



*Alpha Team Guide*

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# Section 1

## **Training**



Training 1  
**Small Groups**



The aim of this session is to give you all the tools you will need to host or help in an Alpha small group.

The overall purpose of the small group, along with Alpha as a whole, is to help to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ by sharing the good news of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:2,4,8).

## **“Alpha is friends bringing friends.”**

Nicky Gumbel



**1977**

Alpha begins at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in London as a course for new Christians

**1981**

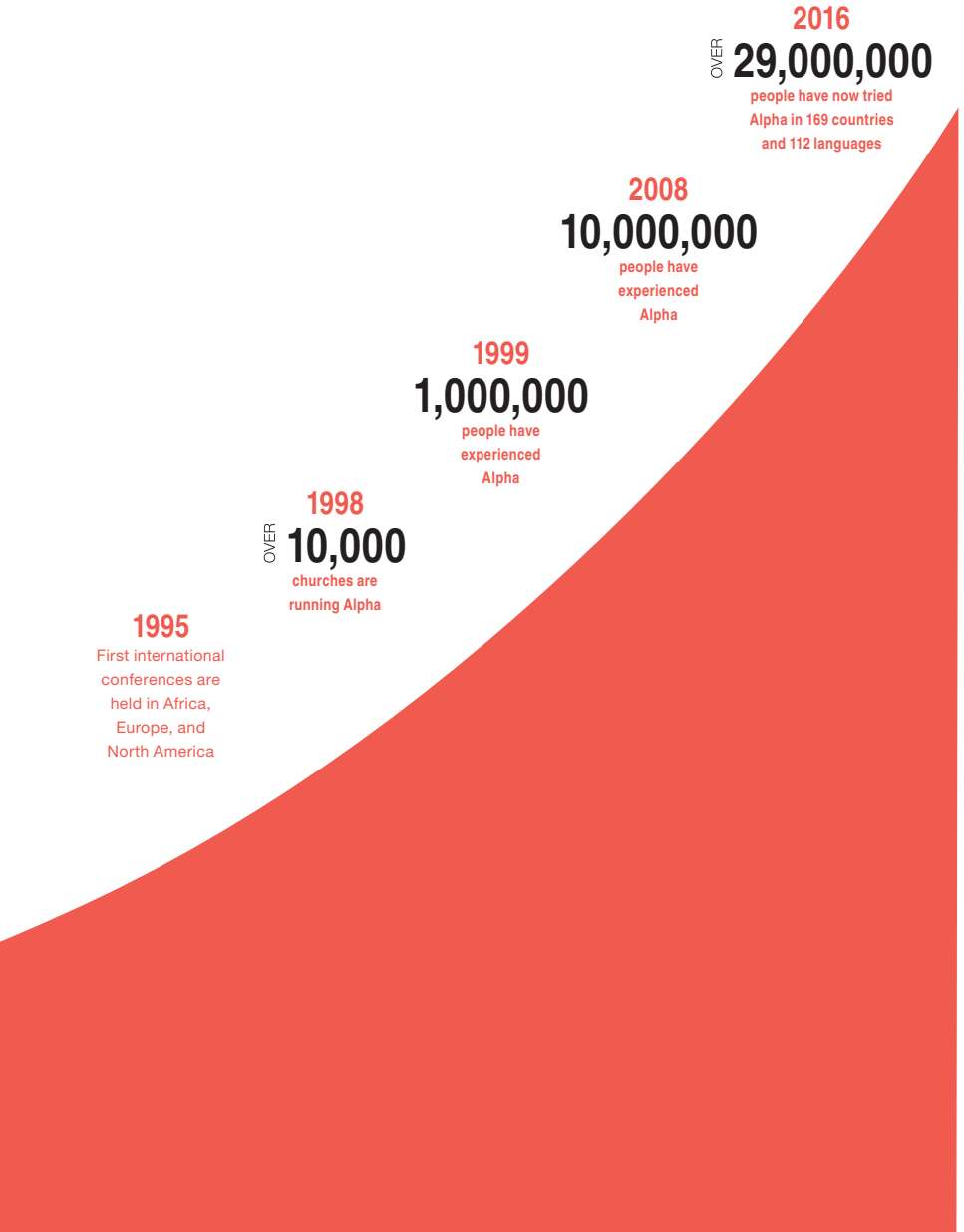
Alpha expands to a 10-week course with a weekend away

**1990**

Nicky Gumbel takes over the running of Alpha and repositions it for non-churchgoers

**1994**

Tricia Neill, now President of Alpha, joins the team and rolls out an international strategy



**Every Alpha session has  
three key elements:**



**Food**



**Talk**



**Discussion**



**Guests arrive:** welcome them, put them at ease, introduce them to each other. Keep the conversation fun and light and try to avoid talking about deep or heavy topics.

**Food:** is an important part of Alpha. Eating a simple meal together creates community and helps build friendships.

**Worship music:** this might feel a bit awkward on the first session so it's worth explaining that the guests don't have to join in if they don't want to.

**Talk:** the talks are designed to engage and inspire conversation. Generally thirty minutes long, they can be given as a live talk or played as a video. They explore the big issues around faith.

**Discussion:** the most important part of Alpha where guests get to say exactly what they think. It's low key, no pressure, and great fun.

**Finish on time:** have a set finish time and stick to it so guests know when they can leave.

**Remember:** no pressure, no follow up, no charge.

The perfect size for the small group is

# 12

Ideally two hosts,  
two helpers,  
and around eight guests.

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## Three keys to hosting a great Alpha small group

### LOVE

Alpha is about sharing God’s love through friendship.

*“We loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well”* (1 Thessalonians 2:8, emphasis added).

The greatest thing you can do as a host or helper is to share your life with your guests and to love and respect them.

**“People come to church for a variety of reasons, but they stay for only one—friendship.”**

John Wimber,  
Founder of Vineyard Church

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## LISTEN

Alpha is a chance for the guests to ask anything and say what they think.

The role of the hosts and helpers is to listen; not to have all the answers or to win an argument. Love them, be interested in them, and be respectful towards them.

**“[People] are never so likely  
to settle a question rightly as  
when they discuss it freely.”**

Thomas Macaulay

The model for the Alpha small group is not teacher-pupil, but host-guest. It is vital to give guests the opportunity to respond to what they have heard and to ask questions in a safe, non-threatening environment.

Groups can be ruined by one of two things:

- Hosts and helpers speaking too much;
- Allowing one guest to dominate the discussion.

### **Role of the host:**

- Greet newcomers to the group.
- Introduce guests to one another.
- Facilitate the discussion.
- Pray regularly for the small group.

### **Role of the helper:**

- Look after the needs of guests.
- Handle administration for the group.
- Support the discussion with helpful comments, but do not speak too much.
- Pray quietly for each guest during the small group discussion.

## Six tips for facilitating a great discussion:

1. **Ask open-ended questions.**
2. **Be encouraging.**
3. **Be yourself.**
4. **Answer the ice breaker questions, but refrain from answering other questions.**

Exceptions to asking “What does anyone else think?”

### **Questions of fact**

E.g., how many gospels are there?

E.g., where are the toilets?

### **Direct questions**

E.g., why are you a Christian?

E.g., when did it first make sense for you?

### **Difficult questions**

In the first session, make a note of everyone’s questions.

If you don’t know the answer, tell guests that you’ll find out and get back to them next session.

### **Recommended reading**

*Searching Issues* by Nicky Gumbel.

Chapters include:

“Why Does God Allow Suffering?”

“What About Other Religions?”

“Is There a Conflict Between Science and Christianity?”

“Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?”

“What About the New Spirituality?”

“Does Religion Do More Harm Than Good?”

“Is Faith Irrational?”

5. **Don’t be afraid of silence.**
6. **Rephrase the question.**

## LAUGH

The experience in the Alpha small group should be low key, relaxed, and fun.

Avoid intensity.

In the first session, break the ice with a game and questions to get to know the guests:

1. Name game
2. Ask, "How and why did you end up coming to Alpha?"
3. Ask, "If it turned out there was a God after all, and you could ask one question, what would it be?"

Remember that laughter is a key component of Alpha.

Have fun and enjoy the journey.

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## Finally, pray for your Alpha

Prayer undergirds everything we do in Alpha, from beginning to end.

### Before you begin

- The pre-session team prayer meeting is vital; a chance to pray for yourself, the team, and the guests in your group.
- Divide up the group between the hosts and helpers and commit to praying for each guest on a weekly basis.

### From the front

- In general, we want to make the guests feel at ease with us, so we avoid public prayer. However, at the end of session 4—“How Can I Have Faith?”, there is an opportunity for guests to join in a simple prayer asking Jesus into their life, if they want to.
- We don’t say “grace” or pray before the meal.

### In your small group

- The topic of prayer is introduced in session 5—“Why and How Do I Pray?”
- You may want to offer to say a short closing prayer at the end of the discussion on session 5 or in any of the subsequent sessions—“Would anyone mind if I said a short prayer to finish?”
- At some point you may feel it’s appropriate to give your guests an opportunity to pray out loud:
  - go around the group and ask each person if there’s anything they’d like prayer for;
  - a host should start with a very short prayer; long eloquent prayers may be impressive, but they discourage others from praying;
  - give space for those who would like to pray, to do so;

- one of the helpers should not pray, to avoid putting pressure on any guests who may not want to pray;
- a host should finish with a short, simple prayer.

It is important that the guests have experienced group prayer before the session “Does God Heal Today?”, where there will be an opportunity for the guests to pray for one another.

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Section 2  
**Small  
Group  
Questions**





## Hosts' and helpers' preparation

- Each job within the team is vitally important. If you are unable to do the job you've been given, please let the Alpha administrator know.
- Please ensure that everyone goes to the team meeting before each session—where important notices and helpful reminders are given.

## Running order suggestions for a typical Alpha session

- **6.00 pm\***

Prayer and briefing meeting for all hosts and helpers: everyone needs to be clear where their group is sitting for both the meal and discussion time.

- **6.30 pm**

When the meeting ends, hosts and helpers go to welcome their guests.

- **6.30–7.00 pm**

As guests arrive, the Alpha administrator should allocate them to a group and introduce them to a runner who will show them to their group.

One host should stay with the group at all times and the other helpers and hosts can show guests where to pick up their meal. You may have friends who you want to chat with, but remember that your group is your number one priority. You can catch up with your friends another time!

- **7.00 pm**

Food should be served as quickly as possible to avoid long lines and to allow small groups to talk during the mealtime. Money for the meal can be collected at the serving point (with a sign, "Suggested Donation").

- **7.28 pm**

Encourage guests to move their chairs if necessary in order to see the worship music leader and speaker.

- **7.30 pm**

Welcome and announcements; book recommendations; introduce speaker; hand over to worship leader.

- **7.45 pm**

Talk starts.

- **8.15 pm**

Talk ends. Swiftly get into your small group for the discussion time. Delegate the coffee serving to one of the helpers.

- **9.15 pm**

Make sure you finish on time after each session. As the discussion draws to a close, suggest going on to somewhere (e.g., café) for a drink together and/or help guests who may be interested in buying books and resources.

You may want to think about how people can purchase books from the recommended reading list, either by directing them online or selling books through your own bookstore.

\*Running times have been given as a guide only

## Recommended reading

### **Session 1 – Is There More to Life Than This?**

*What's So Amazing About Grace?* Philip Yancey

### **Session 2 – Who Is Jesus?**

*Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis

*Jesus Is*, Judah Smith

### **Session 3 – Why Did Jesus Die?**

*The Cross of Christ*, John Stott

*Searching Issues*, Nicky Gumbel

*Mud, Sweat and Tears*, Bear Grylls

### **Session 4 – How Can I Have Faith?**

*The Reason for God*, Tim Keller

*Life Change*, Mark Elsdon-Dew

### **Session 5 – Why and How Do I Pray?**

*Too Busy Not To Pray*, Bill Hybels

*God on Mute*, Pete Greig

### **Session 6 – Why and How Should I Read the Bible?**

*Why Trust the Bible?* Amy Orr-Ewing

*30 days*, Nicky Gumbel

bibleinoneyear.org, Nicky and Pippa Gumbel

*Bible in One Year* app for iPhone/Android

### **Session 7 – How Does God Guide Us?**

*Chasing the Dragon*, Jackie Pullinger

**Sessions 8-11** – Recommended reading provided during the weekend

### **Session 12 – How Can I Resist Evil?**

*Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis

*Cafe Theology*, Mike Lloyd

### **Session 13 – Why and How Should I Tell Others?**

*Searching Issues*, Nicky Gumbel

*Lord... Help My Unbelief*, John Young

### **Session 14 – Does God Heal Today?**

*Power Evangelism*, John Wimber

### **Session 15 – What About the Church?**

*Questions of Life*, Nicky Gumbel



# Is There More to **Life** Than This?

## Admin

1. Ensure that you have registered everyone in the group and that each person has a name badge.
2. Serve drinks and snacks before beginning the discussion.
3. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone to the group.
4. Explain the format for each session and the number of sessions.
5. Highlight: no pressure, no follow up, no charge.
6. Explain the format and purpose of the small group discussion.
7. Reassure the guests that you always finish on time.

## Icebreakers

These games will enable the group to remember each other's names and get to know one another.

## **Name Game**

- “Everyone think of a positive adjective that starts with the same letter as your first name” e.g., “Jovial John” or “Happy Helen” OR “Everyone think of a famous person with the same first name as you” e.g., “Justin Bieber,” “Sandra Bullock.”
- Start with the person on your left. They must say their name and positive adjective or celebrity name. The next person must say their name and adjective or celebrity name and that of the person before them.
- Each person must try and repeat all the names of the guests preceding them from memory. The host is the last person to go and repeats the names of everyone in the group.
- Be quick to help any guests who might find this more difficult.

## **Desert Island Game (if you have time)**

- “If you were stuck on a desert island and you could take one thing (not a person) with you, and you already have the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, what would you take?”
- OR “Which person from history would you like to be stuck in an elevator with, and why?”

## **“How and why did you end up coming here today?”**

- This gives the rest of the group permission to say what they really think. Try to draw more out of guests if they are a bit hesitant. Start with the guest you think is most reluctant/hostile about doing Alpha to encourage other guests to open up and be honest.

**“If it turned out there was a God after all, and you could ask one question, what would it be?”**

- Encourage guests, “These are great questions.”
- Write the questions down on a piece of paper with a view to coming back to them at the end of Alpha.

Finish on time and carry on discussion elsewhere (e.g., café) for those who want to.

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# Who Is Jesus?

## Admin

Welcome the group, then go around and ask each person to introduce themselves briefly. Welcome any new guests and ask them, “How and why did you end up coming here today?” Update the registration list. Add any new names and contact details and correct any mistakes from the previous session.

## Key Concept

Understanding the evidence regarding the historical claims of Jesus Christ.

Guests come to Alpha with a variety of ideas about Jesus. Many of their views would fall into the “folklore/legend” category. Others would see Jesus as a wonderful man, great moral teacher, or religious leader. There are some who really have no idea about Jesus. The goal this week is to get their ideas on the table and begin to help them sort out the evidence that either questions or confirms their assumptions. Discussions around Jesus that may surface include: Was Jesus a real, historical person? Was He more than a wonderful man? Was He more than a great moral teacher or religious leader?

## Questions for discussion

1. What did you think or feel about the talk?
2. What makes you happy?
3. What do you think about Jesus?
4. If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to Him?

Additional questions (if needed):

5. Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? Has it changed? If so, in what way?
6. What aspects of the evidence presented tonight did you find convincing/not convincing?

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