Everything you need to get started with Alpha
OF PEOPLE HAVE TRIED ALPHA IN MORE THAN 169 COUNTRIES.

TODAY,

MILLIONS
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 warming up to the idea of Alpha. Today, millions of people have tried 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 based on a pattern you find in the New Testament of people bringing their friends, family and work colleagues to meet Jesus.

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 realize 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.
ALPHA IS RUNNING IN CHURCHES, BARS, COFFEE SHOPS AND HOMES WORLDWIDE.
Every Alpha session has three key elements: a meal, a talk and a discussion.

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 prepare some refreshments for our 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?
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?

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 alphausa.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 college dorm with three of your friends 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 alphausa.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 alphausa.org and on the Alpha app, which is available through the App Store. Download the app at alphausa.org
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 during school breaks might mean some of your guests will not be able to make during those 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. I.E. If you are running Alpha with college students, an early morning breakfast might not be the best option. Whatever time you choose, make sure that you have enough time for food, a talk and a discussion.

The following is an example schedule for morning or evening.

**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 aphausa.org. 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 aphausa.org, 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 aphausa.org

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 attend Alpha just from searching for it in their area on aphausa.org. It’s great if they can find your Alpha and come along.

To register, go to aphausa.org 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 on your college campus, in your local coffee house 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
Take time to pray with the Alpha hosts, helpers and team – pray for one another, the talk and the guests. You can also post prayer requests and pray for others on our private Alpha USA Prayer Partner Facebook group.

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 alphausa.org/run for more training and to get all your materials for free.
2. Connect with the regional director in your area who will help you design the best Alpha for your context. alphausa.org/regions
3. See if there is an Alpha training event in your area. alphausa.org/training

Also, don’t forget to download the Alpha app, which is available at alphausa.org/run. 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.