have done or has been done to you, with Jesus you are forever clean in the eyes of God and you can be made clean again and again every day in this life by coming to Him.'

READ

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

DISCUSS

- What hope does this verse give to anyone who has made mistakes or been mistreated sexually?

TRY OUT

- Why is what God says about sex good news? How would you explain it in your own words?

PRAY

Session 2:

God & Homosexuality

OUTCOMES

- To see that our sexuality and desires should point us to worship Jesus.
- To understand that we are all called to submit our lives (including our sexuality) in radical discipleship to Jesus.
- Explore how we all can help create an environment that is biblically inclusive for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ at Maybridge.

SHARE

From the outside-in, how is the Church viewed by others when it comes to issues of homosexuality? Why do you think that is?

INTRODUCTION

Last week we looked at how God gives clear guidance on how we engage with sex and marriage.

The Bible is clear that same-sex relationships are outside God's design, yet it is clear that those experiencing same-sex attraction are not outside of His extravagant love and grace.

There are only a few places the bible directly mentions homosexual acts from both the Old and New Testament – Matt covered these fully on Sunday so we won't get into them now.

Although verses around this topic are direct, in their right context

they show that we're all grubby sexual sinners, but God loves us all.

Leviticus 20 is one of the places where homosexuality is referred to alongside other commands around sex.

However, these laws are book-ended by verses that give context for God's intention behind them:

READ

Leviticus 20:7-8

"Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy."

Leviticus 20:23-24

You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

CONTEXT

The book of Leviticus is a list of practical laws and Leviticus 20:13 is among a list of many commands around sex. Unusually for the time, these verses assume a high view of both men and women and sowed the seeds for faithfulness and dignity. These laws compelled men to treat women well.

DISCUSS

- What does this passage say about God's intention for His people by giving these laws?
- Why is it dangerous to single out verses on homosexuality?
- Do we struggle to think that God has a created order for things? Why?

READ

ROMANS 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Quote from author Wesley Hill

'One of the most striking things about the new Testament teaching on homosexuality is that right on the heels of the passages that condemn homosexual activity there are without exception resounding affirmations of God's extravagant mercy and redemption. God condemns homosexual behaviour and yet at great cost to himself lavishes his love on homosexual persons'.

DISCUSS

- Attraction is never condemned in the Bible, only same-sex acts. What is a healthy way to view attraction? How can it point us to worship the God who created us?
- Are there attitudes or behaviours we have that wrongly deem all sexual sin or same sex attraction or as worse than others?

- How might we demonstrate God's extravagant mercy to those who experience same sex attraction?

READ

John 10:10

'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'

DISCUSS

- When the world outside the church would affirm same sex relationships, how might the Church show this truth (John 10:10) is possible for same-sex attracted Christians when we call them to deny their sexual desires in biblical celibacy?

READ

Mark 8:34-38

"...Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

EXPLAIN

We are all called to live as radical disciples to Jesus; to deny ourselves, to pick up our crosses and follow Him. The call to LGB people is no more demanding

than the call to everyone – lay down your own life and desires to live the full life in obedience to Christ.

DISCUSS

- How do we feel about the idea that God has a way for us to live?
- What ideas and cultural beliefs does this challenge?
- What are parts of our lives that we put above Jesus? Do you struggle to submit your desires to God?
- What have you given up in your life to follow Jesus?

TRY OUT

- In the week, notice if there are times when you struggle to submit your desires, an aspect of your life to God, or obey Him. Ask God to help you lay them at the feet of Jesus. You may find it helpful to use one of the songs below to help you pray and reflect on what you've discussed in the week.
- Have a look at some of the Christian organisations that support and help those experiencing same-sex attraction. Learn and pray about ways you might you and the church support friends, families or neighbours and share the love of Jesus with them (links are on page 15).
- Find the time to chat through Living Out 'Church Audit'. How might you, your Partnership Group and our church family help to build a biblically inclusive church in response to your answers?

PRAY

Pray that we might submit our lives in full to Jesus. May we model the call to continually submit of our desires, plans, hopes and lives to Jesus.

You may like to play a worship song to help you reflect and respond to what you have discussed.

This is my desire –
Shane & Shane
youtu.be/LlxtO8xajzs



Devotion –
Worship Central
youtu.be/xNtmRC1ewyY



FOLLOW 'MAYBRIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH' ON SPOTIFY

Our Worship Team have compiled a list of songs that help us engage and reflect on our identity with Jesus and His love for us. You can use them as part of your group or for individual prayer and reflection.



Session 3:

God & Gender Identity

OUTCOMES

- To see how identity is rooted in what God says about us not the world.
- To encourage and inspire one another to allow what God says about us to shape our identity.

INTRODUCTION

At some time and in some way, we are all likely to wrestle with the question 'Who am I?'. We all struggle to find and understand our identity. This should give us a bit of humility – all of us are broken, all of us have insecurities, all of us need help and comfort. We're all human and need to find our identity in the one place it cannot be contested or changed.

SHARE

- In what ways have you had to wrestle with the question 'Who am I?'
- Have you considered the question 'How do I find who I am?' before? Why might it be important to do so?

EXPLAIN

We are unlikely to find a passage that directly addresses the modern ideas of gender or sexual identity, but the bible does help us interpret everything we think about humanity and where we are to find our identity.

READ

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

DISCUSS

- What does the creation story say about our God-given worth and dignity? How does it speak to where we are to find our identity?
- Andrew Bunt, author of *Finding Our Best Identity*, defines identity as 'our controlling self-understanding': What beliefs do you hold that control your identity? Where do we look most to find our identity?
- What are culture's answers to finding our identity and where have you seen this at play in the world around you?

- Christians like to say that we get our identity from Jesus – what does that mean?

READ

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

DISCUSS

- Jesus is the only one who had the 'wrong body' - and it was broken for us. In Him, God stepped down to take our mess onto His own body. How is this good news for our identity?
- Jesus frees us from stereotypes, promises a new creation, and equips us to love others. How can the church help people to understand and enjoy the given nature of their identity as a man or a woman?
- What helps us shape our identity in God and His word, not by the world around us?

SHARE & REFLECT

Spend some time sharing and reflecting on bible verses that remind us of our identity in Jesus... You may want to write them down for everyone to see.

- Who does God say we are? What are the titles or attributes given to us by God?

PRAY

Spend time praying for one another and on the words and verses shared.

Pray that you would live in the light of knowing God gives us our identity.

You may like to read Psalm 139 or play a worship song to declare your identity in Christ over one another:

Canvas and the clay – Pat Barrett

youtu.be/puDttOmbq2Y



Who you say I am – Hillsong Worship

youtu.be/lcC1Bp13n_4



TRY OUT:

- In your week, where and when are you most likely to put other identities above your identity in Christ? It may be a relationship like being a parent, a married or single person. You may put your job title or occupation above your identity in Christ or have an unhealthy focus on your successes or failures... Ask God to help you submit these and spend time submitting your identity to Jesus.
- Our identity as male or female is given to us by God – notice any unhelpful gender stereotypes you, culture or the church places on men and women that are not from God.
- How might you live in the light of knowing God gives us our identity this week?
- Try texting your group or a friend a verse and encouragement of our identity in Jesus each day.

Session 4:

God & Singleness

OUTCOMES

- To see that Jesus is the friend we all need and that true intimacy is found in Him.
- As His people we can help to reflect and offer the love we find in Jesus with one another and honour single people.
- Find ways we can be a church that encourages and supports single people.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus calls us His friends and by doing so he implies he is the friend we all need and true intimacy is found in Him. This is to be modelled and experienced through His people.

SHARE

- What is true friendship?
- Have you experienced a friendship that is particularly meaningful? What makes it so?

READ

1 Corinthians 32-35

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the

Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

DISCUSS

- To Paul, why is singleness a gift?
- For followers of Jesus, to be single is to be celibate. This sounds so unreasonable to so many in our culture today (and even for some in the church). Why?
- Are there ways you idolise heterosexual marriage that are unhelpful to those who are single? What are they?

READ

John 15:12-15

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

DISCUSS

- What is the example of love that Jesus demonstrates?
- Jesus calls us His friends: Would you say you experience Jesus as a friend right now? Why?

Single people who are faithful to God, remind us of the aim for the Church – that we are a wider family where everyone finds the social intimacy they need – genuine, meaningful, life-giving... friendship.

- What does a church that supports people who are single look like?

TRY OUT

In the week, think about some of the reasons people may be single. Do you know anyone that is? Think about how can you honour and support them this week. Matt gave suggestions on Sunday:

- Who can you invite into your life meaningfully? (Meals, walks, kids...)
- Show up to celebrate! Job promotions, graduations, new homes are all moments when it's important to be present.
- At church, make a conscious effort to include those who are on their own.
- Could you be a 'first responder' for those who live alone? Bring meals or go to appointments when they're ill. Be there for small or serious health concerns...
- Would you invite a single person on a family holiday or include them in big family occasions?

PRAY & REFLECT

That we would know and experience Jesus as our Friend.

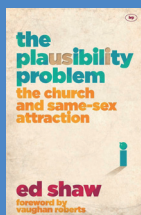
Communion –
Maverick City Music
youtu.be/_hU5LiEXB54



RESOURCES

Some helpful books, resources and organisations to help unpack some of the topics discussed over this series.

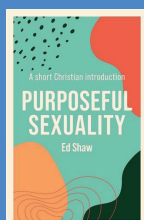
Some copies are available from the church library to borrow.



THE PLAUSIBILITY PROBLEM: THE CHURCH AND SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

Ed Shaw

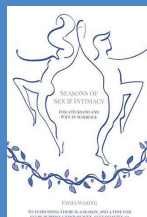
Is the Bible's teaching on sexuality plausible today? For many, it seems so unreasonable but Shaw shows it's not because of the Bible's difficulties, but because of missteps that the Church has taken in its understanding of the Christian life.



PURPOSEFUL SEXUALITY: A SHORT CHRISTIAN INTRODUCTION

Ed Shaw

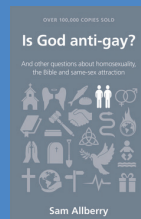
What is your sexuality for? Ed explores the Bible's deepest answers to this question in a way that will help everyone to appreciate and enjoy God's purposeful gift of sexuality – whatever their sexual orientation might be.



SEASONS OF SEX AND INTIMACY: FOR A HUSBAND AND WIFE IN MARRIAGE

Emma Waring

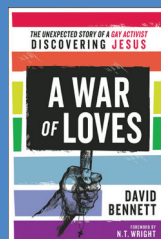
This book offers practical, down-to-earth information to help readers understand their bodies, find advice about common sexual issues and ways to increase your sexual enjoyment as a couple.



IS GOD ANTI-GAY? AND OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY, THE BIBLE AND SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

Sam Allberry

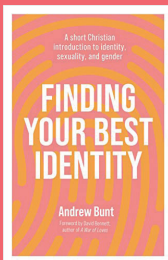
This short, readable book explains clearly and simply what we can say with certainty from the Bible about marriage, sexuality and same-sex attraction.



A WAR OF LOVES: THE UNEXPECTED STORY OF A GAY ACTIVIST DISCOVERING JESUS

David Bennett

This book is David's moving and personal story about how he became a follower of Jesus whilst grappling with the question 'How can I be gay and a Christian'.



FINDING OUR BEST IDENTITY

Andrew Bunt

This is a book on identity that is concise, clear and practical. Whilst Bunt applies his arguments to matters of sexuality and gender, he highlights how we all find our identity from places other than as children made in the image of God.

FINDING YOUR BEST IDENTITY GROUP READ-THROUGH

If you or your group don't want to follow the takeaways over this series, we recommend reading through this book together.

There are study questions at the end of each chapter which can be used to discuss and unpack the material as a group. The focus should be helping each other understand and experience our identity in Christ.

You may wish to split the book up into four weeks:

Week 1

Chapter 1: How do we find who we are?

Week 2

Chapter 2 & 3: 'Others decide' and 'I decide' approach to finding who we are

Week 3

Chapter 4 & 5: 'God decides' approach to finding who we are, plus identity, sexuality and gender.

Week 4

Chapter 6: Experiencing our best identity. Create your own 'action plan' (page 72) to share, discuss and pray together for you final.

Other reading

Helpful reading list from the TFT:
truefreedomtrust.co.uk/recommended-reading



Christian Organisations

TRUE FREEDOM TRUST
truefreedomtrust.co.uk

Offers pastoral support and biblical teaching on same-sex attraction



LIVING OUT
livingout.org/resources

Helpful resources, events and teaching on faith and sexuality.





Living Out

How biblically inclusive is your church?

10 statements to help you audit your church family:

- | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Your church family meetings include people who could be labelled LGBTQI+/ are same-sex attracted. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 2 | Derogatory language or stereo-typing attitudes towards anyone would not be tolerated either up-front or in conversation between church family members. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 3 | All in your church know that we all experience sexual brokenness and all are being encouraged to confess their own sexual sins. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 4 | Same-sex sexual relationships are never mentioned in isolation from other sinful patterns of behaviour, or from the forgiveness offered to all through faith in Christ crucified. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 5 | All in your church are hearing the same call to radical self-sacrifice of themselves in response to God's giving of himself in Jesus. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 6 | All in your church are encouraged to develop an identity founded first and foremost on their union with Christ. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 7 | A godly Christian's sexual orientation would never prevent them from exercising their spiritual gifts or serving in leadership in your church | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 8 | God's gifts of either singleness or marriage are equally promoted, valued and practically supported in your church family's life together. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 9 | Church family members instinctively share meals, homes, holidays, festivals, money, family life with others from different backgrounds and life situations to them. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |
| 10 | No-one would be pressurised into expecting or seeking any "healing" or change that God has not promised any of us until the renewal of all things. | <input type="button" value="True"/> | <input type="button" value="False"/> | <input type="button" value="Not Sure"/> |

