



Alpha



How
do I
get
people
talking

What
will they
ask

What
session
are we
on



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Section 1
**Small
Group
Discussion**



SUGGESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

The aim of this guide is to provide you with practical tips and suggestions to help you host your Alpha small group effectively. Obviously, the discussion questions will not be necessary if the conversation arises naturally. You will probably only use one per topic, and hope to let things flow from there. The questions are intended to be as open and non-threatening as possible. These are only suggestions, so do use any method or questions that you find helpful.

HELPFUL GENERAL QUESTIONS

- How did you respond to tonight's talk?
- What did you feel about tonight's talk?
- What did you think about tonight's talk?
- Did anything that was said tonight particularly speak to you or surprise you?
- What issues were raised for you by tonight's talk?
- Is this a new subject for anyone?

Note: At the end of Alpha there is an Alpha celebration evening, which gives people the opportunity to invite potential guests along.

Talks 7, 8, 9 and 14 are given on the Alpha weekend.

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 administrator know as soon as you can
- Remember, you are the hosts! Make sure newcomers feel welcomed and looked after
- When you have finished your discussion, it would be great if you could tidy your group's area
- Please ensure that everyone goes to the admin/prayer meeting at the start – there are important notices and helpful reminders given each week. For the first couple of weeks, the meeting will be slightly extended

RUNNING ORDER SUGGESTIONS

- 6.15 pm*: Admin/prayer meeting for all hosts and helpers: everyone needs to be clear where their group is sitting for both the mealtime and discussion time
- 6.30 pm: When admin/prayer meeting ends, hosts and helpers go to welcome their guests
- 6.30–7 pm: As people arrive, the administrators should allocate them to a group, and introduce them to a runner who will show them to their group
- 6.30–7 pm: 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. In practice, you may have friends who you want to chat to, but your group is your number one priority. You can catch up with them another time!

- 7 pm: Food should be served as quickly as possible to avoid long queues and allow people to talk during the mealtime. Money for the meal can be collected at the serving point (with a sign, 'Suggested Donation £4')
- 7.30 pm: Encourage guests to move their chairs if necessary in order to see the worship leader and speaker
- 8.45 pm: Talk ends. Swiftly get into your small group for the discussion time. Allocate the coffee serving to one of the helpers
- 9.30 pm: As the discussion draws to a close, suggest going on for a drink

Bookshop opens during the mealtime and small group discussion.

* Running times have been given as a guide only

Session 1

Who is
Jesus

PRACTICAL

Welcome everyone to the group.

Pass an address form around the group for the guests to fill in. Explain that this form helps administratively, but it's not essential if a guest is uncomfortable.

ICEBREAKERS

NAME GAME

- Explain that this is a silly game – but the best way for everyone to learn each other's names at the first session
- To play the name game:
 - Each person tries to think of an adjective that would describe them. It must also have the same first letter as their name. For example, 'Jovial John' or 'Happy Helen'
 - Each person says what their name is and why. For example, Jovial John is jovial because he has a hearty laugh
 - Each person has a go at repeating all the names of the guests preceding them from memory

DESERT ISLAND

- Ask guests to respond to the following question:
 - If you were stranded on a desert island, what three things would you want to take with you?

or, as an alternative:

- If your house was on fire and you could only go back and get one thing, what would you get?

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO DO ALPHA?

- Start with someone who is likely to admit they are an atheist/agnostic. This gives the rest of the group permission to say what they really think. (If you start with someone who turns out to be an enthusiastic Christian already, it may be harder for the others to feel comfortable about being honest about their lack of belief)
- Write down the questions so that you can come back to them in later sessions

IF YOU COULD ASK GOD ONE QUESTION AND GUARANTEE AN ANSWER, WHAT WOULD YOU ASK?

DISCUSSION

1. Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? Has it changed? If so, in what way?
2. What aspects of the evidence presented tonight did you find convincing/not convincing?
3. Who do you think Jesus is?
4. If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to him?

Session 2

Why did Jesus die

PRACTICAL

Introduce any new guests. Pass around the address list. Add any new names and addresses and correct any mistakes from the previous week.

DISCUSSION

This is often the week when the subject of 'suffering' arises (see *Searching Issues* booklet: *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*).

1. What is your reaction to the crucifixion?
2. Do you feel that sin is an outdated concept or is it something you can relate to?
3. How do you respond to the word 'sin' and the word 'forgiveness'?
4. Would you agree that sin is addictive? What do you see as the consequences of sin, if any?

Session 3

**How
can
we
have**

faith

PRACTICAL

Introduce any new guests. Pass around the address list and amend if needed.

This is a good week to mention the Alpha weekend for the first time. Give the dates to the guests.

DISCUSSION

You may find that people have questions, for example, about other religions (see *Searching Issues* booklet: *What About Other Religions?*).

1. What would you write on a form where it asked your religion?
2. Do you associate love or fear with God?
3. When it is said that Christianity will make a change in your character, how do you feel?
4. What does the idea of a relationship with God suggest to you?

Session 4

pray

**Why and
how do I**

PRACTICAL

This is a good week to encourage people about the Alpha weekend. Mention the cost and the possibility of bursaries.

DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever tried praying? What happened?
2. What do you think about the idea of God answering prayer?
3. Can anyone describe a time when a 'coincidence' happened?
4. In the talk, various reasons for praying are given. Which of these do you relate to and why?

Session 5

**Why
how
I
the**

**and
should
read
Bible**

PRACTICAL

Remind the group about the Alpha weekend. Ask someone who has benefited from a previous one to describe their experience. Take further names and collect payment.

DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever read the Bible? How did you get on?
2. Have you ever read a modern translation of the Bible?
3. Have you read anything in the Bible that has challenged an aspect of your beliefs or behaviour?
4. What do you feel about the suggestion that the Bible is a 'manual for life'?
5. 'What the Scriptures said, God said.' Do you share that view?

Session 6

How does God

guide us

PRACTICAL

Arrange transport for the Alpha weekend if necessary.

DISCUSSION

1. Has anyone had any experience in the last few weeks that they think might be God guiding them?
2. How do you feel about the idea of God having a plan for you?
3. How does God speak to people today? Have you experienced this?
4. What should we do if we believe we have made a mess of our lives?

Session 7

Who
is the Holy Spirit

There is no small group discussion following this session.

Session 8

What does the **Holy Spirit do**

DISCUSSION

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11

1. Has anyone heard of or had any experience of spiritual gifts?
2. What are the spiritual gifts? (vv.8–10) Where do these gifts come from? (v.11) [list the gifts and explain them]
3. How do you feel about the idea of God giving us supernatural gifts?
4. Does everybody have the same gifts? (vv.4–6)
 - Different gifts, works, and service, but same God
5. Why does God give spiritual gifts to people? (v.7)
 - For the common good
 - Not for our own glory
6. Mention that there may be an opportunity in the afternoon to hear more on this subject

Session 9

How **can I be filled** **with the** **Holy Spirit**

PRACTICAL

This session is followed by a time of prayer ministry in a corporate setting. Spend time praying with any guests who would like prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Usually, before the final session, there is an opportunity to find out how the guests in your groups have found the weekend. Ask each member of the group to describe their experience of the weekend, giving them an opportunity to ask any questions and discuss.

Session 10

How can I resist

evil

The background is black and features several large, abstract red shapes. On the left side, there is a large red circle. A large, jagged red shape, resembling a stylized arrow or a path, starts from the bottom left and moves towards the top right. The word 'evil' is written in red at the bottom right.

PRACTICAL

Start the small group time by asking guests to share their experiences of the Alpha weekend. This gives the guests the opportunity to express what God has done in their lives. It can be a great encouragement to the group. Remember to include those who did not go on the weekend in the discussion.

DISCUSSION

1. Do you believe in the supernatural/black magic/the occult?
2. Before tonight, did you have a concept of the devil?
Has it changed?
3. Why do you think bad things happen?
4. Why do you think the world is in such a mess?

Session 11

**How
and
why
should I
tell**

others

PRACTICAL

If the dates and details of the Alpha celebration evening do not come up naturally in the discussion, this is a good time to mention them. Invitation cards can also be handed out, too.

If possible, aim to pray together as a group at the end of this session.

DISCUSSION

1. If you did not know anything about Christianity, how would you like to be told about it?
2. Has anyone told their friends/family/colleagues at work that they are doing Alpha? What was their reaction?
3. What do you think/feel about the idea of telling others?

Session 12

**Does
God
heal
+ today**

PRACTICAL

Remind people about the Alpha celebration evening. Try to work out approximately how many people will be coming, including small group members and any guests they plan to invite.

DISCUSSION

If words of knowledge were given at the end of the talk, ask if anyone in the group thinks that a word of knowledge may have been appropriate for them.

If not, ask your guests if there is a specific problem or illness for which they would like prayer for healing. This is a good time to clear up any general issues about healing, so allow time for the group to discuss briefly before praying together.

Pray for people according to the ministry guidelines in this guide. If there are lots of people, divide into one group of men and one group of women.

Equally affirm those who do want to be prayed for and those who do not.

Session 13

**What
about
the
church**



PRACTICAL

Remind the group about the Alpha celebration evening. Try to finalise numbers.

Make a date for a small group reunion. This would possibly be at the host's house, ideally about two weeks before the next Alpha starts.

DISCUSSION

1. Go round the group, asking each person to summarise what they have learnt and experienced over the past ten weeks. (Try to start and finish with an enthusiastic person!)
2. Ask the group what they would like to do after Alpha. Try to encourage them to stay connected as a group
3. Ask each of them if there is anything they would like prayer for
4. Pray – it's a good idea to finish the final evening with prayer

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

5. What comes to mind when you hear the word 'church' or 'Christian'?
6. Look back on the last ten weeks. Has your view changed?
7. Looking forwards, in what way (if any) do you plan to continue what you've started on Alpha?

Session 14

**How can
I make
the most
of the rest
of my**

life

PRACTICAL

Spend time in your small group finding out how guests found the Alpha weekend. Allow guests to share their experiences and ask any questions. At the end, spend some time praying for any guests who wish to receive prayer.

Section 2
**Team
Training**



Team Training 1

**Hosting
Small
Groups**



INTRODUCTION

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.

Jesus himself said that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there also (Matthew 18:20).

- A group size of about twelve is ideal
- Jesus chose a group of twelve (Matthew 4:18–22)
- Each small group is made up of two hosts, two helpers and approximately eight guests

THE SIX SUBSIDIARY AIMS OF THE SMALL GROUP

1. TO DISCUSS

The model for the Alpha small group is not teacher-pupil, but host-guest. Treat the people in your group as if they were guests in your own home – with honour, dignity and respect.

Discuss the talk and issues arising from the message. It is vital to give people the opportunity to respond to what they have heard and to ask questions in a safe, non-threatening environment.

1. Practical details

- Arrange the chairs so that guests can see and hear each other
- Ensure the host can see everyone
- Provide adequate lighting
- Check ventilation

- Keeping time – aim to start the discussion at 9 pm and end by 9.30 pm*

* Running times have been given as a guide only

2. Some groups are ruined by one of two things:

- Weak leadership – not properly prepared, allowing one person do all the talking
- Dominant leadership – does all the talking, instead of giving people the freedom to speak and to say what is on their mind

3. Ask simple questions

- Two basic questions:
 - What do you think?
 - What do you feel?
- Avoid being patronising. Guests may be new to Christianity, but they are not new to life. Treat everyone with respect and interest
- Direct questions back to the group: ‘What does everyone else think?’

4. Be prepared for questions

- Resource: *Searching Issues* by Nicky Gumbel, the seven issues most often raised on Alpha

'(People) are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely'

THOMAS MACAULAY

2. TO MODEL BIBLE STUDY

With some groups, you may never get beyond discussion to Bible study. This applies especially to groups of non-churchgoers or non-Christians.

If you do study the Bible as a group, the aim is to ask questions that get the guests looking at the passage and seeing things for themselves. If they see one thing for themselves from the passage, they will probably remember it for the rest of their lives. Only start a Bible study if everyone is ready. Always encourage others to talk, rather than giving a talk. Aim to motivate the group to start to read the Bible alone.

3. TO LEARN TO PRAY TOGETHER

Great sensitivity is required when praying together in the small group.

1. Opening prayer

- Either by you, or better still, by a member of the group

- To avoid embarrassment:
 - Put words into their mouth: 'Will you ask God to give us wisdom to understand this passage ...?'
 - If asking a member of the group, ask them beforehand (ie during dinner) so that it doesn't come as a surprise or put people off. Say to the group, 'I have asked [X] to open in prayer'

2. End with prayer (if appropriate)

- Aim to start praying out loud together by session 7
- Long eloquent prayers may be impressive, but they discourage others from praying
- Model prayer eg, 'Father ... (short sentence) ... in Jesus' name, Amen
- One of the hosts or helpers should hold themselves back from praying to remove pressure from any guests who may not want to pray

4. TO DEVELOP LASTING FRIENDSHIPS WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

- The main reason why people stay in the church
- Get to know each person well
- Icebreaker games, eg name game (first night)
- Act as hosts
- Facilitates conversations
- Continue meeting together after Alpha is completed

5. TO LEARN TO MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER

- Praying for each other
- Gifts of the Spirit

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Team Training 2
**Pastoral
Care**



INTRODUCTION

‘The Bible does nothing but speak of God’s love.’

ST AUGUSTINE

The Christian faith relies on our relationship with God and our relationships with others.

- God’s love for us (Romans 5:5)
- Our relationship with God – the command to love God (Luke 10:27)
- Our relationship with others – the command to love one another (Mark 12:31)

The most important thing for a guest on Alpha is that they experience the love of God. This requires from us:

- Right motives
- Integrity of heart
- Love for others
- Skills to be learnt

‘We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.’ (Colossians 1:28-29)

1. AIM

1. Everyone

- Every single person on Alpha should be looked after
- Hosts divide up group to take pastoral responsibility for members
- The system must ensure every person is cared for
- Pray daily for each person

2. Spiritual maturity

- Not just Alpha – it's a lifelong process
- Follow up: home group
- Role in church
- Use of gifts

3. Maturity in Christ

- We do not want to attach people to ourselves
- Dependence should not be on us, but on Christ

2. METHOD

'We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom ...' (Colossians 1:28)

We grow in maturity as our intimacy with the Lord and our knowledge of him grows.

1. Lead people to Jesus

- Resource: *Why Jesus?*

2. Encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus

- Bible study/prayer
- Christian books (see end of each chapter in the *Alpha Guide*)
- Listen to good Christian teaching

3. Encourage them to grow in their relationships within the body of Christ

- Alpha evenings
- Sundays
- Telephone/texts
- Reunions
- Continue meeting as a group

4. General attitude

- Be an encourager
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:11
 - Expressing warmth and responsiveness
 - Be positive
- Be a listener (not always a teacher)
 - James 1:19–26
 - Draw people out
 - Listening models respect and gives people their dignity
- Be a peacemaker
 - Matthew 5:9
 - Reconciling differences, relieving tension and exploring reasons for differences (diplomatically)

3. COMMITMENT

‘To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me’ (Colossians 1:29)

1. Our responsibility

- ‘I labour, struggling’
 - Commitment to pray
 - Hard work
 - Effort
 - Late nights
 - Overcoming tiredness
 - Not talking to old friends, but welcoming new people
 - Efficiency with jobs
 - Overcoming disappointment

2. God’s grace

- ‘... with all his energy ...’ (Colossians 1:29)
 - Be filled with the Spirit – ‘full of faith and of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 6:5)
 - Try to allow the Spirit of God to speak to you during the talks and fill you during worship/ministry
- But
 - Then be ready to serve
- Use every gift:
 - Evangelism
 - Teaching
 - Pastoring
 - Prophetic – hearing God

Team Training 3

**Prayer
Ministry
on Alpha**



INTRODUCTION

The activity of the Holy Spirit transforms every aspect of Alpha.

- The word 'ministry' is used in several different senses in the New Testament
- Broadly, 'ministry' means 'service' – includes everything done on Alpha
- Ministry is, 'Meeting the needs of others on the basis of God's resources' (John Wimber)
- 'Ministry' referring to 'prayer ministry' – 'come Holy Spirit'
- Cooperation between God and us (Exodus 14:16, 21–22)
- Opportunities for prayer ministry during Alpha
 - Alpha weekend (Saturday evening and Sunday morning)
 - Healing evening

1. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – FIVE VALUES

1. When we ask the Holy Spirit to come, he comes

- Get our perspective right (Luke 10:17–20)
- The branch must look principally at the vine and not at the fruit

2. Because it is his ministry, we aim for simplicity and truthfulness in all aspects of our prayers for people

- Avoid intensity (shouting, religious language, eccentricity)
- Be yourself (be normal, natural, pray in your normal voice)

3. Face the person you are praying for and ask the Holy Spirit to come

- Welcome him when you see signs of his working and wait

on God for further directions

- Don't worry about silence

4. Silently ask God what he wants to do or to say ... how to encourage and how to impart gifts

- Prophecy is always strengthening, encouraging, comforting (1 Corinthians 14:3)

5. Ask what is happening

- 'What do you sense is happening?'
- 'Do you sense God saying something?'

2. BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

1. The Spirit of God and the written word of God never conflict

- The truth sets us free (John 8:32)
- Paul's prayer – Ephesians 3:17–19

2. Build on biblical truths and promises, eg:

- Guilt (Romans 8:1)
- Repentance (Psalm 51)
- Fear (Psalm 91)
- Guidance (Psalm 37:5)
- Temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- Anxiety (Philippians 4:6–7)

3. Say how you are going to pray and encourage faith in a particular promise of God

- Hold on to God's promises. One aspect of faith is the finding of a promise of God and daring to believe it!

3. THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

- Confidentiality is essential
- Pray for people in relaxed surroundings (either on your own or in pairs)
- Men pray with men, women pray with women
- Respect privacy
- Affirm – do not condemn
- Faith – do not place additional burdens on people
- Allow them freedom to come back!
- Take time to sort out difficulties of understanding, belief, and assurance
- Lead to Christ (resource: *Why Jesus?*)
- Fullness of the Spirit
 - ‘Am I ready?’
 - ‘I am unworthy’
 - ‘I could never speak in another language’
- 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,14; Matthew 7:11
 - If a guest wants to receive, encourage the person to start to speak in another language – tell him/her you will do so also

4. HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

‘May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.’ (John 17:23)

1. Unity comes from the Holy Spirit

- Lack of unity, love and forgiveness hinders the work of the Spirit
- One person should take a lead in praying for others rather than compete with conflicting prayers

5. THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. The Christian community is the place where long-term healing and spiritual growth take place under the protective umbrella of the authority of a church

- Allow people to move at their own pace, remembering that it is a process

2. Keep in touch

- Warn against possible increased temptation
- Refuse to consider that 'nothing has happened'
- Ephesians 5:18 – go on being filled with the Spirit

Is there more to life than this?

Why and how do I pray?

Does God heal today?

Alpha looks at these and other questions, providing a practical introduction to the Christian faith.

This guide runs alongside Alpha, highlighting the main points and giving space for notes.

Over ten sessions, Alpha helps guests explore the meaning of life, revealing that Christianity can be every bit as relevant to life today as it was 2,000 years ago.

This guide is for use with the *Alpha Team Training DVD*.

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