Alpha Basics

Everything you need to get started with Alpha
TODAY, MORE THAN

27,000,000

PEOPLE HAVE ATTENDED ALPHA IN
MORE THAN 169 COUNTRIES.

AND IT HAS BEEN TRANSLATED
INTO 112 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.
WELCOME TO ALPHA

This guide will give you an introduction to Alpha and help you through the steps you need to run it for the first time.

WHAT IS ALPHA?

Alpha is a series of fifteen interactive sessions, typically run over eleven weeks, including a weekend away, where anyone can explore life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment.

Everyone is welcome, but Alpha is designed particularly for people who would not describe themselves as Christians or church-goers.

There’s no charge to attend Alpha – it’s free.
Alpha started over thirty years ago at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), an Anglican church in Central London, UK.

It was originally developed as a short course for people in the church. In 1990, Nicky Gumbel took over running Alpha and found that many people outside of the church were coming along. Today, more than 27 million people have attended Alpha in more than 169 countries, and it has been translated into 112 different languages. It runs in every part of the worldwide church – the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Pentecostal Church and all the mainline Protestant denominations.
ALPHA IS...

Andrew brought his brother Peter; Philip brought Nathaniel; Matthew had a party and invited all his work colleagues – he said, ‘Come and meet Jesus!’ Alpha is an easy way of saying to friends, ‘Come and see, come and explore your questions, come and hear about Jesus, come and see for yourself.’

On Alpha we try to be:

REAL – Alpha presents the reality of who Jesus is. Those that run Alpha are real and authentic and this allows the guests to be real themselves. People are welcome to ask questions and look for answers, with no pressure to contribute and no follow up if they don’t come back.

RELATIONAL – Alpha is based on genuine friendships that are built up over a few weeks and often last for years afterwards.

RELIANT – On Alpha we are reliant on the Holy Spirit because we realise that it is only God who changes people’s lives; we just introduce Him.

No one can force anyone to believe anything. What we’ve found over the years is that if we allow people to be themselves and ask their questions, focus on building relationships and rely on the Holy Spirit, lives are changed.
HOW DOES ALPHA WORK?

Food
Almost every social event is centred around food and drink. The food on Alpha allows people from different backgrounds, with a whole variety of questions and ideas about life, to come together, share a meal and get to know one another on a deeper level.

It is best not to charge for food on Alpha – we believe that hearing about Jesus should be free. While lots of Alphas do ask for a suggested donation to help cover the costs, it doesn’t have to be expensive to put on some refreshments for your guests. Some churches ask their home groups to take turns to cook for Alpha. Each group covers the cost of the week they cook, which spreads the cost across the church, not just on one team or group. Some churches also run their Alpha in a café and just provide a nice coffee for the guests.
Talks
After some food and time to get to know one another, a short talk is given.

The fifteen talks in order (including the Alpha weekend) are:

SESSION 1
Is There More to Life Than This?

SESSION 2
Who is Jesus?

SESSION 3
Why Did Jesus Die?

SESSION 4
How Can I Have Faith?

SESSION 5
Why and How Should I Pray?

SESSION 6
Why and How Should I Read the Bible?

SESSION 7
How Does God Guide Us?

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WEEKEND SESSION 1
Who is the Holy Spirit?

WEEKEND SESSION 2
What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

WEEKEND SESSION 3
How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

WEEKEND SESSION 4
How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?

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SESSION 8
How Can I Resist Evil?

SESSION 9
Why and How Should I Tell Others?

SESSION 10
Does God Heal Today?

SESSION 11
What About the Church?

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Sometimes it isn’t possible to spread Alpha across eleven weeks, so we’ve made some resources available (downloadable for free from Alpha Builder at alpha.org/run), which combine a couple of the talks. However, if you can, try to run Alpha for the full eleven weeks. The more time you have with the guests, the greater opportunity you have to make real friendships and to allow a real process of discovery to happen. No one has to commit upfront to all eleven sessions but by the end we find that they are wishing that there were far more than eleven.

There are two options for delivering the talks: you can give the talks yourself or there are a variety of video resources available to watch. What you decide to do will depend on your audience and your venue. It might be strange to stand up and deliver a talk if your Alpha is held in your university rooms with three of your mates and a box of pizza, and it might not be possible to watch a video if your Alpha is held on the beach with your surfer buddies. That’s why we’ve created a few different resources so that, whatever your Alpha looks like, there is something to fit your context.

The scripts and all of the video resources are available for free online from Alpha Builder at alpha.org/run
**Discussion**
The heart of Alpha is the small group. This is where people can ask questions, talk through issues, build relationships and experience what the Christian life really looks like.

There are a few really practical things that are worth remembering, which can make the difference between an awkward conversation and a real sense of friendship and family in your groups.

The thing that can most affect the success or failure of a small group is choosing and training your hosts and helpers. Alpha small groups are not like other small groups. The host’s focus is on allowing guests the space to ask questions rather than offering all the answers. Even though the leaders you have picked may have lots of experience leading groups and may have hosted Alpha groups before, it’s still essential to train all the hosts and helpers.

All the training for how to run an Alpha small group is available online on Alpha Builder at [alpha.org/run](http://alpha.org/run) and on the Alpha app, which is available through the App Store. Download the app at [alpha.org/app](http://alpha.org/app)

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**How Do We Get Started?**

**When should we run Alpha?**
There are a few helpful things to think through when deciding the dates and times to run your Alpha.

**Dates**
The first thing to do is to plan your dates. Try to avoid booking your Alpha over any holidays or events to avoid long gaps between sessions or guests being unable to attend. For example, running Alpha over Christmas or the school holidays might mean that lots of your guests aren’t able to make all of the weeks.

You also need to think about two dates for training your team and a date for a launch party, if you are having one.

**Timings**
A typical Alpha runs in the evening but Alpha can be held at any time of day, you just need to work out the best time for the people you are trying to invite. If you are running Alpha with university students, an early morning breakfast might not be the best option and if you are running it with mainly parents, a morning might prove better than an evening. Whatever time you choose, make sure that you have enough time for food, a talk and a discussion.

**Evening:**
- 7:00 – Food
- 7:30 – Welcome
- 7:35 – Worship
- 7:45 – Talk
- 8:15 – Discussion Groups
- 9:15 – End

**Morning:**
- 09:45 – Breakfast and Coffee
- 10:15 – Welcome
- 10:20 – Worship
- 10:30 – Talk
- 11:00 – Discussion Group
- 12:00 – End
Where should we run Alpha?
Alpha is currently run in homes, cafés, churches, pubs and all sorts of other locations all around the world. It doesn’t matter what venue you choose, just try to make the space welcoming and conducive to good conversation.

How should we invite people?
Each year Alpha produces a range of invitational materials, which can be found at alpha.org/invitation. There are posters, postcards, banners and other print materials, as well as a range of images and videos to use online.

These invitational materials are a great way of letting your wider community know about Alpha but the main way people come is still through being invited by a friend. Make sure that your church or organisation gets on board and that everyone invites their friends along.

Some churches host an informal ‘Launch Party’ to make it even easier to invite guests along to hear about Alpha and what it involves.

Who should be on the team?
Choosing the right team is really important. The people that host and help in the small groups need to be the best people to both welcome new people into the community and guide discussions in a way that allows for real exploration.

The most helpful question to ask is, ‘Would I be comfortable with putting my best non-Christian friend in the group with these hosts?’ If the answer is no, then it is important to keep looking for the right people.

It is also really important to train your team well. Although Alpha has a simple format, there are a few crucial things to remember when running a small group. Even if your hosts and helpers have done Alpha several times, it’s still a great idea to do the training before you start.

All the materials you need to train your team are available on Alpha Builder at alpha.org/run, as well as on the Alpha app.

Plan your Alpha weekend away
A crucial part of Alpha is the weekend or day away. This can feel like a difficult thing to organise but it doesn’t have to be.

It is a really important part of Alpha and is often the part which guests find most transformative, so it’s worth putting effort into running one if you can. A good way to make the process easier is to pair up with another Alpha in your city and run a weekend together.

For top tips and more information on exactly what is involved, there is more training available about the Alpha weekend on Alpha Builder at alpha.org/run

Register your Alpha
Once you’ve planned your Alpha and got things sorted, make sure that you register it so that people can find it on the Alpha website. Often we hear of people who come on Alpha just from searching for in their area on alpha.org/try. It’s great if they can find your Alpha and come along.

To register, go to alpha.org/run and log on to Alpha Builder.
**Pray**
It is really important to pray for your Alpha. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Get your whole church praying**
Spend some time praying for Alpha in your services, small groups and prayer meetings. Even if your Alpha will take place in your uni halls, school or somewhere else outside of the church, get everyone you can praying. Not only does this make a difference, but it also helps keep Alpha in the minds of the church and reminds them to invite their friends on the next one.

2. **Get people to pray together before each session of Alpha**
Whether it’s lots of you or just you and a couple of friends, allow time to pray with the Alpha hosts, helpers and team – both for one another, the talk and the whole session.

3. **Get hosts and helpers praying for each guest**
Encourage hosts and helpers to pray for every guest in their group every day by name throughout Alpha.

4. **Get the guests praying when they are ready**
It’s exciting when members of your group pray aloud for the first time, begin offering to pray for one another or report on answered prayers from the week before. When the group is ready, normally on the week when we talk about prayer, we model a nice simple prayer and give others the chance to pray if they want to. Some of those first simple prayers are the best.
CONGRATULATIONS, YOU’VE JUST PLANNED YOUR FIRST ALPHA.

WHAT TO DO NEXT:

1. Log on to Alpha Builder at alpha.org/run for more training and to get all your materials for free.

2. Join in with a local Alpha Lab to meet other leaders and design the best Alpha for your context. Find out more at alpha.org/alphalab

3. Attend Run Alpha for more training and to gather with others running Alpha all over the UK. Find out more at alpha.org/runalpha

And that’s it.

Also, don’t forget to download the new Alpha app, which is available at alpha.org/app. It will be your best friend while you’re running Alpha, providing you with tips, ideas and prayers for each session, as well as a weekly checklist so that you can make sure you’ve covered everything.