

EXPLORE

THE
MEANING
OF

LIFE

THE ALPHA COURSE

alpha.org



EXPLORE

THE
MEANING
OF



The Alpha Course Manual is based on
Questions of Life by Nicky Gumbel

First published 1993
New edition 1995

Reprinted 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005

Revised edition 2006

This revised edition 2008, reprinted 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this manual or any other Alpha publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder or the expressly authorised agent thereof.

ISBN 978 1 905887 25 5

Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, A member of the Hachette Livre UK Group. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790.

© Alpha International 2008

Published by Alpha International,
HTB Brompton Road, London SW7 1JA
Email: publications@alpha.org

CONTENTS

Introductory Session: Is There More to Life than This?	2
Session 1 Who Is Jesus?	6
Session 2 Why Did Jesus Die?	14
Session 3 How Can We Have Faith?	20
Session 4 Why and How Do I Pray?	26
Session 5 Why and How Should I Read the Bible?	32
Session 6 How Does God Guide Us?	38
Session 7 Who Is the Holy Spirit?	44
Session 8 What Does the Holy Spirit Do?	50
Session 9 How Can I Be Filled With the Holy Spirit?	54
Session 10 How Can I Resist Evil?	60
Session 11 Why and How Should I Tell Others?	68
Session 12 Does God Heal Today?	74
Session 13 What About the Church?	78
Session 14 How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?	86

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

**IS THERE
MORE
TO
LIFE**

Welcome to the Alpha Course - an opportunity to explore the meaning of life

Over 2.8 million people in the UK and 18 million worldwide, from every walk of life, have already been on an Alpha Course.

This manual outlines the content of the 15 talks, which each look at a different aspect of the Christian faith. After each talk, there is a time for discussion in small groups – a place where you can ask questions, delve into different issues, find out what others think and perhaps make some new friends along the way!

**THAN
THIS?**

INTRODUCTION

- Objections
- Misconceptions
- What does Christianity have to do with life today?

1. DIRECTION FOR A LOST WORLD

- Hunger for meaning and purpose
- Questions to ask about life:
 - what am I doing on earth?
 - what is the point of life?
 - where am I heading?

Jesus: 'I AM THE WAY'

2. REALITY IN A CONFUSED WORLD

Does it matter what we believe?

- Truth – understood intellectually
- Truth – experienced as a relationship

Jesus: 'I AM THE TRUTH'

3. LIFE IN A DARK WORLD

- Created in God's image
- Fallen into sin
- Forgiven in Christ

Jesus: 'I AM THE LIFE'

JESUS SAID,

'I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE'

(JOHN 14:6)

CONCLUSION

- Not boring; it is about living life to the full
 - Not untrue; it is the truth
 - Not irrelevant; it transforms the whole of our lives

Recommended reading

Why Jesus?

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 904074 57 1

Why Christmas?

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 898838 46 3

SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS



INTRODUCTION

1. He existed

- Evidence outside the New Testament about Jesus includes:
 - Tacitus & Suetonius, Roman historians
 - Josephus, Jewish historian
- Evidence within the New Testament:
 - F.F. Bruce

WAS HE MORE THAN JUST:

a man : a great human : a religious teacher?

(Matthew 16:13 –16)

2. He was fully human

- Human body
 - tired (John 4:6)
 - hungry (Matthew 4:2)
- Human emotions
 - anger (Mark 11:15–17)
 - love (Mark 10:21)
 - sadness (John 11:32–36)
- Human experiences
 - temptation (Mark 1:13)
 - learning (Luke 2:46–52)
 - work (Mark 6:3)
 - obedience (Luke 2:51)

ISSUE: HOW DO WE KNOW THAT WHAT THEY WROTE DOWN HAS NOT BEEN CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

WORK	WHEN WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME LAPSE	COPIES
Herodotus	488-428 BC	AD 900	1,300 years	8
Thucydides	c.460-400 BC	C.AD 900	1,300 years	8
Tacitus	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000 years	20
Caesar's Gallic War	58-50 BC	AD 900	950 years	9-10
Livy's Roman History	59 BC-AD 17	AD 900	900 years	20
New Testament	AD 40-100	AD 130 (full manuscripts ad 350)	30-310 years	5,000 + (Greek) 10,000 (Latin) 9,300 (Other)

1. WHAT DID HE SAY ABOUT HIMSELF?

1. Teaching centred on himself

- I am
 - ‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6:35)
 - ‘I am the light of the world’ (John 8:12)
 - ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ (John 11:25–26)
 - ‘I am the way and the truth and the life’ (John 14:6)
- ‘My kingdom’ (Luke 22:30)
- ‘Come to me’ (Matthew 11:28–29)
- ‘Follow me’ (Mark 1:17)
- Receive me – receive God (Matthew 10:40)
- Welcome me – welcome God (Mark 9:37)
- To have seen me is to have seen God (John 14:9)
- Claims humanity’s supreme love (Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:26)

2. His indirect claims

- To forgive sins (Mark 2:5)
- To judge the world (Matthew 25:31, 32, 40, 45)

3. His direct claims

- Messiah (Mark 14:61–62)
- Son of God (Mark 14:61)
- God the Son
 - ‘...before Abraham was born, I am!’ (John 8:58)
 - ‘my Lord and my God’ (John 20:26–29)
 - ‘claim to be God’ (John 10:30–33)

C.S. LEWIS WROTE:

'A MAN WHO WAS MERELY A MAN AND SAID THE SORT OF THINGS JESUS SAID WOULD NOT BE A GREAT MORAL TEACHER.'

He would either be insane or else he would be 'the Devil of Hell'. 'You must make your choice,' he writes. Either Jesus was, and is, the Son of God or else he was insane or evil but, C.S. Lewis goes on, 'Let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.'

'We are faced then with a frightening alternative.' Either Jesus was (and is) exactly what he said or else he was insane or something worse. To C.S. Lewis it seemed clear that he could neither have been insane or evil and thus he concludes, 'However strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God'.

2. WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE TO SUPPORT WHAT HE SAID?

- His teaching
 - eg, Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
- His works (John 10:37–38)
- His character
- His fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy
- His conquest of death

EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

1. His absence from the tomb

- Theories:
 - Jesus did not die (John 19:33–34)
 - disciples stole the body
 - authorities stole the body
 - robbers stole the body (John 20:1–9)

2. His presence with the disciples

- Hallucination?
- Number of appearances
 - at least eleven different occasions
 - 500+ people
 - period of six weeks
- Nature of appearances (Luke 24:36–43)

3. Immediate effect

- Birth and growth of Christian church

4. Effect down the ages

- Experience of Christians down the ages

CONCLUSION

- There is a lot of evidence to support Jesus' existence
- Christians believe he is the Son of God

Recommended reading

Questions of Life

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 905887 83 5 (from alphashop.org)

978 1 905887 82 8 (from bookshops)

SESSION 2

WHY DINE

WIE
SIND
WIR?
DIE?

INTRODUCTION

THE CROSS LIES AT THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

(1 Corinthians 2:2)

1. THE PROBLEM

'All have sinned...' (Romans 3:23)

- Results of sin:

- pollution of sin (Mark 7:20–23)
- power of sin (John 8:34)
- penalty for sin (Romans 6:23)
- partition of sin (Isaiah 59:2)

2. THE SOLUTION

- 'The self-substitution of God' – John Stott (1 Peter 2:24)
- Agony of the cross (Isaiah 53:6)

3. THE RESULT

(Romans 3:21–26)

Four images:

1. The Temple

- 'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood' (v.25)
- (Hebrews 10:4)
- (1 John 1:7)
- Pollution of sin removed

2. The Market Place

- 'The redemption that came by Christ Jesus' (v.24)
- Power of sin broken (John 8:36)

3. The Law Court

- 'Justified freely by his grace' (v.24)
- Penalty of sin paid

4. The Home

- Reconciliation

'For God so

LOVED THE WORLD

that he gave his one and
only Son, that whoever
believes in him shall not
perish but have eternal life'

[John 3:16]

- ‘God was... in Christ’
(2 Corinthians 5:19)
- Partition of sin destroyed

CONCLUSION

- ‘Righteousness from God’
(Romans 3:22; Isaiah 53:6)
- He died for you and me
(Galatians 2:20)

Recommended reading

Mere Christianity

C.S. Lewis

Harper Collins

ISBN 978 0 006280 54 5

Basic Christianity

John Stott

IVP

ISBN 978 1 844 7430 49

Orthodoxy

G.K. Chesterton

House of Stratus

ISBN 978 0 385015 36 3

SESSION 3

HOW CAN WE

HAVE FAITH?

INTRODUCTION

'...those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old is gone. A new life has begun!'
(2 Corinthians 5:17, New Living Translation)

But experiences vary... some immediately know the difference... for others it is more gradual

- When we received Christ, we became a child of God (John 1:12)
(NB believed + received)
- God wants us to be sure
 - 'I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life'
(1 John 5:13)

1. THE WORD OF GOD

We must not only trust our feelings, which can be changeable and may even be deceptive at times, but instead rely on God's promises

- 'I will come in' (Revelation 3:20)
- 'I am with you always' (Matthew 28:20)
- 'I give them eternal life' (John 10:28)

Faith = taking God's promises and daring to believe them

2. THE WORK OF JESUS

We cannot earn God's forgiveness, but Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we might be reconciled to God

- Gift of God (Romans 6:23)
- God loves us and died to prove it (John 3:16)
- He took our sins upon himself (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

3. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

When someone becomes a Christian, God's Holy Spirit comes to live inside them (Romans 8:9)

1. He transforms us from within

- Our characters (Galatians 5:22–23)
- Our relationships

Which of the following changes have you already experienced in your life?

- new love for God
- desire to read the Bible
- sense of forgiveness
- new concern for others
- enjoyment of worshipping God
- desire to meet with other Christians

2. He brings a deep, personal conviction that I am God's child

- (Romans 8:15–16)

CONCLUSION

- Make a decision to take a step of faith by inviting Jesus in
 - it is not irrational
 - it is a step of faith based on evidence
 - the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God and that we're loved by him (Romans 8:15–16)

Recommended reading

Run Baby Run

Nicky Cruz

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 34086 196 7

The Cross & the Switchblade

David Wilkerson

Harper Collins

ISBN 978 0 310248 29 3

The Hiding Place

Corrie Ten Boom

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 340863 53 4

SESSION 4

**WHY AND
HOW DO I...**

PRAY?

INTRODUCTION

- Prayer is as important for Christians as communication is to any relationship; it helps us develop a relationship with God. Prayer is a two-way conversation with him – he hears our prayers and we can learn to listen to what he may have to say in response
- Praying can give Christians peace and help them to experience God's love – these are just some of the rewards of prayer
- Prayer allows Christians to have access to God through Jesus, his Son

1. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN PRAYER? (Matthew 6:5–13)

- The most important activity of our lives
- The whole Trinity involved (Ephesians 2:18)

1. To the Father (Matthew 6)

- ‘To your father’ (v.6)
 - immanence
- ‘In heaven’ (v.9)
 - transcendence (Matthew 6)

2. Through the Son

- (Ephesians 2:18)

3. By the Spirit

- (Romans 8:26)

2. WHY PRAY? (Matthew 6:6)

1. Model of Jesus (Mark 1:35)

- 'When you pray'
(Luke 6:12; 9:18; 28; 11:1)

2. Developing a relationship with God, for which we are created

3. Rewards of prayer (Matthew 6:6)

- Joy (John 16:24)
- Peace (Philippians 4:6–7)

4. Results of prayer (Matthew 7:7–11)

3. DOES GOD ALWAYS ANSWER PRAYER? (Matthew 7:7–11)

Our prayers may not be answered if there is:

- Unconfessed sin (Isaiah 59:2)
- Unforgiveness (Matthew 6:14–15)
- Disobedience (1 John 3:21–22)
- Wrong motives (James 4:2–3)
- Misapprehension of the will of God
 - 'good gifts' (Matthew 7:11)
- Yes/no/wait
 - no:
 - 'either not good in themselves, or not good for us or for others, directly or indirectly, immediately or ultimately'

John Stott

4. HOW DO WE PRAY?

A: adoration

C: confession

T: thanksgiving

S: supplication (requests)

Model of the Lord's Prayer

(Matthew 6:9–13)

- 'Our Father in heaven' (v.9)
- 'Hallowed be your name' (v.9)
- 'Your kingdom come' (v.10)
 - God's rule and reign in people's lives
 - return of Jesus
 - presence of God's kingdom now
- 'Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven' (v.10)
- 'Give us today our daily bread' (v.11)

'Everything necessary for the preservation of life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace'
Martin Luther

- 'Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors' (v.12)
- 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one' (v.13)

5. WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. Always

- (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- (Ephesians 6:18)

2. Alone (Matthew 6:6)

- Regular pattern
- Best part of the day (Mark 1:35)

3. With others

- (Matthew 18:19)

CONCLUSION

- Prayer is part of a relationship with God
 - pray to develop this relationship
 - be honest in prayer
 - Pray always:
 - ACTS
 - Pray alone and with others

Recommended reading

Too Busy Not to Pray

Bill Hybels

IVP

ISBN 978 0 851113 29 6

SESSION 5

WHY HOW I THE

**AND
SHOULD
READ
BIBLE?**

INTRODUCTION

- The most popular book
- The most powerful book
- The most precious book
(Matthew 4:4)

1. GOD HAS SPOKEN: REVELATION

- Inspired by God
- Difficulties in the Bible
 - historical difficulties (cf Luke 3:1–2)
 - moral difficulties (eg, issue of suffering)
- (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- ‘Theopneustos’ – God-breathed

Therefore it is our authority for:

- Teaching
- Rebuking
- Correcting
- Training in righteousness
 - ie, our manual for life

2. GOD SPEAKS: RELATIONSHIP

‘Salvation through faith in Christ’
(2 Timothy 3:15; John 5:39–40)

1. To those who are not Christians

(Romans 10:17; John 20:31)

2. To those who are Christians

- Become like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Joy and peace in the midst of a storm (Psalm 23:5)
- Guidance (Psalm 119:105)
- Health/healing (Proverbs 4:20–22)
- Defence against spiritual attack (Matthew 4:1–11)
- Power (Hebrews 4:12)
- Cleansing (John 15:3)

3. HOW DO WE HEAR GOD SPEAK THROUGH THE BIBLE?

1. Time

- Plan ahead
- Develop a regular pattern

2. Place

- ‘A solitary place’ (Mark 1:35)

3. Method

- Ask God to speak
- Read the passage
(try using Bible reading notes)
- Ask yourself:
 - what does it say?
 - what does it mean?
 - how does it apply?
- Respond in prayer
- Put it into practice
 - ‘everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice...’
(Matthew 7:24)

CONCLUSION

- God speaks to us through the Bible
- Make a habit of reading the Bible regularly

Recommended reading

Holy Bible, New International Version

[*New International Version* is used in the DVDs, but we recommend any modern version]

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 340269 69 5

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth

Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart

S.U.

ISBN 978 0 310246 04 6

The New Lion Handbook to the Bible

Lion

ISBN 9780745938707

30 Days

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 902750 81 1

SESSION 6

HOW DOES

GOD GUIDE US.

INTRODUCTION

- Decisions, eg: marriage, job, home, money, giving, holidays, use of time, possessions, etc

1. God promises to guide

- (Psalm 32:8)
- (John 10:3, 4, 27)

2. God has a good plan for our lives

- (Jeremiah 29:11)
- (Romans 12:2)
- (John 10:10, 15)

3. We need to consult God before making major decisions

- (Isaiah 30:1–2)
- Jesus is the supreme example
 - (Luke 4:1)
 - (John 5:19)

4. Our attitude needs to be one of humility

- (Psalm 25:9, 14)
- ‘I am the Lord’s servant and I am willing to do whatever he wants’
(Luke 1:38, Living Bible)

1. COMMANDING SCRIPTURE

1. General will (2 Timothy 3:16)

- General instruction for marriage, work, money, children, elderly relatives

2. Particular will

- (Psalm 119:105, 130–133)
May bring to light a particular verse

2. COMPELLING SPIRIT (Acts 20:22)

'They know his voice' (John 10:3, 4; Acts 16:7)

1. God speaks as you pray (Acts 13:1–3)

- The good thought
- Strong impressions
- Feelings

2. Strong desire to do something

- 'To will and to act according to his good purpose' (Philippians 2:13)

3. Sometimes he guides in more unusual ways

- Prophecy, eg, Agabus (Acts 11:27–28; 21:10, 11)
- Dreams (Matthew 1:20)
- Visions/pictures (Acts 16:10)
- Angels (Genesis 18; Matthew 2:19; Acts 12:7)
- Audible voice (1 Samuel 3:4–14)

4. Need for testing (1 John 4:1)

- Is it loving? (1 John 4:16)
- Is it in line with the Bible?
- Is it strengthening, encouraging and comforting? (1 Corinthians 14:3)
- Does it bring the peace of God? (Colossians 3:15)

3. COMMON SENSE

'Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding but
must be controlled by bit and bridle'
(Psalm 32:8-9)

- 'Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this'
(2 Timothy 2:7)
- 'God's promises of guidance were not given to save us the problem of thinking' John Stott
 - eg, marriage, job/career
(1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

4. COUNSEL OF SAINTS

- '...the wise listen to advice'
(Proverbs 12:15)
- 'Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed'
(Proverbs 15:22)
- 'Make plans by seeking advice'
(Proverbs 20:18)

But:

- Who is responsible?
- Whom should we consult?

'AND SO AFTER WAITING PATIENTLY, ABRAHAM RECEIVED WHAT WAS PROMISED' [Hebrews 6:15]

5. CIRCUMSTANTIAL SIGNS

- In your heart you plan your course, but the Lord determines your steps
(Proverbs 16:9; Psalm 37:5)
 - Sometimes God closes doors
(Acts 16:7)
 - Sometimes God opens doors
(1 Corinthians 16:9)
 - Watch the circumstances but don't put too much weight on them
 - Sometimes we need to persevere despite the circumstances

CONCLUSION

- Be patient
 - We all make mistakes – God forgives
(Joel 2:25)
 - (Romans 8:28)

Recommended reading

Listening to God

Joyce Huggett

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 340864 25 8

SESSION 7



IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

INTRODUCTION

For a long time in the church the person and work of the Holy Spirit has been:

- Ignored
 - a greater concentration on the Father and the Son
- Misunderstood
 - ‘Holy Ghost’, ‘he’ not ‘it’, resisted
 - he wants to take control

1. HE WAS INVOLVED IN CREATION

- Bringing order out of chaos
(Genesis 1:1–2)
- Giving life to man (Genesis 2:7)

2. HE CAME UPON PARTICULAR PEOPLE AT PARTICULAR TIMES FOR PARTICULAR TASKS

- Gideon – for leadership (Judges 6:14–16)
- Samson – for strength (Judges 15:14–15)
- Bezalel – for artistic work
(Exodus 31:1–5)
- Isaiah – for prophecy (Isaiah 61:1–3)

3. HE WAS PROMISED BY THE FATHER

- The promise of a ‘new thing’
 - ‘...they will all know me’
(Jeremiah 31:31–34)
 - ‘I will put my Spirit in you’
(Ezekiel 36:26–27)
 - ‘a river flowing from the Temple’
(Ezekiel 47)
 - ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people’
(Joel 2:28–29)

However, the prophecies remained unfulfilled for at least 300 years

With the coming of Jesus there is a great activity of the Spirit

- But still on a few particular people:
 - John the Baptist (Luke 1:15)
 - Mary (Luke 1:35)
 - Elizabeth (Luke 1:41)
 - Zechariah (Luke 1:67)
 - Simeon (Luke 2:25–27)

4. JOHN THE BAPTIST LINKS HIM WITH JESUS

(Luke 3:16)

In Greek ‘baptizo’ = to overwhelm, immerse, plunge, drench

- Jesus, the Spirit-filled man
 - Jesus received power through the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Luke 3:22; Luke 4:1, 14, 18)

5. JESUS PREDICTS HIS PRESENCE (John 7:37–38)

However, he tells them to wait in the city until they are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 5, 8; Acts 2:2–4)

- At Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Spirit and received:
 - new languages (Acts 2:4–12)
 - new boldness (Acts 2:14)
 - new power (Acts 2:37–41)

‘When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”...and about

300
were added to their number that day’ (Acts 2:37, 41)

CONCLUSION

- We live in the age of the Spirit.
God has promised to give his
Spirit to every Christian
(Acts 2:37-39)

Recommended reading

Chasing the Dragon

Jackie Pullinger

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 340908 80 8

SESSION 8

WHAT

DO

ES

THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

INTRODUCTION

- New birth (John 3:3–8)
- Born into a family

1. SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD

1. Forgiveness (Romans 8:1–2)

2. Adoption (Romans 8:14–17)

- Greatest privilege (v.14)
- Closest intimacy (v.15)
- Deepest experience (v.16)
- Greatest security (v.17)

2. DEVELOPING THE RELATIONSHIP (Ephesians 2:18)

1. He helps us to pray (Romans 8:26)

2. He enables us to understand God's word (Ephesians 1:17–18)

3. THE FAMILY LIKENESS

- (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- (Galatians 5:22–23)

4. UNITY IN THE FAMILY

- (Ephesians 4:3–6)

5. GIFTS FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

Each member of the family is different
(1 Corinthians 12:4–11)

- Free gifts
- To each one
- For the common good

6. THE GROWING FAMILY

- He empowers us to be witnesses for Christ
- Power for service (Acts 1:8)

CONCLUSION

- Every Christian has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) but not every Christian is filled with the Spirit
 - ‘be filled’ (Ephesians 5:18–20)
 - how? (Revelation 22:17)

Recommended reading

The God Who Changes Lives 1, 2, 3 & 4

Ed. M. Elsdon-Dew

Alpha International

Vol. 1 ISBN 978 1 902750 77 4

Vol. 2 ISBN 978 1 902750 78 1

Vol. 3 ISBN 978 1 902750 62 0

Vol. 4 ISBN 978 1 904074 56 4

Lifechange

Ed. M. Elsdon-Dew

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 905887 74 3

SESSION 9

HOW CAN I BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

CAN I BE
WITH THE
SPIRIT?

INTRODUCTION

Outpouring of the Spirit in Acts:

5 Categories:

1. Longing (Pentecost – Acts 2:2–4)

2. Receptive (Samaria – Acts 8:14–23)

3. Hostile (Paul – Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1–2)

4. Uninformed (Ephesus – Acts 19:1–6)

5. Unlikely (Gentiles – Acts 10:44–47)

What happened to Cornelius and his household when the Spirit came upon them? (Acts 10:44–46)

1. THEY EXPERIENCED THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

'...the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers... were astonished' (Acts 10:44–45)

- Experience is different for everyone
 - (Acts 8:16)
 - (Romans 5:5)
 - (Ephesians 3:14–19)
- Fruit of the Spirit

2. THEY WERE RELEASED IN PRAISE

'For they heard them... praising God'
(Acts 10:46)

- Fear of emotion
- All relationships should involve emotions
- Private versus public
- Emotion versus emotionalism

3. THEY RECEIVED A NEW LANGUAGE

'For they heard them speaking in tongues' (Acts 10:46)

1. Not all Christians speak in tongues

- Not necessarily a sign of being filled with the Spirit
- There are no first or second-class Christians
- It is not the most important gift

2. What is the gift of tongues?

- Human or angelic language
(1 Corinthians 13:1)
- A form of prayer (1 Corinthians 14:2)
- Builds up individual
- Transcends language barrier
(1 Corinthians 14:14)
- Speaker in full control

3. Why is it helpful?

- Praise/worship
- Praying for oneself
- Praying for others

4. Does the New Testament approve?

- (1 Corinthians 14)
- Context: excessive public use
 - Nevertheless... (vv.5, 18, 39)
 - Private versus public

5. How do we receive this gift?

- 'Eagerly desire' (1 Corinthians 14:1)
- Ask God
- Co-operate with the Spirit
- Believe
- Persevere

CONCLUSION

Three common hindrances

(Luke 11:9–13)

1. Doubt (vv.9–10)

2. Fear (vv.11–13)

3. Inadequacy (v.13)

Recommended reading

The Mystery of Pentecost

Raniero Cantalamessa

Liturgical Press

ISBN 978 0 814627 24 2

SESSION 10

HOW CAN I [RESIST]

EVIL?

INTRODUCTION (Romans 12:21)

- Reality of spiritual warfare
- Satan = Fallen angel?
 - (Isaiah 14; Luke 10:17–20)
- Old Testament:
 - (Job 1; 1 Chronicles 21:1)
- New Testament:
 - a personal, spiritual being who is in active rebellion against God and has the leadership of many demons like himself
 - (Ephesians 6:11–12)
- Not to be underestimated
 - cunning
 - evil
 - powerful

1. WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE THAT THE DEVIL EXISTS?

1. Biblical (Scripture)

- Old Testament
- Jesus
- Peter (1 Peter 5:8–11)
- Paul (Ephesians 6:11–12)

2. Christians down through the ages (tradition)

- Church fathers
- Reformers
- Ordinary Christians

3. Makes sense of the world (reason)

Mistaken views:

- Disbelief
- Unhealthy interest (Deuteronomy 18:10)

2. WHAT ARE THE DEVIL'S TACTICS? (Genesis 3)

1. Aims to destroy

- (John 10:10)

2. Blinds people

- (2 Corinthians 4:4)

3. Doubt

- (Genesis 3:1)
- (Matthew 4:3, 6)

4. Temptation (Genesis 2:16–17)

- Permission, prohibition, penalty
- Consequences of breaking trust (Genesis 3)
- Shame/embarrassment (v.7)
 - God called them back (vv. 9–13)
- Friendship with God broken
 - 'they hid' (v.8)
 - 'afraid' (v.10)
- They blamed each other (vv.11–13)

5. Accusation

- Accuses God
- Accuses Christians before God (Revelation 12:10)

3. WHAT IS OUR POSITION?

(Colossians 1:13)

- Satan defeated on the cross (Colossians 2:15)
- Jesus' disciples given authority over demons (Luke 10:17–20)

4. HOW DO WE DEFEND OURSELVES? [Ephesians 6]

'Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes' [Ephesians 6:11]

SIX PRACTICAL TIPS:

**Keep your relationships right –
breastplate of righteousness (v.14)**

- The righteousness of Christ given to us [Philippians 3:9]
- To protect the heart against guilt and condemnation

*Focus on Jesus – belt of truth (vv.13–14)
A grounding in Christian doctrine/truth to
counter Satan's lies [John 8:32]*

**Get involved in service –
boots of the gospel of peace (v.15)**

- The readiness to speak of Christ
[Isaiah 52:7–10]

Know your Bible – sword of the Spirit (v.17)

- The word of God
 - The only offensive piece of armour
- (Hebrews 4:12)

**Keep trusting God in difficult times –
shield of faith (v.16)**

- The opposite of cynicism and scepticism

**Win the battle of the mind –
helmet of salvation (v.17)**

- Past, present, future
- To protect, future
and accusation

5. HOW DO WE ATTACK?

'The whole world is under the control of the evil one' (1 John 5:19)

The kingdom of God advances through:

1. Prayer (Ephesians 6:18)

- 'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds' (2 Corinthians 10:4)

2. Action (Luke 7:22)

- Preaching the gospel
- Casting out demons
- Healing the sick, etc

CONCLUSION

- Evil does exist but we don't need to be afraid
- Defeat evil with prayer and action through the power of the Holy Spirit

Recommended reading

The Screwtape Letters

C.S. Lewis

Harper Collins

ISBN 978 0 007273 55 3

SESSION 11

WHY AND HOW

OTHERS?

SHOULD I TELL

INTRODUCTION

- Great commission (Matthew 28:16–20)
- Needs of others
- Gospel = good news (about Jesus)
- Two opposite dangers:
 - insensitivity
 - fear
- Key = it arises out of a relationship
- Co-operation with Spirit of God

1. PRESENCE (Matthew 5:13–16)

- We are called to be salt and light (vv.13–14)
- When people know we are Christians, they watch our lives (v.16), eg, spouses

'...if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives' (1 Peter 3:1–2)

2. PERSUASION

'Since...we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade people'
(2 Corinthians 5:11; Acts 17:2–4)

- Work out the answers to common questions (1 Peter 3:15)
 - eg: 'What about other religions?'
'How can a God of love allow suffering?'

3. PROCLAMATION (John 1:39–46)

- ‘Come... and you will see’
 - we are not all called to be ‘evangelists’ but we are all called to be ‘witnesses’ [v.41]
- Explain ourselves
 - (see appendix at end of chapter)

4. POWER (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

- God’s power at work in our lives
(1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

5. PRAYER

- For them – to open blind eyes
(2 Corinthians 4:4)
- For ourselves – to have boldness
(Acts 4:29–31)
- For others (Romans 10:1)

CONCLUSION

- Don’t give up (Mark 4:15–20)

Recommended reading

Searching Issues

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 905887 78 1

The Case Against Christ

John Young

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 978 0 340908 82 2

APPENDIX

Preparing your testimony

Suggestions:

- Make it short, aim for three minutes
 - people switch off after that
- Make it personal – don't preach
 - use 'I' or 'we' – not 'you'
- Keep Christ central – they need to follow him, not you!
- Format
 - a little of your former life
 - how you came into your relationship with Christ
 - something of what it has meant since then
- Write it out in full – it's easier to see the waffle when it's down on paper!

**LORD JESUS CHRIST,
I AM SORRY FOR THE THINGS I HAVE
DONE WRONG IN MY LIFE.**

(Take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience.)

Please forgive me. I now turn from everything which I know is wrong.

Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free.

Thank you that you now offer me this gift of forgiveness and your Spirit. I now receive that gift.

Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever.

THANK YOU, LORD JESUS. AMEN.

SESSION 12

**DOES
GOD HEAL**

+ 0

DAY?

INTRODUCTION

- Introduction of healing to this church
- Our own experience

1. HEALING IN THE BIBLE

1. Old Testament

- Promises of God (eg: Exodus 23:25–26; Psalm 41:3)
- The character of God
 - 'I am the Lord who heals you' (Exodus 15:26)
- Examples of God healing (2 Kings 5; Isaiah 38–39)

2. The ministry of Jesus

- His teaching
 - the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15)
 - proclaimed and demonstrated
- His healings
 - 25% of the Gospels (Matthew 4:23)

- His commissions
 - commission of the Twelve (Matthew 9:35–10:8; Luke 9:1)
 - commission of the seventy-two (Luke 10:1–20)
 - commission of the disciples (Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:15–20; John 14:9–14, especially v.12)

2. HEALING IN CHURCH HISTORY

Many examples of healing and miracles (Acts 3:1–10; Acts 5:12–16)

- Early church history
 - eg: Irenaeus (140–203)
Origen (c.185–254)
Augustine (354–430)

3. HEALING TODAY

- Simplicity
- Love (Matthew 9:36; Mark 1:41)
- Words of knowledge
 - pictures
 - sympathy pain
 - impressions
 - hear or see words
 - words formed on tongue
- Prayer
 - where does it hurt?
 - why does the person have this condition?
 - how do I pray?
 - how are they doing?
 - what next?

CONCLUSION

- Persevere
- Keep asking for healing through prayer

Recommended reading

Dancer Off Her Feet

Julie Sheldon

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 9780340861585

SESSION 13

W

The background features large, bold, black letters 'H', 'A', and 'T' arranged vertically. A thick black cross shape is positioned above the letters, with its vertical bar aligned with the letter 'A'.

ABOUT THE CHURCH?

INTRODUCTION

- Popular misconceptions:
 - church = services
 - church = clergy
 - church = a particular denomination
 - church = the building

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

1. THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1 Peter 2:9, 10)

- Greek word 'ekklesia' = an assembly or gathering of people
- Church/kingdom
- Baptism is the visible mark of being a member of the church

Baptism signifies:

- Cleansing from sin (1 Corinthians 6:11)
- Incorporation into Christ's death and resurrection
(Romans 6:3–5; Colossians 2:12)
- Sealing of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13)

1. Universal church

(Ephesians 3:10, 21; 5:23, 25)

- 1,900 million Christians in the world today
 - persecuted church
 - third world
 - free world

2. Local churches

'Galatian churches' (1 Corinthians 16:1)

'The churches in the province of Asia'
(1 Corinthians 16:19)

'All the churches of Christ'

- Cell

- small group (4–12 people)
- close friends
- keynotes
- confidentiality
- intimacy
- accountability (1 John 4:19)

- Congregation

- pastoral group: 12–50
- small enough to know others and to be known
- ministry to each other (Ephesians 4:12)
- exercise of gifts of the Spirit
(1 Corinthians 12:7–11)
- open group

- Celebration services

- festive occasions
(Passover, Pentecost, New Year)
- sense of God's greatness
- weakness: difficult to make friends

2. THE FAMILY OF GOD

(Ephesians 2:14–18) (1 John 5:1)

- Brothers and sisters to each other
(1 John 4:19–5:1)

- God as our Father (John 1:12)

- Importance of unity

- Jesus prayed '...that they may be one'
(John 17:11)

- 'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit' (Ephesians 4:3)

'On the necessary points, unity;
on the questionable points, liberty;
in everything, love'
(Rupertus Meldenius)

- Faithfulness (Galatians 6:10)

- Forgiveness (Matthew 18:15, 35)
(Matthew 5:23–24)
- Fellowship (Acts 2:42–47)
 - fellowship with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
 - and with one another (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 10:24–25)

3. THE BODY OF CHRIST

[1 Corinthians 12:1–27]

'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'
(Acts 9:4)

- Unity (Ephesians 4:3–6)
 - 'the unity of the Spirit'
- Diversity (vv.7–11)
 - 'to each one of us grace has been given'
- Mutual dependence (vv.14–26)
 - 'builds itself up in love, as each part does its work'

4. A HOLY TEMPLE [Ephesians 2:19–22]

- Built on foundation of apostles and prophets (v.20)
- New Testament
- Jesus as the cornerstone (v.20)
- Indwelt by God's Spirit (v.21)
'a holy Temple'

5. THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

[Ephesians 5:25–27, 32]

- Christ's love for his church (v.25)
- Christ's purpose for his church (v.27)
(Revelation 21:2)
- Our response (1 Peter 2:9)
 - holiness
 - worship
 - witness

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN WROTE:

'THE CHURCH IS AN HISTORIC REALITY....

beginning with God's call to Abraham and continuing through the ministry of prophets and apostles right down the ages until now. And whether or not the church is popular, big or small, is relatively unimportant.

The fact of this great rock, this anvil upon which so many hammers have been worn out, this given reality, needs to be at the centre of our thinking as Christians.'

CONCLUSION

- You cannot be a Christian alone
 - get involved in community
- The church is the family of God
 - we are all one family

Recommended reading

I Believe in the Church

David Watson

Hodder & Stoughton

ISBN 9780340372777

SESSION 14

HOW
CAN I
MAKE
THE
MOST
OF
THE
REST
OF MY



(Romans 12:1-21)

?

1. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

1. Break with the past

- 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world' (v.2)
- 'Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mould' (v.2 J.B. Phillips)

2. Make a new start

- 'Let God transform you inwardly by a complete change' (NEB)
 - sincere love (v.9)
 - enthusiasm for the Lord (v.11)
 - harmonious relationships (vv.9-21)

2. HOW DO WE DO IT?

- 'Present your bodies...''

Act of will

- ears
- eyes
- mouths
- hands

- sexuality
 - time
 - ambitions (Matthew 6:33)
 - money
- '...as living sacrifices'
 - it will involve sacrifice
 - it may involve suffering

3. WHY SHOULD WE DO IT?

- What God has planned for our future
 - 'his good, pleasing and perfect will' (v.2)
- What God has done for us
 - 'in view of God's mercy'

CONCLUSION

- Leave the past behind
 - Jesus offers us a new start
- Sacrifice
 - Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice
 - following him may involve suffering, but God is with us
 - we can trust God with our future

Recommended reading

The Jesus Lifestyle

Nicky Gumbel

Alpha International

ISBN 978 1 905887 85 9 (from alphashop.org)

978 1 905887 84 2 (from bookshops)

Life in Christ

Raniero Cantalamessa

The Liturgical Press

ISBN 978 0 814627 99 0

ALPHA RESOURCES

Alpha Resources

Alpha books by Nicky Gumbel:

Why Jesus?

'The clearest, best illustrated and most challenging short presentation of Jesus that I know.'

– Michael Green

Questions of Life

The Alpha Course in book form. In fifteen compelling chapters the author points the way to an authentic Christianity which is exciting and relevant to today's world.

Searching Issues

The seven issues most often raised by participants of Alpha: suffering, other religions, sex before marriage, the New Age, homosexuality, science and Christianity and the Trinity.

A Life Worth Living

What happens after Alpha? Based on the book of Philippians, this is an invaluable next step for those who have just completed Alpha, and for anyone eager to put their faith on a firm biblical footing.

The Jesus Lifestyle

An in-depth look at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). The author shows that Jesus' teaching flies in the face of modern lifestyle and presents us with a radical alternative.

30 Days

Nicky Gumbel selects thirty passages from the Old and New Testament which can be read over thirty days. It is designed for those on an Alpha course and others who are interested in beginning to explore the Bible.

Is God a Delusion?

Has science disproved God? Does religion do more harm than good? Is faith irrational?

Drawing upon his experience as a barrister, Nicky Gumbel addresses the biggest issue of our age: does God exist? He sifts through the arguments adopted by some prominent atheists and assesses the evidence.

To order:

Alphashop.org

Phone the Alpha Publications Hotline
on **0845 7581 278**

or email **alpha@marston.co.uk**

To order from overseas:

T +44 1228 611749

GET INVOLVED. SEE LIVES TRANSFORMED.

alpha.org

Alpha UK

Web alpha.org
Email ukinvitation@alpha.org
Tel 0845 644 7544

HTB Brompton Road
London, SW7 1JA

Alpha Publications hotline

Web alphashop.org
Email alpha@marston.co.uk
Tel 0845 758 1278

PLEASE KEEP ME INFORMED

To receive a free subscription to Alpha News, please return this form to:

Alpha International
Holy Trinity Brompton
Brompton Road
London
SW7 1JA

Title

Firstname

Surname

Address

Country Postal / Zip Code

Email

IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS? WHY AND HOW DO I PRAY? DOES GOD HEAL TODAY?

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

This manual accompanies the course, highlighting the main points and giving space for notes.

Over 10 weeks, the Alpha Course helps guests explore the meaning of life, revealing that Christianity can be every bit as relevant to life today as it was 2000 years ago.

For more information on the Alpha Course, please visit **alpha.org**

alpha.org

© Alpha International 2008



ISBN 978 1 905887 25 5

9 781905 887255

125307 08 05