

ALPHA NEWS

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JULY - OCTOBER 2009



Getting ready to invite the UK to Alpha

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My friend
Bear Grylls
got me to
Alpha

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‘This is servant
ministry, this is
serving the churches,
this is building up the
capacity of all our
churches to be
effective evangelists
and especially to
communicate to the
young, to the next
generation’

THE BISHOP OF LONDON



100 NATIONS AT ALPHA'S BIG WEEK

Full reports
and pictures

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WELCOME TO ALPHA NEWS

Alpha News is published three times a year to keep church leaders and congregations up-to-date with the spread of the Alpha course and associated ministries. The Alpha Course is an introduction to the Christian faith which has seen extraordinary success at stimulating faith among those who are not churchgoers and also given a new dynamism to many existing Christians.

The number of registered churches worldwide at the end of each year since 1992 was:

Year	Courses	Attendees (cumulative)
1992	5	
1993	200	4,600
1994	750	25,000
1995	2,500	100,000
1996	5,000	400,000
1997	6,500	800,000
1998	10,500	1.3m
1999	14,200	2 m
2000	17,000	2.7m
2001	19,800	3.8m
2002	24,400	4.7m
2003	27,340	5.7m
2004	29,051	6.7m
2005	31,167	8m
2006	32,592	9.3m
2007	35,092	10.8m
2008**	35,385	12.3m
2009	42,530	

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Number of registered courses in some countries:

Australia	2,000
Finland	650
France	530
Germany	1,350
India	5,296
Netherlands	1,132
Nigeria	300
Romania	430
Russia	336
South Africa	830
South Korea	4,873
Sweden	313
Switzerland	608
UK	8,260
USA	9,110

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** From 2008 a new system of counting Alpha courses was introduced to take into account a wide variety of different locations rather than just churches

Alpha People



Archbishop's welcome to Lambeth Palace

ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams led a special service of Morning Prayer in the Crypt Chapel of Lambeth Palace for the bishops attending Alpha International week.

During the service in the 13th century undercroft, he led prayer 'for all involved in Alpha International week, for the work of Alpha around the world and the ministry of Holy Trinity Brompton.'

After the service the guests were invited to a breakfast reception in one of the state rooms at Lambeth Palace.



PETE GREIG, founder of the international 24-7 Prayer movement, spoke on several occasions during the week.

Pete, who took charge of prayer at Alpha at the beginning of this year, also organised the week's non-stop 24-7 prayer room, situated close to the church, which was visited by hundreds of delegates. A full programme of events consisted of many times of worship, which included cello worship, a string quartet and guitar.

During the week activities included a Polish Catholic service and prayer ministry for Alpha teams around the world.

MICHAEL Timmis, head of the world's biggest prison ministry Prison Fellowship International, attended the week with his wife Nancy. Alpha for Prisons works closely with Prison Fellowship throughout the world. Michael, a practising lawyer and businessman, is a member of the Alpha Board and the Alpha Catholic Board. He took over the Chairmanship of Prison Fellowship from the charity's founder Chuck Colson in 2006. He is also Chairman of Prison Fellowship in the USA.



...and Dean John joins in

AMONG delegates attending the Bishops' Stream at the conference was one man who knows more about Alpha than most – the Very Rev'd John Irvine, Dean of Coventry. John Irvine was a curate at Holy Trinity Brompton in the early 1980s when he took over the running of the fledgling four-week Alpha course from founder Charles Marnham. He extended the course to 10 weeks and added a weekend away before leaving to plant a church in 1985.



DELEGATES FROM 100 NATIONS



It's a

1500 church leaders from 100 nations meet for Alpha's big week

MORE than 1500 delegates from 100 countries – including 60 archbishops and bishops – attended the Alpha International Week at Holy Trinity Brompton, London, in June.

The 'Bishops' stream' was hosted by the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres and included 23 Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops, 21 Anglicans, as well as Baptists, Lutherans, and Pentecostals.

The biennial event is an opportunity for Alpha leaders throughout the world to meet together for encouragement and envisioning for the years ahead. The week included an Alpha conference, a marriage conference, a youth and students event, as well as other training events and seminars.

The Archbishop of Canterbury led a special service of Morning Prayer in the Crypt Chapel of Lambeth Place for the bishops attending Alpha International week.

More than 100 Catholic participants of the week attended a special mass at Westminster Cathedral led by Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga of Colombia.

After the service Thomas

McMahon, Catholic Bishop of Brentwood, UK, welcomed the Catholic bishops to a reception at Archbishop's House. Bishop McMahon praised Alpha, saying, 'Alpha serves to draw all the churches together in terms of the gospel.'

Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright spoke on the Tuesday evening on the urgency of the gospel.

The Bishop of London attended the first of two 'News from the Nations' sessions, where representatives from the 100 countries spoke of how Alpha was helping to bring Christian faith to their nations.

Alpha representatives from countries including India, Egypt, Albania, Mauritius, Colombia, the United States, France, Russia, China and Rwanda spoke movingly of what they had seen.

Closing the session, the



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COME TOGETHER FOR ALPHA'S INTERNATIONAL WEEK AT HOLY TRINITY BROMPTON



Nicky Gumbel addresses the conference at Holy Trinity Brompton
Inset: other scenes from the week

global vision



ON THE WEB



- 10-minute highlights film
- The main talks- audio and video
- Video reports - country by country

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Bishop said, 'I have seen the extraordinary life [Alpha] has brought to the church in this global crossroads of London and throughout the country.'

'One of my brother bishops said to me, "What I find amazing about this is: there is no Alpha movement. They are not trying to set up their own international fellowship."

'This is servant ministry; this is serving the churches; this is building

up the capacity of all our churches to be effective evangelists and especially to communicate to the young, to the next generation.

'Very simply, one of the reasons I stand here, humbled, grateful, is because I believe that we are not working for the survival of our own institutions. We are together really growing in unity in the way that you don't if you are a sort of specialist in these matters.

'We are really growing in unity because we are all of us looking in the same direction and the direction is Jesus Christ - the future hope of this fragmented world. My heart is full of gratitude and rejoicing.'

On the last night of the event, delegates gathered for a celebratory supper in the church gardens followed by a prayer and praise party led by Pete Greig, Tim Hughes and the Worship Central team.

THE BISHOPS on

Alpha International week was attended by 60 archbishops and bishops of different denominations from a wide variety of countries including Argentina, Egypt, Mexico, Myanmar, France, India, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka and Chile. They took part in a special 'Bishops Stream' hosted by the Bishop of London and were welcomed to Lambeth Palace by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Here are excerpts of what three of them said:

THE BISHOP OF LONDON

'May this be an engine for claiming the world for Christ'

The Bishop of London opened the week long conference by saying 'May this be an engine for claiming the world for Christ'

It is very inspiring to think of what God is doing among us, quite apart from our own temperaments, and we come from every possible part of the Church.

We come, I believe, to a moment of very great opportunity and decision for the lovers of Jesus Christ.

The call to all human beings is to be inhabited by God. There is no other calling more profound, more full of joy, full of delight.

The last century was dominated all over the world by political religions, by Fascism, by nationalism, by Communism, all the isms. These are political religions. The fact is that there was a vacuum, a spiritual vacuum, which was filled by the great killers of the 20th century, the political religions.

After the Second World War, there was a very brief period of rebuilding and then 40 years of confusion, of turning inwards, of not quite knowing what to do. I heard a real prophecy in the early 1980s in Moscow: a Russian priest said, 'Very soon, believers will be able to speak on the radio'. And it sounded extraordinary because everybody thought we were going to have to live with the Soviet Union – that Communist, atheist state – for ever.

But very soon that prophecy came true. But he had made two prophecies.

He had said, 'Very soon, believers will be able to speak on the radio... and they will not know what to say.'

We have many opportunities for witness, but somehow there is an enormous difficulty in finding the words to communicate.

As you and I know, brothers and sisters, it isn't words that we need, it isn't theories, it's the Spirit which causes us to speak from the ground of the soul, to speak not theoretical truths, but

The Opening Speech

to speak from the truth.

And here we are gathered together just after what is in our church the festival of the Holy Trinity.

We see the Spirit in one another, and we love beyond ourselves. We lose ourselves and that is the way we find ourselves.

This is what Jesus Christ says: if people live turned in upon themselves, hoarding up their lives, that's how they shrink.

The spiritual mystery – deep, simple, converting – is this: that as we go out to our neighbour in love (and here we have the whole world of neighbours represented), so God gives us the spiritual beauty that is our own, but which would never have flowered but for the way in which we engage with our neighbours.

St Anthony the Great of Egypt (and how good it is to see such representation from Egypt, one of the ancient Christian lands of our world) said, 'We are saved in our neighbour'.

And it's in that hope and that prayer and that conviction that I believe that just at this moment when the political religions have failed all over the world, this is a time of great opportunity and hope for the Christian community.

We need to find not only the words, not only the theories (which we have in abundance), but Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, the ability to speak the truth and to be encouraged by one another.

And so with enormous joy and gratitude to Nicky, to Alpha, to all those who are responsible for organising and bringing us together, may Almighty God give his blessing through his most Holy Spirit, and in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, to this whole gathering, may it be a powerful encouragement and an engine for claiming this whole world for Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.



THE BISHOP of London attended the first of the two 'News from the Nations' sessions, where representatives from 50 of the 100 countries spoke of how Alpha was helping to bring Christian faith to their nations. Closing the session, the Bishop said,

I just want to say what is in many of our hearts this morning – just how grateful we are to Nicky Gumbel and to the Alpha team... Bishops are backing Alpha... I certainly am because I have seen the extraordinary life it has brought to the church in this global crossroads of London and throughout the country.

'One of my brother bishops said to me, "What I find amazing about this is: there is no Alpha movement. They are not trying to set up their own international fellowship."

'This is servant ministry; this is serving the churches; this is building up the capacity of all our churches to be effective evangelists and especially to communicate to the young, to the next generation.

We are growing in unity because we are all looking to Jesus...

The Closing Speech

'Very simply, one of the reasons I stand here, humbled, grateful, is because I believe that we are not working for the survival of our own institutions. We are together really growing in unity in the way that you don't if you are a sort of specialist in these matters.

'We are really growing in unity because we are all of us looking in the same direction and the direction is Jesus Christ - the future hope of this fragmented world. My heart is full of gratitude and rejoicing.

why Alpha works



Archbishops and bishops attending Alpha International week gather with the Bishop of London.

Catholic bishops at Westminster Cathedral

THE BISHOP OF BRENTWOOD (ROMAN CATHOLIC)

Alpha plays a strong part in helping to bring faith alive

The Catholic Bishop of Brentwood, Thomas McMahon welcomed Roman Catholic delegates to a reception at Archbishops' House at Westminster. This is an edited transcript:



I would like to say two things from my own personal experience of Alpha. The first thing I want to say is how Alpha serves to draw all the churches together in terms of the Gospel.

If I speak from my own experience, I am blessed that the boundaries of my diocese are completely coterminous with the Anglican diocese.

Therefore a few years ago the Anglican bishop and myself – after due consultations with our people – decided to invite Alpha to come and give a two day conference for leaders in the diocese and we were privileged that it took place in our cathedral.

We were even more privileged to have Nicky Gumbel and Sandy Millar. Therefore we had people from the Christian churches who came together for those two days in order to pray, to reflect on the word of God in the Bible and be nourished in different ways for evangelism. So that is the first thing I would like to say.

My second strong feeling about Alpha is that it helps to bring faith alive.

When confirming young people I will often ask them the question, 'For you personally, is Jesus real or just a notion?'

My great sadness is that I believe that for so many Christians the person of Jesus is just notional and not real.

Because when Jesus is real, then it changes our attitude, our values, our choices, our priorities.

Cardinal Hume who was the Cardinal in this cathedral [Westminster], had great gifts with words and he would put to them the same question but in this form:

He would ask young people

whether they are a 'Sunday acquaintance' or a 'weekday friend'.

He took the analogy of friendship and he said, 'You can never quite tell the moment that an acquaintance becomes a friend. But when you come to know them, when you can trust the other person and share confidences, keep each other's secrets, we are friends.'

And then he would say 'There should be a moment like that in our relationship with the Lord – when we cease to be a Sunday acquaintance and become a weekday friend.'

And I think that Alpha plays a very strong part in helping to bring the faith alive which is dormant.

We all believe that there is a religious instinct within every person and we have to keep to that religious instinct. If we bring the Church all together and if it helps to bring faith alive then I think it is truly a great thing.

Our chief task is to spread the Gospel. Without that people are lost. It was Pope Paul who said, 'The Church exists in order to evangelise.'

Well in this wonderful gathering, where we are united with some of the leaders in our faith, Alpha can help us in that task.

The Bishops who came

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Mons. Carlos Humberto Malfa, Bishop of Chascomús, (Buenos Aires) Argentina; **Mons. Guillermo Rodríguez-Melgarejo**, Bishop of San Martín, (Buenos Aires) Argentina; **Mons. Mario Antonio Cargnello**, Archbishop of Salta, Argentina; **Dom Sergio Arthur Braschi**, Bishop of Ponta Grossa, Brazil; **Mons. Héctor Vargas Bastidas**, Bishop of Arica, Chile; **Mons. Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga**, Archbishop of Tunja, Colombia; **Mons. José Francisco Ulloa Rojas**, Bishop of Cartago, Costa Rica; **Mons. Oscar Fernandez**, Bishop of Puntarenas, Costa Rica; **Mons. Jose Grullon Estrella**, Bishop of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic; **Mons. Victor Alejandro Corral Mantilla**, Bishop of Riobamba, Ecuador; **Yohanna Goltia**, Bishop of The Coptic Catholic Church, Egypt; **Dominique Rey**, Bishop of Frejus-Toulon, France; **Eric Aumonier**, Bishop of Versailles, France; **Jean-Yves Riocreux**, Bishop of Pontoise, France; **Thomas Menamparampil**, sdb Archbishop of Guwahati, India; **Vincent M. Concessao**, Archbishop of Delhi, India; **Mons. Luis Artemio Flores**, Bishop of Valle del Chalco, Mexico; **Mons. Felipe Aguirre Franco**, Archbishop of Acapulco, Mexico; **Mons. Rene Sócrates Sándigo**, Bishop of Juigalpa, Nicaragua; **Mons. Norberto Strottman**, Bishop of Chosica, Peru; **Joseph Vianney Fernando**, Bishop of Kandy, Sri Lanka; **Thomas McMahon**, Bishop of Brentwood, UK; **Mons. Pablo Galimberti**, Bishop of Salto, Uruguay.

ANGLICAN

Mongezi Guma, Holy Cross Cathedral, Botswana; **Trevor Mwamba**, Bishop of Botswana; **Martin Blaise Nyaboho**, Bishop of Makamba, Burundi; **Mounser Anis**, Archbishop of the Province of Jerusalem and

Middle East, Egypt; **Devamani Bachu Sathyanandam**, Bishop of Dornakal, India; **Roger Chung Po Chuen**, Diocese Antisirana, Madagascar; **Ian Ernest**, Bishop of Mauritius and Archbishop of the province of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius; **Samuel Htang Oak**, Bishop of Yangon, Myanmar; **Tubokosemie Abere**, Diocese of Okrika, Nigeria; **James Wong**, Bishop of the Seychelles; **Anthony Porter**, Bishop of Sherwood, UK; **Richard John Carew Chartres**, Bishop of London, UK; **David Urquhart**, Bishop of Birmingham, UK; **Sandy Millar**, Bishop in Mission, UK; **Thomas Wright**, Bishop of Durham, UK; **Paul Gavin Williams**, Bishop of Kensington, UK; **Bill Murdoch**, The Anglican Diocese in New England, USA; **John Guernsey**, Bishop of the Church of Uganda for Congregations in America, USA; **Martyn Minns**, Missionary Bishop of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, USA; **TJ Johnston**, Missionary Bishop of the Anglican Province of Rwanda, USA; **Charles Koete**, Bishop of the Solomon Islands, The Solomon Island; **Martin Blaise Nyaboho**, Bishop of Makamba, Burundi.

PENTECOSTAL

Ago Lilleorg, Bishop of the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church, Estonia; **Meelis Maikalu**, Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church, Estonia; **Nikolai Rütinen**, Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church, Estonia; **Enocent Silwamba**, National Overseer of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Zambia, Zambia.

BAPTIST

Fred DeegbeCalvary, Baptist Church, Accra, Ghana; **Zacchouse Mwangangi Ngiki**, Kenya; **Owen Motlhabane**, Zamdela Baptist Church & President of



Mons. Jose Francisco Ulloa Rojas



Wigle Tamboer



James Wong



Roger Cheung Po Chuen

the Free State Baptist Association, South Africa; **Wigle Tamboer**, Baptist Church of the Netherlands.

OTHER DENOMINATIONS

Jaani Tammsalu, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Estonia (Lutheran); **Pavils Bruvers**, Bishop of Liepaja, Latvia, (Lutheran); **Arenda Haasnoot**, The Protestant Church of the Netherlands, The Netherlands, (Reformed Church); **Henk C Mijnders**, Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands, The Netherlands, (Reformed Church); **Jan van Langevelde**, Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands, The Netherlands, (Reformed Church); **Keith T. Jenkins**, Open Door Evangelistic World Ministries, USA, (Non-Denominational Chraismatic); **Samuel Norye Menjshah**, Ghana, (non-Denominational).

ARCHBISHOP OF JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST

It's a real joy to see lives transformed by Alpha



Alpha is a real blessing to the Anglican Church in Egypt.

The number of people going to church has doubled since we started Alpha in 2000. I travel to churches in Egypt, Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea and many other places to distribute Alpha certificates and it's a real joy to see lives transformed by Alpha.

Our hope is to see Alpha spread through the whole of

Jerusalem and the Middle East. I know it's in Lebanon now but I would love to see Alpha in Iran. I also have Archbishop Johan Aculata with me from the Coptic Catholic church. He hopes to start Alpha in the Catholic Church and the other denominations that we have and we hope that Alpha will help unite all the denominations in Egypt

During the Monday night of International Alpha week, a diverse group of people attending the leaders' conference spoke of how their lives had been radically transformed by Jesus Christ through attending an Alpha course. This is a selection:

Stephen:

I was trying to get in with my girlfriend's parents, as you do, and I went along to a church service with her one morning and was really surprised by what I saw.

I had a huge amount of questions. I didn't understand where her faith came from, and didn't understand why anyone would believe in the Bible.

I also really wanted to know where I came from, where I was going to. My girlfriend said she didn't think she could give me the answers but suggested I went and did an Alpha course and maybe I'd find the answers there.

So I did. I spent two months wrestling, reading, listening, and becoming very frustrated by some of the answers I was getting and not really finding my place there.

Then, slowly but surely, God started working in my life and I started finding things that were beginning to satisfy the thirst that was inside me and things started to click.

There were times when I would break down with emotion and God would just meet me. And towards the end of the course, I gave my life to Jesus and things haven't been the same since.



Jenny Bamsey



Ben and Vikki Rowe



Simon Foster



Dave Taylor



Michael: My wife went on an Alpha Course 15 years ago. She had been praying with her friends without me knowing for 11 years until four years ago I went on an Alpha Course myself.

It was an answer to her prayers. I'd been finding every excuse under the sun not to go and then suddenly there I was on the course.

It was week seven when I realised that the biggest battles I'd been fighting were between my two ears and it became so obvious to me that I needed Jesus in my life.

I walked out that night and I was one of the Ready Brek kids, I had this glow all around me and for weeks I was just walking on air. It was incredible.

Helen: My husband had always been a Christian and I'd been quite antagonistic and hostile to his faith.



Then, two years ago we moved to a little village and I saw a poster advertising the Alpha Course and I suddenly thought: 'Perhaps I ought to give this a go. Perhaps this will answer my questions.'

It certainly did. On the away day when we prayed for the Holy Spirit to come, oh boy, he came. I was so hot, and I was crying and I was filled with such joy. My husband says I've never been the same since. I don't think I nag him any more.



Gary: I was a churchgoer but I didn't have any kind of relationship with Jesus.

I went on an Alpha Course because I was going through a very painful divorce and a friend of mine suggested it to me.

It was at Portsmouth Football Club. I didn't really want to go to a church so I went to the football club and there was a guy there called Linvoy Primus who has since become a good friend of

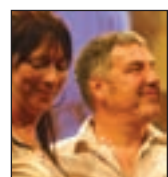
mine. On the course I learned how to forgive and six months later I went on a mission to India and was baptised on the beach.

Kaki: I was raised by atheists in South Carolina. One day, I was invited by a friend to go to church and I saw the sign for Alpha there.



I went on the course and was transformed through the Holy Spirit, who filled my life in a miraculous way.

I discovered I was not a whole person until I let Jesus into my life. My husband has been transformed as well and is converted and my daughter has taken her first communion. I have also been baptised after 39 years of never being baptised.



Lisa (and Stephen): Seven years ago neither of us were Christians. I'd had a particularly traumatic and abusive marriage.

I had left the marriage and was friends with Stephen. My Mum's hairdresser invited me to an Alpha Course and I told Stephen there was free food so he came with me!

Stephen: We've been blessed ever since. We both got baptised that year and we got married. God runs our household, he runs our relationships. We have three children who have all been baptised and we've just been blessed ever since.

Jacinta: I had not been a regular churchgoer but when I had my son 12 years ago there was something inside me screaming 'If you want the best for this child you have to have God in your life'. So I brought up my children to know about God but not to know God.



With my stubborn hands or very stubborn Irish lips, I said to God, 'I'm not going to get to know you through church'. But he had other ideas and he said 'Go back to church'. So I went on an Alpha course and I couldn't believe what I found.

I met a group of Christians who were alive and excited and in relationship with a living God through their faith.

My faith has made all the difference to me. My husband has come to faith, I've got such peace and such security and I've got a relationship with a living God that is beyond all measure.



Will: When I got together with my girlfriend, she was a Christian and I wasn't and I decided I needed to find out about it so I got some leaflets from the local carol service and from there went on the Alpha course.

On the weekend away, I had an amazing experience with the Holy Spirit. I was sort of asking questions into space and I actually felt like I was having a real conversation with God and

getting my questions answered.

Kim: I was brought up in a totally non church-going household. I started going to church thanks to my prospective in-laws and I discovered a community that I loved.



I threw myself into it and one lady who'd become quite important to me at church said to me one day that she was thinking of doing this thing called Alpha.

I went along really to support her. It was probably on the Holy Spirit weekend when I came to a place where I could say I was a Christian. I encountered the Holy Spirit physically.

It was an experience I'd never had before and it has transformed everything. I'm just about to start training for Reader ministry, for leading services, preaching and so on. But beyond that, it has changed our marriage, it's changed our family. We've got four children growing up in the heart of the church and in faith of Christ and it is wonderful.

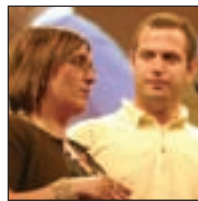


Simon: I started out an atheist but I wanted to make some changes in my life so I went along to an Alpha course.

I met some really friendly people and made some great friends and I was just filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has made a huge difference to my life. I pray now, and read the Bible.

Ben (and Vikki):

I was raised in a Christian home. My dad is a church pastor. But I got involved with drugs and alcohol abuse and got in trouble with the police and so on, so I moved away to Southampton.



In Southampton, I met this beautiful woman. When she met my family, who were Christians, she saw something different in them and wanted to find out more. We went along together to an Easter service at church.

Vikki: Before the Alpha course, I was a miserable, angry, materialistic person, totally self-obsessed. And I had a foul mouth. But I just completely changed overnight to the point that my parents and friends would ask what was wrong with me.

Ben: Jesus has totally transformed our lives. I was filled with guilt about my past and he has set me free from that. Vikki and I have got married and Vikki is working at the church full-time now and from August, I'll be working there too.



Mike: A year ago I wasn't a Christian. I wouldn't say I was an atheist but I wasn't far off. I trained as a geologist many years ago and I've worked in science for 30 years, working on the impacts of climate change on the natural world.

we did Alpha...



Hatun Bulot

I believed I could answer all life's questions using scientific principles. That was until I met a girl in the US at New Year who challenged me to understand a little bit more about where she was coming from in life.

I said 'How do I do that?' and she said 'Oh we'll find an Alpha course for you in England'. She found one in Stamford in Lincolnshire and I started that in January.

I've now got a new outlook on life and I've been asked to join the Alpha team at the church where I did the course.

It's changed the way I look at the world and the environment. I understand a little more about this whole concept of loving your neighbour as yourself and I think about this in the context of climate change and what the western world is doing to the developed world. And my girlfriend and I are going to get married.



Barry: Eight years ago, I was a very aggressive, argumentative atheist. I was quite horrible.

I used to browbeat my Christian friends, argue them into the ground and eventually they just held their hands up and said 'You really should do Alpha'.

Two people told me that quite independently and then a month or two later I had this real desire to do an Alpha Course so I found one. My wife told me afterwards that it was completely out of

character. She was really amazed that I wanted to do Alpha.

Since then, Jesus has made a huge difference in my life. I was a helper on the next course and then my wife came along. We both came to faith on the second course and now we just want to tell everybody about Jesus. We've started house groups in our church and we're running our first Alpha course in September.

Jenny: I wasn't a Christian at all but I decided to go on an Alpha course basically to get my son into a church school.



I was doing it for my son, but little did I know that God was doing it for me and my family. I learned to pray on Alpha, I got comfortable with it. My prayers started to be answered in my family life.

There was an empty house opposite mine and one particular prayer was that a really good family that would support me would move in. Well, the leader of what became my church moved in.

When I was doing Alpha, my husband was happy because it would get my son into school but every time I came home he would take the mickey out of me and wind me up about it.

[Since then], we've become a massive part of the church. We've helped on an Alpha course and now we've been asked to lead an Alpha course. So it's changed our lives massively.



Matt (Jenny's husband): I thought she'd gone crazy but a year later I decided to go on an Alpha course to see what it was all about and it has totally transformed me. I met with the Holy Spirit and it has brought peace and joy to our family. To be in a relationship with a living God is really great and we have the privilege now to be leading an Alpha course.

Gemma: I went to Uni where they had 'Just Ten' run by J. John and it was in the Cathedral.



I was invited to that and then the church that my friend went to invited me to a student Alpha they were running in the Student Union Bar.

I saw the poster for it and saw they had free food and it was in the bar so I thought it sounded good.

I suggested it to my friend who was quite shocked that I'd actually invited her to something for a change and we both went and it was really amazing.

Since then, I'm a totally different person. I suffered with deep depression before and I've been totally healed. It's like I'm in a different body now. It's amazing.

My parents were quite shocked by the change, especially when I said I wanted to give up my job and work for the church as a volunteer - I've got a degree and a masters.

I invited my parents to Alpha

three years in a row. Then one year I moved back home and I invited them again and my Dad and my sister came.



Graham (Gemma's father): We couldn't believe what had happened to Gemma at uni. She invited me to Alpha in Stamford, in a massive pizza restaurant. There were over 200 people there.

For the first six or seven weeks I was a bit sceptical and then on the away day and two days after that, I was just blown away.

The Holy Spirit rippled through me and lifted me up and it was an amazing experience that carried on for two months. My wife thought I had a brain tumour. From that point on, I was born again.

Hatun: I went to church by accident once and one of the guys there was talking about God and calling God 'him' and I was so curious about why he would do that.



He suggested I went on an Alpha course if I wanted to learn more. That was 14 months ago.

It's made a huge difference to my life. For example, when I came to England two years ago I always felt really awful when it rained, I hated it.

But now, when it rains, it just makes me feel relaxed, I can see that it is good for everything, why people need to enjoy the rain.



Dave: Three years ago I was finishing a prison sentence in Brixton for more commercial burglaries and stuff like that.

Just before I got to Brixton, I was in a high security prison, in Belmarsh. One night, I read Mark's Gospel and Jesus came to me. I fell to my knees and said, 'I know you're there now. Can you help me please' and literally a day after that I was transferred to Brixton, which was pretty unheard of because I was in a high security prison and Brixton was a category B.

The day after I got to Brixton, an Alpha course started. It was amazing. I walked straight into the prison and got a job straight away within the chaplaincy. I was helping to set up the Alpha team and stuff and I did Alpha there.

Jesus came and turned me upside down really. I went from not liking many people, well not liking anyone at all really, to loving people. Overnight, I turned from somebody with no heart to somebody with a heart.

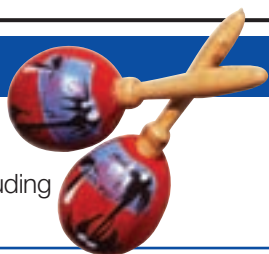
I came out of prison three years ago. I feel Jesus has given me a life. I've got a heart and it gets broken regularly by what's happening in the world.

I had a really bad problem with drugs, heroin and crack cocaine. I think the only drug I take now is the odd paracetamol if I've got a headache.

And Jesus is there the whole time. I wake up and Jesus is there. I go to sleep and Jesus is there.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

91 There were approx. 91 delegates from 13 Latin American countries including the Caribbean at AIW.



2,000 2,000 bananas were eaten at AIW

NEWS from the NATIONS

More than 1500 delegates came to International week from 100 different countries. Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, interviewed each country to hear the news of Alpha in their homeland.

ALBANIA

Hervin Fushekati: Last year, we came here to capture a vision about Alpha. Today, we come to testify that it's all true. Alpha really works! We believe Alpha is shaping the future of the church and of church growth in Albania. It's giving us passion, it's giving us a strategy, it's giving us joy – joy because people are coming to Christ. I believe very soon Alpha is going to bring about huge growth in Christianity in Albania.

ARGENTINA

Father Flavio Ferretti and Dario & Mariel Acosta: Alpha in Argentina is just starting out and I can testify that it is a great tool from the Holy Spirit to bring young people into contact with the love of Jesus. We are here today with three bishops from Argentina.

ARMENIA

Matt & Ella Bartelsian: We had a GAT training in Armenia in November 2008. It was a great event because we had Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Baptists and an Orthodox team all together. One of the pastors who came broke down on Tuesday night and cried because he said, "I've never seen anything like this, the unity that Alpha brings as we join together to do evangelism".

Orthodox Church representative:

We came here three years ago and we loved Alpha so much that we incorporated the Alpha course into our leadership programme. We do Alpha courses as an evangelistic tool and then we do discipleship classes and then leadership. Last year we received permission from our Archbishop to run Alpha in one local church and they

loved Alpha so much that we've continued running Alpha courses twice a year. Please pray for our Orthodox church that it open its doors for Alpha courses in Armenia.

AUSTRALIA

Jon Seeley: We've got over 2,000 churches running Alpha courses across Australia and many of them have been running Alpha for quite a while. It's a key part of their evangelism and discipleship. A lot of them have been getting excited about GAT and have sent teams from their churches to Indonesia or Thailand or India.

AUSTRIA

Lorenz Erlbacher: I am a Catholic deacon. Cardinal Schonborn and other bishops from Austria have a really strong desire for new evangelisation. Last year we had our Youth Alpha conference with 80 delegates.

BAHAMAS

Rev. Marie Roach: Youth Alpha is really growing in the Bahamas. Also, we have Prison Alpha. We only have one prison in the Bahamas but we are presently holding Alpha in every section of the prison. We plan to have a GAT in November.

BELGIUM

Philippe Fontaine: We estimate that between 4,000 and 5,000 people have been touched by Alpha in Belgium. We had a big Alpha prison conference in January. After the conference 70 people decided to become volunteers to do Alpha in prisons and to develop the Caring for Ex-offenders programme.

BOTSWANA

Simon Ipe: We've been running Youth Alpha courses



Armenia

for the last two years and The Marriage Course as well. We're also going to have our first GAT training in September, which we're hugely excited about.

BRAZIL

Rolph Rieck: The great challenge that we face after our first national conference of Alpha in Brazil is to introduce Alpha in prisons. There are 450,000 prisoners in more than 1,000 prisons and we have with us chaplains of the Catholic Church that work in these prisons.

BULGARIA

Peter Blaginov: Last year we had an Alpha conference. Now we have a website in Bulgaria and also Alpha posters, and we're working on a translation of the DVDs – that's something that we'll make together with the Orthodox Church. In September and October we will have Alpha Conferences for Orthodox priests so please pray for this.

BURUNDI

Jean-Claude Ngyimbere: We held our first Alpha conference in Burundi in June last year and since then we have seen how, through Alpha, churches and leaders of twenty two different denominations are coming together.

CANADA

Susan Cockburn: While most churches in Canada unfortunately are in decline or static, eighty eight percent of churches that are running Alpha are growing and twenty

one percent are growing significantly so we're really excited about that.

CHILE

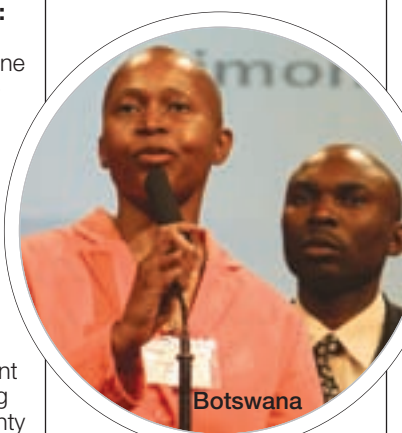
Fray Adrian: I first experienced Alpha in Lima, Peru in 2007. Last year we did a massive Alpha for everyone in our church. We had 65 groups doing Alpha in the church.

COLOMBIA

Liliana de Gutierrez and Jose German Rodriguez: We have started our first courses in Catholic parishes. In October we will be holding our first Latin American Alpha conference, which is a joint effort between Alpha International and CELAM, the [Catholic] Episcopal Conference for Latin America.

COSTA RICA

Fr Jorge Roberto Salazar Roberto and Erick Delgado: We have thirty Alpha courses running. One is an Alpha course for people with AIDS that is having amazing results.



Botswana



Egypt

CZECH REPUBLIC

Milos Porbosky: Alpha is well established and we are

working towards our first national initiative which is scheduled for 2013. Just last month we were accepted by the Czech Cardinal, Mr Miloslav Vlk, who endorsed Alpha.

DENMARK

Bess Serner-Pederson: We have been running Alpha in Denmark for 15 years now. This year we have met together as Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland – for the first time. We are all Lutheran countries, so we have the same kind of issues.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Rev. Fausto Liriano: We've been running Alpha since September. We've got nine Alpha courses running and four of them are running in the work context.

ECUADOR

Bishop Corral Mantilla: Thank you so much to the Anglican Church for bringing me here to learn about this amazing tool for evangelisation.

EGYPT

Mr Shady Anis and Bishop Mouneer: We opened the National Alpha office in September 2008. We've got the support of many church leaders. Here at the conference we have an Anglican Archbishop (my father!), a Catholic Archbishop and people from the Presbyterian Church.

ESTONIA

Janek Pallase: We are a group of 12 at this conference. Joining us for the first time are one bishop and three deans and two Georgians and their guest.

FINLAND

Helena Lintinen: God is using Alpha to bring Finnish people to Jesus Christ, in churches, in some workplaces like parliament and our BBC house, in universities, schools, and prisons. But Alpha is also running in some odd places. We have some men who became Christians on a Sauna Alpha! One of the Alpha leaders recently said that if you want your church to grow, start Alpha.

FRANCE

Florence de Leyritz: We are very encouraged because we have had over 70,000 people on Alpha in France since it started, mostly in the Catholic Church but also in Protestant and Evangelical churches. We had our first national Alpha Invitation in September 2008, when over 450 parishes and churches invited the nation to dinner. We had a lot of radio and press coverage and over ten thousand people came to dinner on the first evening and almost all of them – seventy five percent -- stayed on for the rest of the Alpha course.

GEORGIA

We have not established Alpha yet in Georgia but we have been looking for a while at what to do to go to the next level in reaching people for Jesus. I think we now have seen our goal. We think we



111

Alpha has been translated into 111 languages, 81 of which are official.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

70,000

There have been 70,000 guests at Worship Central event's from inception to the Asia tour (not including AIW).



Catholic church and also to other churches in Lithuania. And there is a great interest in Youth Alpha, and in one of the biggest dioceses they put Alpha as a compulsory part of preparation for confirmation.

MADAGASCA

Bishop Roger Chung Po Chuen: Praise the Lord for what Alpha is doing in Madagascar.

MALAYSIA

Mrs Datin Kathleen: We started the year with a big Youth Alpha conference for 2,300 people in Sarawa and then we sent a Catholic team to Mysore in India where we presented Alpha to the Bishops' Conference. Jamie Haith will be coming to do Student Alpha training in August this year and then we have a Family Life conference scheduled for October with Nicky and Sila Lee. Finally, we're all working towards our National Conference in East Malaysia in April next year. Bishop Albert Vunn will be hosting that conference.

Bishop Albert Vunn: All our churches are using Alpha as their main evangelistic tool so my priority is to train all our pastors, all our clergy to do Alpha.

in the Netherlands but what is even more exciting is that a quarter of them are young people who have done Youth Alpha. We also have a partnership with the national evangelical broadcasting company and, four years ago, they started with the pre-Alpha Internet course, Why Jesus? At the end of this year, this course will be translated into fourteen languages, amongst them Farsi, so everyone will be able to do an Alpha course on the Internet, even those living under restrictions.

NEW ZEALAND

John White: There's a new wave coming through of people wanting to do Alpha in New Zealand.

NICARAGUA

Bishop Sandigo: The main problem in Nicaragua is that many people have been baptised but few have been evangelised. That's why Alpha is such a great opportunity.

NORWAY

Leif Gordon Kvelland: A national Marriage Course Conference was held last September. Our vision is that the Alpha work in Norway will grow and grow.

PANAMA

Charles Burress: About a year ago a GAT team visited the northern part of Panama and they set the place on fire. Some great things are happening.

PHILIPPINES

John Borra: In the province of Mindanao we are running the Alpha course in 25 per cent of all the parishes. We recently had Worship Central in Manila and because of the wonderful response the largest Catholic conference in the Philippines (the Carigma Conference happening in November) are inviting Worship Central to lead their worship.

**POLAND**

Elzbieta Kaminska: Over the last year, almost three thousand people came to faith in Poland through Alpha and most of them were Catholics. We are now running 22 Youth Alpha courses and ten Student Alpha courses. Most of them are in the Catholic church. We organised our first student conference last year and we started two new Alpha ministries – Alpha for Forces and Alpha for Prisons.



Archbishop Vincent Michael Concessao of Delhi, India

After listening to all this sign of great hope for the church and humankind... That is what I see in Alpha. Thank you, Nicky. Thanks to all those who are associated in this work. May God make Alpha really fruitful in bringing about a new world. Thank you.



Archbishop Felipe Aguirre Franco of Acapulco, Mexico

Monsignor Artemio and I are convinced that Alpha could be a really precious element that we could introduce in the continental mission for the Catholic context in Mexico and in Latin America.

phenomenal, primarily thanks to all the training events we have had. We had 229 training events last year and about 15,000 leaders were trained in small groups. I also have Archbishop Vincent of Delhi with me.

JAPAN

Pastor Nobuyoshi Nagai: Last year we grew from nearly 200 courses to 280 courses, and we also started a pilot Youth Alpha and five Student Alpha in universities, and three Alpha in the Workplace courses.

KAZAKHSTAN

Anastasia Schtensel: We have started translating Alpha materials into the Kazakh language. The Alpha Course is included in several religious universities in Kazakhstan. Before coming to this conference, we had our local conference, and people from Russia and Kazakhstan came to take part. Eighteen churches came as well as two bishops and seven pastors.

KENYA

Mrs Liz Odera: When we were here last year, we had thirty Alpha courses running. Now we have 124. Prison Alpha has also grown hugely. We now have nineteen Alpha courses running in prisons.

KOREA

We are running over 5,000 Alpha courses in 3,000 churches. Thanks to Alpha, 400 churches have more than doubled in size. Nicky came in February and we held a conference with more than 11,000 people.

LATVIA

Mr Rinalds Grants: A few weeks ago, we finished our biggest Alpha course ever, with 120 guests and 50 people in the team. Last year we had a Youth Alpha conference and we have gone from having two Youth Alpha courses to having 10 now, and this will grow. We also opened our Alpha office this year, which has given us the chance to spread Alpha to other denominations.

LEBANON

Nabil Shehadi: Alpha is continuing to grow in Lebanon and spread across the denominations. The first Alpha we ran was with the Catholic Church. The Alpha Arabic DVDs will be out next month.

LITHUANIA

Sr. Agnes Ivaskeviciure: Lithuania is mainly a Catholic country, so out of 50 courses this year, 43 of them were with the Catholic church. I'm sure that the Holy Spirit is bringing new life to the

OTHER ATTENDING COUNTRIES

Other countries that were represented at Alpha International week included: Bangladesh, Bosnia, Gibraltar, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Liberia, Macedonia, Mali, Moldova, Nigeria, Peru, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine.

will establish Alpha in Georgia.

GERMANY

Thomas von Bernstorff: We have 1,350 courses running in Germany at the moment. We have 70 advisors doing tremendous work in keeping up with the pace. We had a thrilling event earlier this year with The Marriage Course conference; Nicky and Sila Lee were there and we had a great time with 150 delegates.

GHANA

Francis Osei: The Director-General of Prisons has said that anyone who is working in prisons would have to use the Alpha tool. Otherwise, courses are multiplying,

especially The Marriage Course.

HUNGARY

Fr. Adam Fuzes: We are 60% Catholic, but it's a very good thing that in Alpha we can work together. We had 70 courses in 50 communities last year. We also printed The Marriage Course materials in Hungarian. Additionally, we now have a partnership with Austria and France and we will meet in May.

INDIA

J. Varada Raj: Alpha is growing rapidly in India. We have about 5,300 churches doing Alpha courses right now. The growth has been

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



260

There were approx. 260 volunteers at AIW.



1,200

On Monday and Tuesday of AIW 1,200 people were served lunch in 25 mins.

NEWS from the NATIONS

continued

PORTUGAL

Fr. Jorge Silva Santos: We have run 30 Alpha courses this year and held a national Alpha conference with 300 people and a national meeting with 1,000 people. We have also started to run the Marriage Course this year and have run 50 of them already.

RUSSIA

Marina Saveliev: We're here with a mixed team from different parts of Russia. We have a Siberian pastor and we have people from the Far East, Magadan and Vladivostok. So Alpha is well spread across Russia. This is a good thing but we're doing several training days and conferences and travelling can be very difficult. We have Pastor Oleg here from Siberia, who was a drug addict ten years ago before he was saved. His church started running Alpha two years ago and now they have The Marriage Preparation Course and the church is growing.

Sister Mogajata from Magadan:

We have been running Alpha in Magadan for three years, across all denominations – Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Protestant and Orthodox. Alpha is helping people be freed of the fears.

RWANDA

Eric Munyemana: In Rwanda, we believe that Alpha is a timely, practical, simple and effective tool from God to help us promote reconciliation among the people of Rwanda who have been through a difficult time. As most of you know, at least one million people were killed within a hundred days in 1994. We already have a strong foundation for Alpha since most of the senior and influential church leaders in the country have formed a steering committee that will oversee Alpha. We have two thousand pastors ready to be trained who will take Alpha nationwide.

SIERRA LEONE

Pastor Joseph Francis Williams: We have a national agenda to evangelise our country within nine years and we think Alpha is a great tool to achieve this. Alpha is changing our communities. Now we have Alpha in our military, which is known around the world for the atrocities it has committed. It is now held every Friday in every single military unit. After we came [to EMEA week] last year, we went home and held

a Youth Conference for 327 students and youth and we will hold another one. We are also moving into prisons. And we've just formed a partnership with the Blind Society -- we have a large blind community in Sierra Leone. There are six blind schools and we've agreed to take Alpha in Braille to all of these schools.

SINGAPORE

Lillian Tan: Greetings from Singapore, a tiny island with four million people where Alpha's been running for 12 years. Nicky and the team came out last year for the Asia Pacific conference, as well as five other related events. We had about 20 countries represented and for Worship Central, we had two nights of celebration for about 11,000 people – for Singapore that's really big. We also held a Youth Alpha conference. We'd only had about a few courses running up till then, and now we have well over 30 courses running.

SLOVAKIA

Sister Helen Torkosova: We started running Alpha in Slovakia two years ago and one hundred young people have come to know Christ. In October, we had a Global Alpha Training event for 150 delegates from all over Slovakia and they will start running Alpha in many cities in the country. We also have with us two Catholic priests from Slovakia who plan to start running Alpha in their parishes.

SOUTH AFRICA

Sheldon Delpert: We've signed a contract with the government of South Africa to run Alpha in every prison in the country, which is fantastic. The other highlight and our main strategy going forward is to take Alpha to places like Soweto. I want to introduce you to Josephine who's leading our work in Soweto. **Josephine:** We are running Alpha in the Catholic church but we will be running it again in the Methodist church from August. The most exciting thing is that we have been invited by a TB hospital in Soweto to run Alpha for the nurses who care for people with HIV and AIDS. They really need Jesus in their lives so we are really excited to be able to help them.

SPAIN

Jose Alberto Barrera: We're running about twenty-five



Zimbabwe

courses in Spain and we've been sending GAT teams to Mexico and Ecuador. In Spain, interest in Alpha is increasing in the Catholic Church and in the Madrid area, where there are three courses in two different dioceses.

SRI LANKA

Archbishop Vian: Alpha is new to Sri Lanka. About six months ago we had a visit from the Asia Pacific team. They spoke to the Bishops' Conference and the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors. I have come here to learn all about the Alpha experience. So, now that I have been sold on Alpha I will certainly go and sell it to my brother bishops and to the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.

SWITZERLAND

Rachel & Martin Stoessel: Alpha has been running for the last 13 years and last year we had more than 9,000 people coming to hear about who Jesus is. And the nice thing is we have



Slovakia

every third guest is a man. We have invested last year at the office in visiting our senior Alpha church leaders and we have two with us. One is Dominic:

Dominic

Just a short story, a 50 year old couple who lead a healing/new age practice, came to the course and I was quite anxious. They came on the weekend away and invited Jesus and the Holy Spirit into their lives. On Sunday morning I was sitting opposite them at the breakfast table and he said, "You know, it's quite a thing when a world breaks together" and I said, "What do you mean by that?" and he said, "Well, my world has broken down but you know what, a new world started to live, and this is the new world of the Kingdom of God".

TAIWAN

Alexandra Ip: Our big vision for Alpha is beginning to be realised: The number of Alpha courses doubled in 2008, and there were transformations in prisons. What's exciting is that this was led by ex-inmates. Ex-inmates were filled with the Holy Spirit in our pilot run five years ago after our first Alpha conference when Nicky and the team came. Our vision is to see transformation in lives. This is the time we need to accelerate.

THAILAND

Nanthanatch Yongsinviyakul: Alpha is more than an evangelistic tool; it's a ministry of reconciliation. We want to see

lives transformed. Last year, I saw Alpha double in size, especially Youth Alpha and Alpha in the Workplace. This is Alex to talk about what's happening in Alpha in Workplace in Thailand.

Alax

Alpha is running in Citibank in Bangkok and in Exxon Mobil – and also Challenging Lifestyle and The Marriage Course.

THE WEST BALKANS: BOSNIA, CROATIA, MACEDONIA, SERBIA

Dusan Beredji: In communist times, these countries were all part of the former Yugoslavia and the communist regime wanted the whole nation to be unified but this dream was shattered by the violent civil war. Our nation has seen a lot of hatred and not much forgiveness but Alpha is starting the process of reconciliation. I came here a few years ago and met for the first time with a Croat Christian. I'm from Serbia and we became good friends and started to do Alpha training days together. We have now decided to have one office for the five countries. In this way we can demonstrate Christian unity, show that anything is possible in Jesus Christ, and show we can forgive and live together and work together. We are running a lot of marriage courses as well as 65 Alpha courses in our region. We are also running Alpha for Prisons and we work with drug addicts and alcoholics.



Trinidad & Tobago

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Derek Walcott: Trinidad is on fire for Alpha. Every single type of Alpha is being run including Alpha in the Workplace and Alpha in Prisons.

Alpha in Trinidad has really been doing amazing things, bringing people and faiths together. We have Alpha running in most Christian denominations, and we have participants from every single religion.

TURKEY

We are now in the process of printing the *Questions of Life* book and once we have that book, we will start our first Alpha course in September.

UGANDA

Maxwell Chrysolite Kamanyire: We had a team come out last year from St. Paul's Shadwell [London] to train us and we had two training events – one in the city and one in the east. Alpha has grown out of that training. We launched Alpha for Forces this year and we have two Alpha courses running in two military bases. We still have a long list of people waiting to do Alpha at the military police base, the air force base and the senior staff college. We've also seen growth in Alpha for Prisons. We have around twelve Alpha courses running in different prisons. We started running Alpha with the prison inmates but the wives of the officers said they also wanted a course, and then the officers asked for a course, and now the prison governor is on the course. Student Alpha has also grown. We have four

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



40

There were 40 language translators and interpreters at AIW.



11,682

The furthest someone flew to get to AIW was 11,682 miles



Singapore



Director of Alpha UK Rebecca Stewart presented the home country's feedback session, during which she gave details of the twelfth national Alpha Invitation set for September where posters will ask 'Does God Exist?' Colleagues Bonnie Yule-Kuehne and Edward Hobbs reported on the growth of alphafriends.org and the many GAT teams going from UK churches.

universities with an average of 100 students coming to an Alpha course every term. We are now going to focus on the growth of The Marriage Course for the rest of this year and next. We also have one of the Chief Justices of Uganda as chairman of our board.

UK Rebecca Stewart: Alpha in the UK keeps on growing. We've just had our biggest Spring Alpha course here at HTB for a number of years. It was actually 30 per cent bigger than this time last year and we're seeing that all over the country. Now two and a half million people in the UK

have done an Alpha course and the awareness keeps on growing. As you know, we advertise like mad so that people know what Alpha is, so that when someone invites them to come along, they know what it is and have the confidence to accept the invitation. Today, 24 percent of the adult population has awareness of Alpha – that's eleven and a half million people. So there are nine million people who know what Alpha is but they haven't yet been invited, so we've still got some work to do. Last September, we plastered the country with Alpha posters, asking some of the

big questions and posing the question 'If God exists, what would you ask?' And this September is going to be our twelfth annual initiative and we're going to be continuing that, posters everywhere – we hope it's going to be the most eye-catching and biggest campaign yet, and we're asking the big questions of life: Does God exist?, Is this it?

Bonnie Yule-Kuehne: We've been investing heavily this year in the Alphafriends.org website. We have thousands of people around the UK going on to the website to access free resources, to hear testimonies and hear about what's happening with Alpha, in the UK and around the world. This year, we doubled our numbers on Vision Day. We changed it from a Strategy Day to a Vision Day and put it on a Saturday and we had over 700 people join us for that, of every denomination and from every corner of the country.

Edward Hobbs: One very quick word on GAT. We have already sent 11 teams from the UK this year, more than in the whole of 2008, with many more to come. They have trained everyone from leaders in the Kenyan Coptic Orthodox church to prison chaplains in Albania.

URUGUAY Bishop Galimberti: Right now we don't have Alpha in Uruguay but I plan to be a great salesman of Alpha in the future. I have seen how people's lives have been

transformed and that there is a great deal of love, joy and enthusiasm. So it should be easy to sell!

USA:

Gerard Long: We estimate that 40,000 people made a commitment to Jesus Christ on Alpha last year. And that was across 127 or so different denominations – so it's running right across the church. We saw huge growth in the number of churches running Alpha last year – a 49 percent turnaround. There were twelve of us in our regional team last year and we are now twenty-eight across the country. We've got more advisers coming on board. One area we're particularly excited about is what we call the Alpha Invitation -- where Alpha is being used as a catalyst to bring unity across the church. So different churches come together in a city or in a community and they say we're going to try and win this city for Jesus Christ using Alpha. We started with one city in 2007, we had three last year. This year we've got thirty cities across America where Christians have come together in unity to spread the gospel through Alpha.

ZAMBIA

Evelyn Egan: This year we had an endorsement from the Catholic bishop, after which we had a very big turnout of Catholics on the Alpha course. We have about four Catholic parishes now running the Alpha course in Zambia. This time we're also going to get a Pentecostal bishop

endorsing Alpha for the first time in Zambia.

Pentecostal Bishop: As I go back, Pentecost Holiness Church will take Alpha as a course to do in all the regions. We have six regions in Zambia and I've already invited Eva and her team to come and attend our regional conference which will be in December. We will sell this to all the regions, and then next year will be even better. In Prison Fellowship, as I'm executive director there, I think we will be able to do great things.

Prison representative:

We had prison chaplain's training. 58 prison chaplains were trained and out of that we now have 13 prisons running the Alpha courses. And there is one exceptional case which is the maximum security prison, what they do is they'll have a discussion outside and then they'll lock them up in the cells so what they actually have is Cell Group Alpha.

ZIMBABWE

Anderson Mudhara: I would first like to thank you for all for all your prayers during the difficult times that we're having, especially over last year. But we thank God that despite the political and economic situation, we managed to carry on running Alpha courses. We have sixty Alpha courses running at the moment and four Marriage

Courses and we are planning and hoping that the prison authorities will open their doors to allow us to take Alpha into our prisons. Last year, I was arrested about seven times as were some of my team. We are forty six in the team. Two of my colleagues were badly beaten and they had to go to South Africa to get medical treatment. Unfortunately one of them passed away and



Zambia

another is permanently paralysed. Things are better now politically but we are still struggling economically. We have a five-year vision for Zimbabwe. By 2013 we hope and trust that we'll be running three thousand Alpha courses, with fifty percent of those being Youth Alpha courses. We also want to grow the Marriage Course so that we have 50 by 2013 from four now. We also hope to open up about five resource centres as well as ten regional offices by 2013.

PLEASE HELP US BUILD GOD’S KINGDOM THROUGH ALPHA



Emerging Generation

Young people have a hunger for the truth. Your donation would help young people across the world discover the real meaning of life through attending an Alpha course near where they live or study.



Evangelising The Nations

Alpha is now available in 99 languages. Your gift would help us finish translating the course into more world languages this year, making the good news available through Alpha to perhaps many millions more people.



Transforming Lives

Your gift would help us reach out to men and women in prison, offering them hope, the opportunity to commit their lives to Christ, and a chance to turn away from crime.



Dear Friends,

We are so grateful to those of you who have given so generously towards Alpha’s work. Thanks to your support and commitment, we are seeing lives and communities transformed, and churches revitalised.

We estimate over twelve million people in 163 countries have attended an Alpha course. Yet there is so much more we can do. The potential is vast. This year, with God’s continued blessing, we want to share the good news about Jesus Christ even further.

To be able to fulfil our vision, we need your partnership through prayer and financial support. If you feel able to help, please consider filling in the form at the bottom of this page. With thanks and best wishes,

Nicky Gumbel

Revd Nicky Gumbel



Growing Churches

Tens of thousands of churches are experiencing new growth and purpose. Your donation would help many other churches of all denominations across the world share the good news through Alpha.



Building Leadership

Your support would help us train tens of thousands of people across the world to run Alpha in churches, universities, schools, homes, prisons and workplaces.

DOES GOD EXIST?

☐ YES
☐ NO
☐ PROBABLY

EXPLORE THE
MEANING OF LIFE
alpha.org

THE ALPHA COURSE

Reaching Out

The generous involvement of Alpha Partners helps us reach out across the UK each Autumn to invite the nation to an Alpha course in their local church. This year’s national campaign features billboard advertising and our prayer is that through it, many tens of thousands of people will be encouraged to attend Alpha to find an answer to explore the meaning of life.

I would like to help others discover the love of Christ through Alpha

My standing order gift:

My bank details:

Bank Name _____
Branch Address _____

Post code _____
Name(s) of account holders _____
Account Number
Sort Code

My instruction:

Please pay Alpha International (NatWest Bank, Knightsbridge Branch, sort code 60-04-04, account number 84503092) the sum of £ _____
beginning on _____ 200____
and the same sum every
☐ month ☐ quarter ☐ year until further notice.

Please use reference (office use only)

My donation:

Please accept my gift of £ _____

☐ I enclose a cheque payable to Alpha International
☐ Please debit my credit / debit / charity card

Card no:

Expiry Date Start Date

Issue No Security No (last 3 digits on signature strip)

Name(s) on card _____

Cardholder’s billing address (if different from right) _____

Post code _____

☐ As a UK taxpayer I would like Alpha International to reclaim the Gift Aid I have paid on this gift, all donations made in the previous six years, and any further donations I may make. The amount of income tax and capital gains tax I pay is at least equal to the tax Alpha International will reclaim on my donation(s).

Signature(s): _____

Date: _____

My details:

Title _____ Christian Name _____
Surname _____
Address _____

Postcode _____
Telephone _____
Email _____

Please complete this form and return it to:
Alpha Partners
Alpha International
Freepost LON17818
London, SW7 1YN

thank you!





Members of the Alpha staff display some of the wide range of materials available for this September's Alpha Invitation

UK Churches prepare for big initiative in September

THOUSANDS of UK churches are set to take part in the UK's twelfth national advertising initiative this September.

As posters cover the country on billboards, buses, railway stations and even a county cricket ground, churches are already planning supper parties and other local events.

The 2009 Alpha Invitation, which features the words "Is this it?" and "Does God Exist?" with the option to tick response boxes 'Yes', 'No' or 'Probably,' kicks off on 1st September.

Throughout the month adverts will be seen across the UK.

This year's initiative includes:

- Posters at 17 national termini stations including Birmingham New Street, Leeds and London's Liverpool Street.

- Posters in more than 1,200 other national railway stations including 200 posters in the

London underground.

- Nearly 900 large billboards all across the country.
- Posters on the backs of more than 2,200 buses.

Alpha will also be advertising at a variety of county cricket grounds during the summer, including an international match at the Rose Bowl ground in Southampton, Hampshire.

Two banners, one at each end of the wicket, will be on show during the England v Australia One Day International on 9th September. The UK TV audience for that match is estimated to be between 1.8-2.5 million.

The Alpha banners will also be seen at a further 10 domestic matches that will be aired live on TV during the season.

The banners will also be up for the England vs Bangladesh Under 19 match on 23/24 July, to be aired live on Sky from Hove.



Resources available include: posters, postcards, banners, drinks mats and much more.

What to do next...

1 Visit www.alphafriends.org has full details of the 2009 Invitation and how to get involved, including tips on how to promote and launch your course, and free downloads for printing and web via the resources section.

2 Visit www.alphashop.org where all printed promotional materials are available to purchase, or call the Alpha Publications hotline on **0845 758 1278**.

3 Alpha launch packs are available which contain a launch brochure giving details of the 2009 campaign and a sample pack of the 2009 promotional resources. If you have not received this and would like one please call Alpha UK on **0845 644 7544**.

4 If you have not run an Alpha course before, call Alpha UK to request a "Getting started" pack on **0845 644 7544**.

5 Remember to register your course on www.alphafriends.org/register.



Dave Taylor was a drug addict and habitual criminal when he went on an Alpha course in Brixton prison... This is his amazing story

Dave Taylor, of Croydon, south London, spent his early years in and out of jail. A drug addict and habitual thief, he could see no way out of his downward spiral. Then God began to touch his life and he went on an Alpha course in Brixton prison. He writes:

When I was born, my mum and real father were running a fish and chip shop. When I was five my mum caught my father having an affair with a young girl who used to babysit me and my older brother.

I haven't had any contact with my real father since then.

My mum, my older brother and I got into a taxi and went straight round to my grandparents' house.

They lived in east London, right next to the West Ham ground. We lived there for a bit and I started to go to junior school there.

My mum met my stepfather Fred while working as a barmaid in a club. Eventually my nan, who worked with the local council at the time, managed to get a council property for us, so we all moved in together – Mum, Fred, my brother and me. I was somewhere between five and seven then.

Some time after that we all moved to Essex.

Our family was far from happy. There was a lot of domestic violence. My stepfather used to beat my mum up quite regularly.

He left my mum to pay the bills and she was useless. Instead, she'd go out and buy comfort food and clothes.

So when the debt collectors and bailiffs turned up, my stepfather would say 'Why haven't you paid the bills?' to my mum. Then there'd be an argument and before you knew it she'd be beaten up again. It was very hard.

I can remember Mum being knocked to the ground and out cold quite a few times.

As I got older, I tried to stop him and

by Dave Taylor

that's when he'd lose his temper and have a go at me. He never hit me full in the face but he's a big guy, 20-odd stone.

When you've got a big guy like that on top of you, it's very frightening.

But I still liked my stepfather. He brought me up and always had a lot of time for me. We went on holidays together and went out as a family at weekends – to the cricket and stuff like that.

From an early age my brother tried to get away because he couldn't handle the domestic violence and stuff. He went to join the Navy, leaving me and my half-sister Joanna.

I can remember smoking cigarettes at 13. Then within a couple of months it was marijuana – with some of the people I knew in the area.

Then it was glue sniffing and then it was nicking the Scotch and the vodka from the house and sneaking away.

My friends introduced me to all this stuff, which normal teens do, but I don't know if it's me having like an addictive personality or what.

I isolated myself from really early on and it was basically me in my own little world drinking myself or smoking myself to oblivion.

I did like sports when I was younger but nothing ever lasted. I always sort of screwed up or just didn't care any more and left.

I went to two or three different schools. My parents, after trying for ages and ages, got me into a grant-maintained school in London called the London Nautical School which meant me travelling from Basildon every morning to London.

I hated every minute of that school. The

kids were all living in London, I didn't know them they were all bigger than me and bullied me so I used to go into London on my Travelcard and then just head off on my own. I was 12 or 13.

I would find myself in museums and stuff. I used to turn up at the gate and say 'My mum and dad are in there and can I go in and find them?' and they'd just wave me through. I went to the Tower of London two or three times.

I went on jollies on my own, I had my packed lunch and my travel ticket so I could go where I wanted. That was an adventure. I can probably do a good guided tour of London now – I went everywhere.

I came out of that school and moved to a local school but once again, I was isolated and bunked off again.

When I was about 14 I left school for

good. I was sort of a law unto myself by then.

There was nothing my parents could do.

I got money through stealing. Sometimes I

would take money from my mum's purse or I'd steal from the changing rooms when we'd go to cricket – from people's pockets and stuff.

There are 11 players on each team – that's 22 players, 22 wallets. I was a young kid, so no-one was going to think it was me. If there was like a couple of hundred pound in a wallet, you'd take £40 or £50.

Often I'd be dipping into people's handbags. There was always stuff lying around.

All along I was still using drugs heavily, still drinking heavily – well, I was totally out of control really. I took whatever I could get my hands on.

By then I was taking speed intravenously – injecting it. I couldn't talk to anyone. I was taking these drugs and just blasting myself into space because I

couldn't handle my emotions and my feelings.

Nobody seemed to get on with me, nobody liked talking to me, no-one was friendly with me. Instead of sitting there not being liked, a couple of spliffs later I didn't care if I wasn't liked.

I got a job at a fairground when I was 18 running the dodgems. The fair came to Basildon, I went on a couple of rides and asked if there was any work going. They were always taking on young lads to do the manual work, so they took me on. I travelled around with them all over the country.

They didn't pay a great deal, but they used to feed you and gave you a roof over your head (they gave us a caravan to live in).

My drug habit had gone completely out of control now. I was on amphetamines as well as everything else – pot, strong glue.

I ended up leaving the fair because I was stealing off them to buy my drugs and I got caught. If they caught you stealing, they wouldn't call the police in – they'd give you a good kicking. The police were never on the sites.

So they kicked me off the fair and I ended up on the streets of Nottingham.

That was when I first found heroin. It was £10 a bag, but at first it wasn't expensive because you weren't using a lot and a £10 bag would last you two or three days.

You think you're not going to get addicted but within two or three weeks it gets you.

Within three or four weeks, from having a £10 bag every couple of days, it would be pretty much a bag a day, so that's £10 a day straight away.

Within four or five weeks after that, you're on two bags a day, or three bags a day, you build up very, very quickly before, Soon I was buying it in weight and spending hundreds of pounds each time.

I was living on the streets and while I was there I was thieving and burgling and just hurting anyone who came near me.

I was doing commercial burglaries –



Main picture: Dave Taylor recovers from his overdose in 2005

Left: In hospital on the life support machine to which he was attached for a month

Above: Dave Taylor being interviewed by Nicky Gumbel at the Alpha International week earlier this month.



There was a hairdressing salon, and while they were all working I sneaked into their tearoom.

There were five or six handbags there, which meant five or six purses, five or six credit cards. Often they had their pin numbers in with their purses in case they forgot them.

On a good day I'd make £2,000, £3,000, £4,000. A bad day meant I hadn't made enough to supply my habit, which meant that that night I was going to be ill. But there weren't many days when I was ill.

When I was 19 I got caught red-handed. I can't remember what I got done for but at the end of the interview they said 'Is there anything else you want to tell us?' and I just reeled off everything I'd done in the last six or seven months. I don't know why I did that. I never enjoyed thieving.

I got two years for burglary. I hated every minute of it but it was also a relief. I was getting help because I was on drugs.

I had to go through cold turkey. When I turned up at the prison, I told the doctor, 'Look, I'm in bother, I'm on heroin'. At that, he threw me some paracetamol and said "Cold turkey never killed no-one, son."

I went through a month of not sleeping – just looking at the walls. That hurt.

But I could still get hold of heroin when I was in prison. My mum was sending me money and I was using it to buy drugs.

When I came out, my mum and dad were living in Mansfield and their next door neighbour was a girl my age. She had a younger sister, and we fell in love. She got pregnant and she had my little girl, Abbie. That was in 1996.

Soon I was back on heroin and crack cocaine. I was just a crazy person then.

I was stealing from my girlfriend and arguing with her. I never actually hit her but I pushed her a couple of times. I was a nasty bully really.

I was very good at standing over her and trying to scare her. I threatened to kill her at times. I was not a very nice person. She was right to get rid of me.

Eventually I came off heroin by Subutex

at a community based detox clinic in Nottingham recommended by my doctor. I told him I wanted to come off heroin.

The cravings in my mind were ridiculous. I went to bed wanting heroin, I woke up wanting heroin and it was just too much.

Even though I was off heroin and I was taking this substitute, it didn't stop me smoking heavily still and it didn't stop me drinking heavily.

I was drinking five or six cans of strong lager like Tennants Super a day, which is enough to get most people drunk, as well as smoking lots of weed and lots of other things.

I went back to heroin a couple of years later and came off it again. It was always there or thereabouts. I've had so many sort of clean times and so many dirty times.

I was living in different hostels and still stealing and was in and out of prisons. I've been in about 18 different prisons. I think the biggest sentence was four years, for commercial burglaries.

In 2004 I was just totally out of control. I had another girlfriend by then and my stepfather had a go at her in the house and I just flipped.

I can't remember what the argument was about but my Dad said a few hurtful things. My little girl was in the house that day, visiting (I used to have her at weekends and stuff).

I was angry. I went upstairs and got a cricket bat out of my bedroom and came back downstairs and hit my stepfather over the head with it. I took a big swing and cut all his head open.

My daughter was sitting on his lap at the time. My mum was crying, "Why, David, why?" and I don't even know why.

I just think it was years and years and

years of anger, probably towards him for the domestic violence. Everything just flew out in one go.

The police were called and I was arrested for GBH. But I got a caution for that which is amazing because it carries a possible life sentence.

I think it was because it was my stepfather said he didn't want to press charges. Nowadays I would be taken to court anyway I think.

I stayed with a friend for a few nights and then I went up to Nottingham and booked myself into a bed and breakfast. It was October 2004.

They call it a snowball when you put heroin and crack cocaine in the same needle to inject – and that's what I did.

I hadn't touched heroin for quite some time so my tolerance level was non-existent, I put it all in the needle and took the lot. When I look back, it can only have been a suicide bid, although I can't remember anything about it.

That was about 10 O'clock at night. By half past ten the following morning, the hotel cleaner found me naked on the bed unconscious.

I was rushed to Queen's medical centre Nottingham and I was put straight on a life support machine. My brother was the first there. He phoned my mum and said, 'Don't bother coming up. He isn't going to make it'.

I was on a life support machine for about a month. I had pneumonia and a minor stroke whilst in intensive care because of the lack of oxygen to the brain.

They said I was going to be brain damaged.

When I woke up I can remember the doctor coming in and asking me my name and me not being able to tell him what it

was.

My family supported me the whole time. I've got photos of my Mum feeding me and my stepfather shaving me.

In February 2005 I walked out of hospital after being there for four months. Within three or four weeks of coming out of hospital, I was smoking pot and drinking.

I joined a local cricket team which had a lot of Pakistani Asian guys on the team and I got quite friendly with them.

I was curious about Islam. They started telling me about Allah and I started praying five times a day. I went to Dewsbury in Leeds to the Mosque.

There was something eating away at me inside, I didn't feel comfortable with the Muslim faith but I needed some kind of structure in my life. I was trying to stop smoking, I was trying to stop drinking, and I just couldn't do it, so I was back on crack.

I tried my hardest, but I couldn't do it. I just hoped that Allah was going to come and say "Bang" and take all the bad stuff away from me.

By May that year I was back in prison on another two-year sentence. I was caught in the changing rooms at Lords Cricket Ground where Middlesex were playing another county team. The police came and banged me to rights because of my past.

I was sent to Belmarsh.

In the prison I was attending a Muslim prayer session in the Chapel about two to three months into my sentence when I sneaked off and got talking to someone from the chaplaincy team in the prison.

I said, "Look, help me, I'm a Muslim, I don't feel comfortable with this. Help me".

I picked up a bible and the person said, 'Just read Mark's gospel'.

That night, I read Mark's gospel... and I read it all, which is amazing considering it was the King James version. I read it and I was like 'Wow, now I know what I was missing.'

That night I fell on my knees and I asked God for help. It was like 'All right, now I know you're there Lord, help me.'

continued on page 18

I had almost 20 years of drug abuse – and it was all taken away from me in a second

TV adventurer Bear Grylls has just been appointed Chief Scout – the leader of the Scout movement. He is also a strong supporter of the Alpha course and has helped promote the course on many occasions. In this exclusive extract from his new book *Living Wild: A Guide to Modern Scouting*, he addresses the issue of faith:

Faith is always hard to write about and faith, if it is to be real and meaningful, is of course intensely personal. That is part of what makes believing so special.

But faith is at the very heart of Scouting and to write a book on Scouting without mentioning faith would be to produce an incomplete work.

I have also learnt over the years, from numerous expeditions, close calls and hairy moments, that it takes a proud man to say that he never needs any help. And I have yet to meet an atheist in the Death Zone on Everest or in a lifeboat!

Life is a journey and we all at times need a guide. But that guide for me has become much more than simply a pointer of the way.

He has become my backbone, my confidante, my helper, my companion and my friend. And if such a person were to exist, what a great Scout companion He would be!

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. I guess the best way I can write this section is to simply and intimately write about what my Christian faith means to me and how it has helped me time and time again.

Ultimately, you will decide and must decide, for yourself, whether you are going to include a spiritual dimension to your life. But for what it is worth, life becomes a lot wilder and a lot more fun if you do.

It is hard to live life never asking any pertinent questions about why we are here and what we are doing; and it is even harder to live your life never getting any answers!

So here we go... Jesus said very simply that: 'I have come so that you may have life, and have it in abundance.'

Now that for me was a bit of an eye-opener! I always thought that Christianity was about being very sensible, and acting all smart and religious. But the more I discovered about the person of Jesus Christ himself, the more I found a man who was as un-religious as you can imagine.

In fact when he talked about finding faith and entering heaven he said: 'unless you become like one of these (children), you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

It seemed that the very heart of the Christian faith, in truth, was neither about church or pulpits, sermons, latin verse or behaving! It was about a relationship with this Jesus who promised us life in abundance, joy within, peace without and freedom in our soul.

Now I was interested! And if that wasn't enough, he had a habit of turning water into wine to make a great party!

The root of man's struggles is that we are all fundamentally a bit flawed. We all have messed up, we all have fallen down and fallen short.

Deep down in the pit of my soul, I know that I have messed up and done wrong, many times over.

But this Jesus kept saying to those that knew their need for God,

that the 'Son of Man had come to seek and save those that were lost'.

Remember the story in the bible of the woman who longed just to touch the hem of Jesus's cloak, knowing that in doing so she would be healed of her illness, or the man that hung on a cross beside Jesus asking him to forgive him his many sins?

They wanted what only He could give: freedom.

'The Son of Man comes to seek and save those that are lost'.

Jesus's words were nectar to that man next to him on the cross and they are nectar to me today in my many failings.

That knowledge that despite ourselves, when we turn to Jesus, simply and honestly, and ask for forgiveness, we are made clean.

A wave of love floods over us and heals us. No wonder so many great men through the ages have talked about the 'peace of God that passes all understanding'.

Such love, such forgiveness, is beyond understanding, beyond logic. But that is what makes this gift of God's love so special.

If we look back in time, there are

not many great men or leaders who have not quietly in their hearts, bent the knee and looked upwards to Jesus for help, strength, resolve and peace.

Look at Isaac Newton, Christopher Columbus, the Wright brothers, Joan of Arc, Richard the Lion Heart, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Galileo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and of

Christian emotion is gratitude.

And when we live a life full of gratitude then light tends to spread all around. We are calmer, nicer, friendlier, we laugh more, we become more generous, more encouraging, more empowered, gentler, more fun and wilder than ever before.

These are called fruits of the Spirit. They are a bi-product of a relationship with our Maker. The

Christian faith is about finding home and finding our Father. I need both those things in my life, and I am not too proud to admit it. My Christian faith makes me stronger, it makes me smile.

So if you have yet to find this sort of faith for yourself, be bold, take a step. What have you to lose?

What have you to gain? Pray a simple prayer in your head, (don't worry, no-one but God is listening!), and ask for this Jesus to come into your life and stand beside you.

Wonders will start to happen, I assure you.

I am going to give you one story and a few key verses to help you. Both have helped me through my

When we live a life full of gratitude then light tends to spread all around

course the Scouting founder, Baden-Powell.

All were men of faith. Indeed it takes a proud man to say he never needs any help.

Faith is of course personal. So it is OK to use it personally. It is a gift for you, bought by Jesus at a great price.

He died on a cross, tortured to death, in our place, so that we could be forgiven, held and set free. No wonder the overwhelming

I thought Christianity was just acting a bit but I was wrong

TV adventurer Bear Grylls has found the answer



own life so much. They speak much better than any words I can write. I hope they help you find home.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.

For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it: 'Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints.'

'I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.'

The Lord replied: 'My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.'

'During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I

anity was about all smart and religious as so wrong...

er BEAR GRYLLS explains why he
at faith is key to living life to the full

Why isn't Christianity cool? Bear
answers a couple of questions...

Alpha was the best thing Shara and I ever did together

Why does Christianity sometimes seem so uncool (compared to riches, fame, ambition and fun)?

People look to fame and fortune as the cure to life's struggles, but both those things on their own leave you feeling pretty empty.

You have got to build your house on rock not sand, and especially if you are in the media which can often feel a little like being in the middle of a storm every day.

To me Christianity isn't about

being cool or not cool. It is an intimate backbone that is the source of my strength and joy. I mean, how can anything that brings freedom, heals pain, restores relationships, instills peace, refreshes love, melts bitterness, mends broken hearts, gives strength and inspires kindness and generosity, be uncool!

It just took me a whole host of years and mistakes to understand that Christianity was about all of this and not fuddy duddy church and smart vicars! (No offence Nicky!)

What are your tips for learning a bit more about what the Christian faith is all about?

Try Alpha. Shara and me did and it was the best thing we ever did together in our life (apart from that boozy night we once had down at the salsa bar in Mexico, but that's another story!). But with Alpha I always feel 'What have you to lose and what have you to gain?'

Pictures from Bear Gryll's TV programme on Channel 4 'Born Survivor'



carried you.'

And then the verses from the Good Book, or the Bible, that I always carry with me hidden away:

'I will not be afraid for you are close beside me.' Psalm 23 v 4

'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' Philippians 4 v 13

'The Lord himself watches over you.' Psalm 71:1-3

'Be strong & courageous for the Lord your God is with you.' Joshua 1:9

'Be sure of this, that I am with you, even to the ends of the world.' Matthew 28:20

'I am holding you by your right hand...do not be afraid; I am here to help you.' Isaiah 41

Now that is what I call life-enhancing!

The motivational:

This is the last part of this Scouting book; but in many ways it is the part that drives everything. Without the motivation to get out there and make things happen, nothing ever does!

It all comes from having a dream and then the determination to follow it.

But what if I fail? What if it all goes wrong? That is a fear of failure and fear of failure is one of the biggest killers of adventure,

imagination and dreams.

The best advice I was given was that if you want to succeed then get out there and fail 22 times.

The likelihood is that by the time to get to nine you will have hit the bullseye and succeeded anyway!

So fail your way to success! But how will I raise the funds to do these adventures?

Get out there and start writing those letters, start knocking on

some doors, start offering some services in return for support. Just begin! That is often the hardest part. So stop the excuses and get going.

Read this quote:

'It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better.

'The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, ... who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly,

so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.'

You see, no-one ever raised a statue to a critic! No-one is interested in critics. All they do is point out how the strong man stumbles.

They are jealous of you because you at least have the balls to get out there and make a difference and live an adventure....and the timid

and then lead from the front.

Remember the motto of the SAS: Who Dares Wins. That says it all really.

The man who risks nothing gains nothing.

So now you have decided to go for it, how do you keep going?

People say to me: 'But all this motivation is so temporary. It can never last.'...

Of course it's temporary...but so is washing! That's why you gotta keep doing it.

You've got to keep putting the good stuff in and only then will you get the good stuff out.

So keep hanging out with like-minded people; people who value others, people

who value adventure; who value dreams.

We become like those we hang out with, so chose your friends wisely and then help each other to keep charging.

But sometimes it gets so hard? Of course it does! That is why most people don't achieve anything.

It is hard. But hard means there is an opportunity. There is an opportunity to keep going; to

**The best advice given me was: if
you want to succeed then get
out there and fail 22 times**

dare not.

I also love the motto: Paddle your own canoe. It says that we shouldn't sit around complaining or giving excuses about why we can't do something.

It doesn't assume someone else should do it all for us, or that we can coast along on others shirt tails. It says get out there and paddle!

Forge your own path, be a leader,

endure more than the others who quit; there is an opportunity to shine.

It is in the big moments in life that we learn who we really are. That is the time to come alive. I was never the fittest soldier going through SAS selection, but I was stubborn and kept going when it cut rough.

I was never the best karate guy when I started martial arts, but I kept going for all those wednesday and sunday nights, week after week, year after year. And I got my black belt.

Worthwhile things take sacrifice. But that is what makes them special.

Life doesn't reward the best or most talented. It rewards the dogged. I want to finish this book with a very simple phrase.

It sums up adventure, it sums up Scouting. I love it.

Life is really very simple: what we put in is what we get out.

God bless and go for it!

Bear x
www.beargrylls.com

This is a sneak preview of Bear Gryll's new book: 'Living Wild, A Guide To Modern Scouting' which marks the start of Bear's Chief Scout post.

Dave Taylor completes his story...

I was living in hostels, stealing and in and out of prison – then I overdosed...

continued from page 15



Two days after that I was transferred from Belmarsh to Brixton. I don't know why. There was no reason for them to transfer me from one prison to another but they did.

Within a day of being in Brixton, I got a job down in the chapel. The vicar there at the time was a guy called Roger Green.

On the Sunday, the first service was the Catholic service, so I sat in on it and loved it.

Then came the CofE service and another church came in to help lead the worship. They played some songs and stuff and I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing.'

Two days later, on the Tuesday morning, was this thing called Alpha. Roger said, 'It would be good for you to sit in on Alpha.'

I started reading the books downstairs before it started and I thought, 'Ah, this is interesting.'

There were about 15 of us, all inmates. I loved it, it was amazing. We basically worked through the green books and someone would give a talk.

Then came the session called What is the Holy Spirit? We were singing a worship song and I suddenly got goosebumps all over.

I thought, 'Woah, what's that?' It felt like when a jumbo jet goes whoosh, straight over the front of me.

I almost fell over where it sort of hit me like that. I thought, 'Wow'. I was overwhelmed. It knocked the hell out of me.

It felt really good, but suddenly I felt really sorry – about how my life had turned out and how I had just ballsed everything up really.

It was at that moment that I said a prayer. I said, 'I'm going to give you everything of mine now, Jesus. Thank you.'

I gave my life to Jesus. I prayed to God 'I want to follow you and I want to get to know you more'.

I was so sorry for everything I'd done bad in my life – my thoughts, everything.

That morning there were tears rolling down my face. I was sobbing. I think the last time I cried was when I was a youngster.

After that session I started praying and I didn't want to take drugs any more.

I had had almost 20 years of drug abuse and isolation. It felt like it was taken from me in a second. It still really blows my mind.

I was put in contact with a Christian charity called Stepping Stones; which is predominantly run from Croydon. They find you somewhere to live, they help with work and find a church for you to go to. I left prison and came to Stepping Stones in 2006.

One of the trustees invited me to the New Life Christian Centre. I got

there about half past ten and the minute I walked in I felt God just said 'Dave you're home'. I've been there ever since.

It's a fantastic church. We now run the Alpha course from our church. I tell my testimony to those attending, I tell them how the Lord helped me.

I go to events like Soul Survivor a lot because I like being renewed. I'm human, I'm stupid, and I still make loads and loads of mistakes.

But I'm drug free and I've been drug free since 2006.

I think when the Holy Spirit came into my cell that night and healed me and made me cry it took the obsession away from me.

When I first came out of prison I did a drug treatment programme.

I believe that Jesus gave me my heart back. I'd be dead if it wasn't for Jesus.

I want to find out what God's purpose is with me. I volunteer and help people with drug and alcohol abuse. I go out and help give people advice about what's the best way to stop taking drugs.

On a Friday there's a few of us that go and feed the homeless.

I have my family back now. My next step is to get myself fully up on my feet and working properly so I can go and find my daughter. It would be amazing to walk into my church with my daughter.

One of the proudest things for me was when I was baptised at the church. My mum cried loads because the person they knew wasn't there any more. It blew their minds how two or three guys from the church stood up and had something to say about me.

Before the Alpha course I never knew Jesus. Now I know. Everything bad that I've ever done in my life has gone because of that one man.

I still find it really hard. I'm a Christian; I love Jesus with all my heart for what he's done for me for me it is the forgiveness, that's the hardest one.

I still struggle with that from time to time. And because I struggle with that I struggle with forgiving myself as well for my past.

I've got a real passion for reading the bible. I've been known to go a whole day without being seen because I am in my house reading the bible. It's God's word isn't it? It's amazing, I love it.

I want to get married, I'd love to have more children. But the lady has to be a Christian.

Now I'm looking for a job. I'll get one. I can't fail, can I? I'll get one eventually. I'm looking for anything really – in catering and stuff like that.

There's lots of things that have happened and it all leads back to one person and that's Jesus and God. That's the amazing thing about it.

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GAT teams help train the world

HUNDREDS of church members from all over the UK are helping to train church leaders in other countries to run Alpha through the Global Alpha Training (GAT) initiative.

More than 30 GAT events have been held around the world this year in countries which include Russia, Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone and China.

More than 152 people attended a special Global Alpha Training day at the end of Alpha International week.

The initiative involves teams of between four and eight people from churches in one country travelling to another to train those interested in running Alpha.

GAT events that have already taken place this year include:

- A team from Canada led a GAT event in India during January.
- A team from New South Wales, Australia led a training event in Jakarta, Indonesia for two days in February.
- A team from a church in the Netherlands led a two-day GAT event in Russia at the end of January.
- A team from a Norfolk church trained delegates at a two-day event held in Uganda in February.
- A team from Holy Trinity Brompton went to Zambia for two two-day GAT events, as well as leading a prison meeting in one of Zambia's biggest prisons.

In a talk during Alpha International week Nicky Gumbel described GAT as being a major way for Alpha to be accelerated around the world.

'Everybody can be involved,' he said. 'Rather than doing as we used to do, 20 conferences a year, 40 conferences a year, 80 conferences a year, the aim is to do 5000 GATs a year.'

'What I don't want is for us [at Alpha headquarters] to be a block and at the moment I feel we are a block. How can we stop being a block? Well, we can help



For more information about the GAT initiative, see gat.alpha.org

get Alpha into everybody's language.

'Another block is the lack of training. People are not trained so they can't run Alpha. So GAT is a way of training people and your country can be involved.'

Nicky urged every country to get involved 'Macedonia was one of the poorest countries but they helped another country. However poor your country is, your country can help another country.'

'Through this we can send teams all over the world, all over our regions, to train up other churches.'

'What I have seen is the blessing of the Holy Spirit. We are trying to follow the Holy Spirit. What I see is the Holy Spirit blessing GAT teams. I meet people all the time who come back from a GAT team and they are on fire.'

Thousands of delegates worldwide have already been trained through the GAT initiative. In 2008 more than 50 teams consisting of hundreds of people held events in 38 different countries including Argentina, Burundi, Indonesia, Poland and Zambia.

OTHER NEWS



Student Alpha broadcast live on internet

A NEW weekly Student Alpha course at Holy Trinity Brompton is to be broadcast on the web starting in October.

The initiative will enable student courses to use talks from the London course for their courses. Alpha Chaplain Jamie Haith, who leads the Student Alpha ministry, will do all the talks.

Unlike a mainstream Alpha course,

Student Alpha is only seven weeks long to accommodate university term times. The talks will be cut down to 25 minutes long and will contain multi media to appeal to younger guests.

The course evenings will be filmed live and will be available to download on alpha.org/alphafriends.org very soon after each session.

Alpha co-sponsors Big Church Day out

MORE than 14,000 people attended a worship and prayer event in West Sussex in May, which was co-sponsored by Alpha UK.

The 'Big Church Day Out' event was held at Wiston House, West Sussex in May. More than 5,000 people had to be turned away because the venue was full.

Alpha's Director of Prayer Pete Greig hosted the main stage of the event, which focused on worship and celebration.

Alpha chaplain Jamie Haith held an Alpha seminar in the afternoon and gave the main address in the evening.

Artists included YFriday, Graham Kendrick, Israel Houghton, Michael W Smith and Delirious.

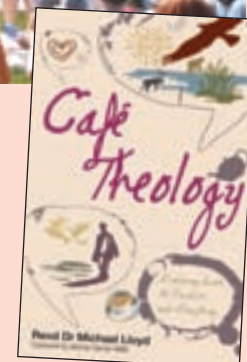
A 24-7 prayer programme was offered at Wiston Church.

Harry and Pip Goring, who hosted the event, also host HTB's summer teaching holiday, Focus.



Mike Lloyd's book gets a new look

ALPHA has released a new edition of *Cafe Theology*, the popular book by St Paul's Theological Centre lecturer Michael Lloyd. The book explores 'Life, the Universe and Everything' in Mike Lloyd's unique blend of humour and thought-provoking theology. The book, which has a foreword by Bishop Sandy Millar, has been given a new cover and now includes a full index.



Doing Alpha on a cruise ship

More than 40 people attended an Alpha course on the cruise ship 'Tahitian Princess' in spring this year as it travelled around the world from the Grand Canyon to Gibraltar. Cruise ship guest Felicity Corbin-Wheeler organised the course during her holiday after receiving support from the Roman Catholic priest on board and also the Jewish Rabbi. The 45 minute sessions took place in one of the ship's lounges with the talks presented on DVD. The Alpha meal took place in one of the restaurants. More than 500 Why Jesus? booklets were given out at the Easter services on board ship.

1.6m did Alpha course last year

NEW statistics from independent research organisation Christian Research show that 1.6 million people did Alpha in 2008, an 18 per cent increase on the year before. Holy Trinity Brompton's Alpha course has grown bigger year on year. More than 12million people have completed an Alpha course globally since 1993.

Youth Alpha goes on UK tour

MORE than 200 young people have been trained to run Youth Alpha courses at conference events led by Youth Alpha leaders who went on a tour of the UK earlier this year. The Youth Alpha leaders from Holy Trinity Brompton visited a wide range of venues in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Later this year the tour continues to venues in Scotland and the north east of England. For more information, see youthalpha.org.

Alpha Copyright statement

The Directors of Alpha International write: "We have always been keen to allow individuals who are running an Alpha International Course the flexibility to adapt it where it was felt necessary to allow for locally felt needs and where there was the desire to retain the essential elements, nature and identity of the course. Experience has shown though that this has been misunderstood and the resulting loss of integrity in some courses has given rise to considerable confusion. Now that Alpha International resources and publications are being used all around the world we have reluctantly had to draw up a copyright statement more tightly in order to preserve confidence and quality control. We are sure you will understand.

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Revised 20/05/03

Chris Beers, 33, of Windsor, Berkshire, lived a life of drink, drugs and rebellion since his teenage years spent in Canada. A series of family tragedies – including the murder of his grandfather and cousin – contributed to extinguishing any faith in God. Here he tells the extraordinary story of how in recent months his life has completely turned around...

When I was 12, my family moved to an inner-city area of Toronto, Canada, called Little Italy, and it was pretty rough. My dad was away a lot of the time on business and for some reason I was attracted to doing things that were against the law.

I started to hang around with the wrong sort of people and I got into fights and started to smoke cigarettes.

Both my parents had a very strong Christian faith and we were made to go to church every Sunday but sometimes we would try to skip out.

Instead of going to school, I got quite heavily in shoplifting from department stores. I'd walk through the shop and put stuff into my coat or down my trousers and walk out. I also stole a lot of bicycles by picking their locks.

In Grade 7, when I was about 13, I started skipping school a lot. Sometimes I'd steal money from my mum's purse and spend my time on the streets.

I loved people-watching. Many days I would go and sit in a shopping mall and simply watch people to see what they were doing. Or I would ride the subway for hours.

I was by myself a lot. I think generally I was a pretty happy kid – it's just that I enjoyed doing bad things.

Eventually I got caught shoplifting and was charged. My parents were horrified.

I had to write a letter to the courthouse promising to change. Because it was my first offence I was let off. After that I went back and stole more. That continued for the whole year.

My dad didn't know what to do at all. He would ground me, but it wouldn't stop me from changing my ways. The more authority he used, the more resistance I put up.

He insisted I still had to go to church every Sunday if I wanted to live under his roof.

My brothers were heading the same way as me and in the end my dad thought the only way that this behaviour was going to stop was if we moved out of the centre of Toronto – so we moved up to Orangeville, a small town about an hour to the north.

This was a huge shock to the system but I managed to establish a reputation pretty much as soon as I arrived at my new school.

One of the townies tried to say something to me and I flew off the handle and hit him. That was it – I was in with the cool crowd from then on.

Although I never concentrated on school that much, I got by and I started to enjoy things. I got involved in lacrosse and ice hockey and started to establish some really good friendships in this small town.

Then, when I was about 14, the drinking began.

Every weekend my friends and I would go into our parents' liquor cabinets, pour all sorts of different liquors into a jar and drink it.

If someone's parents went away for the weekend my friends and I would go to their house and have a party.

My parents tried to establish a curfew for me, but either I would sneak out or I would ask to stay over at someone's house and then go and party at someone else's house. It was great fun.

When I was 15 or 16 I got into drugs. I started with marijuana but then quite quickly started to do a lot of LSD.

We were intensely into this drug which is very strong and completely mind-warping. It wasn't uncommon for us to go on 12 or 16-hour trips.

Six friends and I used to do it at weekends. We were into very psychedelic music. I guess we viewed ourselves as hippies.

We built a jam room out in the country and we would spend whole weekends there, playing music and doing drugs. We would spend a lot of time outdoors, walking around and talking about the meaning of life – a side-effect of the drug.

Then I started to sell both marijuana and LSD. I quickly became one of the biggest dealers in my high school. I had all the money that I wanted.

When my dad was away on busi-

ness trips, my mum was trying to take care of four boys who were very rebellious. Unfortunately my brothers were following in my footsteps. When I kept refusing to abide by house rules, my dad started chucking me out of the house. That began when I was 15.

When I was chucked out, I'd go and stay at a friend's house. But when I came back and apologised,

enough to go and find a place to live.

It was my choice and I had to deal with the consequences.

I was making quite a lot of money. I could go and rent a convertible car quite easily and go away for weekends. I was moving pounds of weed, supplying a good part of the high school, and I continued to deal in LSD. Then we got

into more serious drugs like Ecstasy.

When I was 17 I started to get into the rave scene – all-night dance parties. This was a form of music and an atmosphere

that I'd never experienced before, and that was a huge attraction for me. Without any alcohol – just 100,000 watts of music coming from the speakers and a hit of LSD – you were transported into a completely different world. It became like my religion. When I went away for the weekend, that was my church, surrounded by the congregation, my friends.

You've got people around you that have the same beliefs, worshipping in the same way as you, and dancing for 12 hours straight.

The unadulterated freedom was

amazing and very appealing to me – as it was to my brothers and close friends. There was a sort of secret code behind the rave scene where everyone was your friend.

This was a place where everyone could meet, and you could look into each others' eyes and knew you were there for the same reason. It was a unique place where you could hug complete strangers.

There was never the animosity that you would find in a normal nightclub. This was a place for peace, love, happiness, and friendship. You were going there for one reason – to get off on the music and the atmosphere.

At the first rave I ever went to, I wasn't in my right mind because I'd been doing a lot of LSD. I looked down at this strobe light and the first thing I saw was Jesus or an angel. It's a memory that's imprinted in my mind. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't take my eyes off him. Maybe it was a hallucination, but I'll never forget it.

These acid trips happened most weeks – but I smoked marijuana every day. I would do it as soon as I woke up – before work, break time, lunch time, after school, all night, all the time. Every day for years and years.

On Sundays, I continued to go to church because of my dad's house rule.

Meanwhile, I was quite happy

The extraordinary story of how drugs and family tragedy gave way to hope...

A weekend on LSD with 100,000 watts of music blaring, surrounded by friends – that was my church



On Saturday nights I might drink 12 to 14 pints and on Wednesdays eight or nine

my dad would always forgive me and take me back in. Through my teenage years I was constantly in and out of the house.

He kicked me out maybe five to ten times, for days, weeks or even months.

Maybe he caught us smoking or drinking in the house, maybe I came home five hours after I was supposed to. I had a complete and utter disregard for whatever he said.

I think he thought that if I was responsible enough to break the rules, I would be responsible

The day my grandfather was murdered

A number of awful things happened in Canada when I was a teenager. First, in 1989, when I was 14, my dad failed to see a stop sign and went through it and killed a young mother and injured two others. He went to jail for 30 days for it.

Then, in 1993, my grandfather (my father's father), my cousin Pam and one of her friends were brutally murdered by a crack addict in a small town called Barrie.

My cousin Pam was about 24, a Christian all her life, and she was visiting in the house with a friend. Due to a new law, he was the

first Canadian to get 25 years with no parole. During the trial I saw this guy in the courtroom several times. I always wanted revenge. I thought, 'This guy's going to pay when he gets out of jail.' I felt utter hatred for him.

My parents, as Christians, forgave him. The young man's family were Christians too and it was all over the press that they forgave him. I couldn't relate to this, but it made an impression.

My grandfather had been a Gideon – he used to present Bibles to schools and hotels.

So it was huge front page news at the time. I felt a range of emotions I guess – how do you react to something like that?

Then, a couple of years later, my dad's sister died suddenly in her sleep at the age of 42.

At first the police were very suspicious. So there we were again, witnessing a family home surrounded by cop cars. But nothing was found out.

As a result of these tragedies, I was left with the question: How could God allow these things to happen?

here quite a bit. We lived in South Kensington, then we moved to Kingston near London.

I worked as a cocktail bartender at TGI Friday's for about two and a half years. I continued to smoke dope and started to drink a lot more.

I was around the booze trade, so I was going out three to five nights a week and getting pretty drunk. I was consuming a lot of booze, cigarettes, weed, whatever...

On a Saturday night I might drink 8-10 pints.

Soon after that I got fired from TGI Friday's. They had had enough of my partying too hard after which I wouldn't show up for work sometimes...

I was pretty upset, but it was one of the best things that could have happened because I started working for Bang & Olufsen as a salesman – and it paid much more money. I really took to it and was one of the top sales guys in the country for a time. I started to feel really good about myself for being able to achieve this.

I continued to drink as heavily as ever. By now I'd drink a bottle or more of wine every night. At weekends I'd continue partying until long into the morning. Everyone that I hung around with drank, so I just thought it was the normal thing to do.

By now I had moved away from my father and the house I was living in was a really bad influence. My house-mates smoked lots of weed and really caned the booze every night.

In 1998 my parents had announced they were getting divorced after 26 years. I was extremely upset. After several tragedies had happened in our family [see panel above], the one thing we had left was our family – and then that broke up. Yet again I thought: What's this Christianity thing all about?

After that, my dad started living permanently in England and I saw a bit more of him.

He used to attend services at Holy Trinity Brompton church quite regularly and every few months during my mid-twenties he would ask me to go with him, so I'd go maybe three times a year. I just did it for him.

By the time I was 27, my days of churchgoing were long gone. I would almost never go to church. I was usually still up on Sunday morning from the night before.

The drugs were getting more serious – cocaine, speed, party drugs that you snort. I was off my head every weekend.

If I was going to be successful in my career, I needed to move on to something bigger and better. So in 2006 I got a job in recruitment, specialising in IT sales recruitment.

I did well in it from early on, and

it's been great and a huge learning experience. But again, everything revolved around drinking – it was that kind of culture. It's fun and exciting – you work hard, you play hard. I was going out to the pub every night drinking five or six pints.

I continued to drink heavily and do drugs at the weekends. I wasn't really hooked on the drugs, but I'd take them if they were around (and they were always around!). I was happy, really enjoying my friends and my social network, my job and the cash I was making.

Everything was going really well but I felt this sort of void... Whenever I looked into my dad's eyes – or any of his friends' eyes – I always saw some sort of peace or happiness that attracted me.

But I didn't understand it and I couldn't relate to it. So it made me curious.

Sometimes in the morning when I was coming down off drugs, I would look in the eyes of my friends and there was almost a sad or empty look in them.

All my house-mates would do was smoke weed and absolutely cane the booze

These were people that I loved to party with, but I sensed that there was a kind of emptiness in our lives. I sometimes didn't like what I saw when I looked in the mirror. I looked unhealthy, almost ghost-like and drugged-up.

Then, one night, I was at a big party on the Isle of Wight when it really hit me. I was walking around at 7.30am and everyone looked like a zombie. I thought, 'I'm 33...this has got to change. There's got to be something more. I've been doing this for years and years and even though I'm progressing in certain ways, am I really progressing in life?'

Even though I had a lot of friends and we were doing lots of exciting things, I felt kind of empty and lonely.

Looking back, I was drinking and doing drugs to fill the void. It was just, 'Let's party, man. Let's have a good time and not think about reality. Let's get messed up.'

Then my dad talked to me about the Alpha course.

I knew about it because I remembered about six years before, my brother had gone away on an Alpha weekend with my dad. When he came back he was laughing and I was like, 'What's with you?'

He said, 'Oh, I've been away on

this Alpha weekend.'

'Why did you do that?'

'I just thought I'd try it out.'

I said, 'Why are you laughing?'

He said, 'I honestly don't know.' We talked about it for a bit and then it was kind of forgotten about.

Each time I went to HTB I really enjoyed it. I thought, 'If I ever do go to church, I'd like to come here.' I really liked the music but also the speakers at HTB are generally excellent and they give enjoyable sermons.

So my dad said, 'Look, why don't you come on an Alpha course?' And finally I agreed.

He had to remind me about five times, telling me when it started, so he worked quite hard at getting me to go. Then he took me to an Alpha launch evening in September 2008.

There were drinks and canapés and Bear Grylls was the guest speaker being interviewed by Nicky Gumbel. I thought it was an excellent evening – I thoroughly enjoyed it. Then I went along to

the Alpha course by myself.

On the first evening I was late and a nice guy at the door took me in and brought me dinner.

I met my group. Surprisingly, one of the leaders was an ex-Chelsea football hooligan called Pete Dobbs.

Charlie Mackesy gave the talk that night. As he stood up I had the feeling of: 'Get me the hell out of here! What am I doing here?' I felt very uncomfortable.

But as soon as Charlie started speaking, he put everything into perspective and I started to feel much more comfortable.

He was excellent. I collect artwork on the side, so to have a real artist talking up there was great.

Charlie can relate to people who aren't Christians very easily. He's got a very laid-back style, which is very appealing.

I liked my group. There was a great variety of people. I found it all very interesting, but I didn't say much during the group discussion.

I kind of looked forward to the second week. Christianity was something I'd never paid attention to before – even though I'd been surrounded by it my whole life.

In a way Alpha contextualised what the Bible was saying, so it was relating rather than preach-

ing.

As the course went on, I really started to look forward to Wednesday nights.

After the meetings, we would always go to the pub, which pleased me just fine!

Half-way through the course, they have a weekend away. Unfortunately only four of my group could go, but I was looking forward to it.

When I drove to Chichester I had no idea what to expect. I got there early and dropped my stuff off in my room. Then I sat down with a bunch of friends who had arrived and got chatting to this really nice guy called Ben.

We were sitting at the bar drinking a pint of beer and it was a very welcoming atmosphere. We ate dinner and I started talking with Ben about all sorts of different music.

I love electronic music—Trentemøller, the Freestylers, Danny Tenaglia and others. I also really enjoy chill-out, dub, break-beat, techno, drum'n'bass and all sorts...

Ben and I were talking about the Kings of Leon, Radiohead and other rock bands that I really enjoy. He knew them all so we could have quite a good conversation about the new up-and-coming music.

I later found out that he was one of the Alpha leaders.

On the Saturday morning we had a talk which I thought was pretty interesting and then one which covered speaking in tongues which I thought was absolutely weird. The supernatural didn't appeal to me at all.

At one point in the weekend I remember that Nicky Gumbel said something like, 'If you turn on the news for 15 minutes, what do you see? You see hatred, vengeance, war, unhappy people, divorce, jail, murder, adultery, sin.'

'But if you look in the Bible, what do you see? You see love, compassion, forgiveness, purity, you hear about everlasting life, not death.' It was as black and white as that.

So I sat back at that point and thought, 'This is very interesting – what do I want my life to be?'

I saw the way that the world was going and the way that I wanted to go. I had a choice – and it was a difficult choice because all of my fundamental values were based on the worldly side and not on the Christian side.

But again, looking into Christians' eyes I could see that there was a purity and an inner happiness that I wasn't seeing in a lot of people's eyes. And I wanted that.

Chris Beers: 'I guess I wasn't living in reality – I was in a totally different world'

cussed me staying here by myself after the summer. He thought it was a good idea. With his work he was going to be here two weeks every month.

So he was providing a house to live in and gave me money for my transportation and some groceries – and left me to it. It was a big house right on the river and I was living there by myself half the time, so it was quite difficult.

I went from having all these friends and contacts, to basically having nothing. I'd also left my girlfriend of two years behind.

But it was a decision that deep down I knew I had to make or I was going to be in real trouble.

Looking back it was a key decision in my life. I got a job as a bartender at O'Neill's in Cannon Street.

I was still doing Ecstasy and LSD. I wasn't really hooked on the stuff, but I would do it every weekend. I got into the London rave scene. I was also still smoking marijuana every day.

But my relationship with my dad improved hugely. For half the time we would be living together and I think the reliance on each other when there's only two of you is much greater. I was certainly trying harder.

That became the arrangement for many years. We moved around

Nigel Thompson, 34, of Battersea, south London, attended the Alpha course at the suggestion of his friends TV adventurer Bear Grylls and his wife Shara. Nigel crossed the Atlantic with Bear in an open boat back in 2003 in a voyage described in Bear's book 'Across the Frozen Ocean'. Here Nigel tells his story...

I was born in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. My father was in banking and whilst we had long since left the North East, my brother and I were sent to board at Durham School.

Being away from parents between the ages of 11 and 18 is not all bad actually. It meant you could get away with things you couldn't at home. We had this beautiful chapel at school but I saw the services as something to be endured rather than enjoyed.

I was big into sport at school. Rowing was my number one interest all the way through school and I was captain of the Boat Club. I blame my poor A Level results on rowing!

After school, I went to Oxford Brookes University and carried on rowing. Their rowing squad was very strong—third or fourth-best university in the country.

I sat at number three in an Eight, in what's known as the powerhouse.

We trained hard. We'd get up at 6 am and go off in a minibus to Wallingford, a 20 minutes drive from Oxford. We'd be on the river by 7.30am and would row for about two hours, then take a break, and then do another couple of hours. At weekends, we'd spend almost all day Saturday and Sunday on the river.

Rowing is not like rugby or football where you can just turn up and put some jumpers on the ground for goalposts. A boat costs a lot of money and you can't do it part-time.

I had a very active social life at university. I remember my lecturer in the first year saying you can only do two things at university, but there were three options: socialising, work and sport.

I chose a bit too much sport and social life! I'd say 90 percent of my good friends today are from university.

I graduated from university in 1996 with a degree in Real Estate Management and immediately joined a surveying company in London. All I wanted to do was to go to London and see what it was all about. I had a lot of friends who'd grown up in London but I didn't know the place at all, so I was really excited about getting stuck into it.

I tried to carry on rowing but the conflict with my career was evident.

Soon after I arrived in London I went along to Thames Rowing Club and on the first day, the guy in charge of the senior squad said: 'The kind of commitment we need is Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, Thursday and Friday evenings, two outings on Saturday and Sunday, and a couple in your own time.'

I was starting out, building my career, and just thought it wasn't for me. I tried it for six months but gave up.

I worked for a big international surveying company called Healey & Baker and they were exciting times. My offices were in Hanover Square, in the heart of Mayfair, so right in the middle of everything.

I worked on retail property, so there were lots of shopping centre developments. It was all about turning up early and leaving late.

But I also had a really full social life in the first few years in London. Everyone wants to go out and have fun all the time.

After two years, I changed jobs and moved into my current job at Lunson Mitchenall. It was a small company back then, of around 15 people. It's now considerably bigger.

We worked on the Lakeside shopping centre in Essex; Braehead Shopping Centre in Glasgow – the MetroCentre in Newcastle; and we also did a lot of city centre redevelopment.

I first met Bear through his wife Shara, who was a great friend of mine at university. We had a lot of mutual friends.

I lived with Shara and her sister Annabel soon after we moved to London and Bear lived just round the corner so we'd spend a lot of time together.

Bear never really had a conventional job and I think he was a bit bemused by what I did in the office every day.

He used to ring me up and say, 'I'm going to swim across the Thames this afternoon. Do you want to come?'

This would happen like on a Tuesday afternoon and I'd say, 'Well I'd love to but I'm about to go into a meeting with some clients.'

But we used to do a lot of madcap things together.

We both loved boats and we each had very old, knackered speedboats which we used to bomb around the Solent in together. They were utterly unreliable and unsafe. He used to take Nima the dog and Shara. I'm not sure Shara enjoyed it as much as we did!

Bear never really paid much

attention to rules and regulations. He hasn't changed much.

I'm not sure Bear had done many big expeditions before Everest. It was a sponsored climb and I think there was a space available and he thought he'd go along.

Some time after that Bear jet skied around the UK for the RNLI with a few friends,

You can jump around in big seas and it's really good fun, and you can water ski. We loved it.

Bear and I were both really interested in boats. So we thought we'd get one built and go around the UK and get sponsorship.

But then we read about a team that had tried to cross the Atlantic in an RIB but had failed, and were trying again. So we

I'd never seen an iceberg before and there were a lot of them around, even in August

I didn't get involved in any of that but then Bear suggested we went around the UK in an RIB (an inflatable boat made of rubber – a sort of Land Rover of the seas). You can put an enormous engine on an RIB and they'll go through any kind of sea and won't tip over. My first RIB had a 115-horsepower engine, meaning I could go at about 40-50 miles per hour, which is pretty fast on water.

thought we'd give that a go. It sounded more fun than going around the UK.

This was 2002. To start with it was just the two of us and Mick Crosthwaite, a very good friend of Bear's from school and who had also been on the Everest expedition. Then we needed someone who knew a lot about boats, so we asked a guy called Lt Andy Leivers, who was an engineer in the Royal Navy on

HMS Newcastle, to join. He was really good to have on board because he had spent more time at sea than all of us put together.

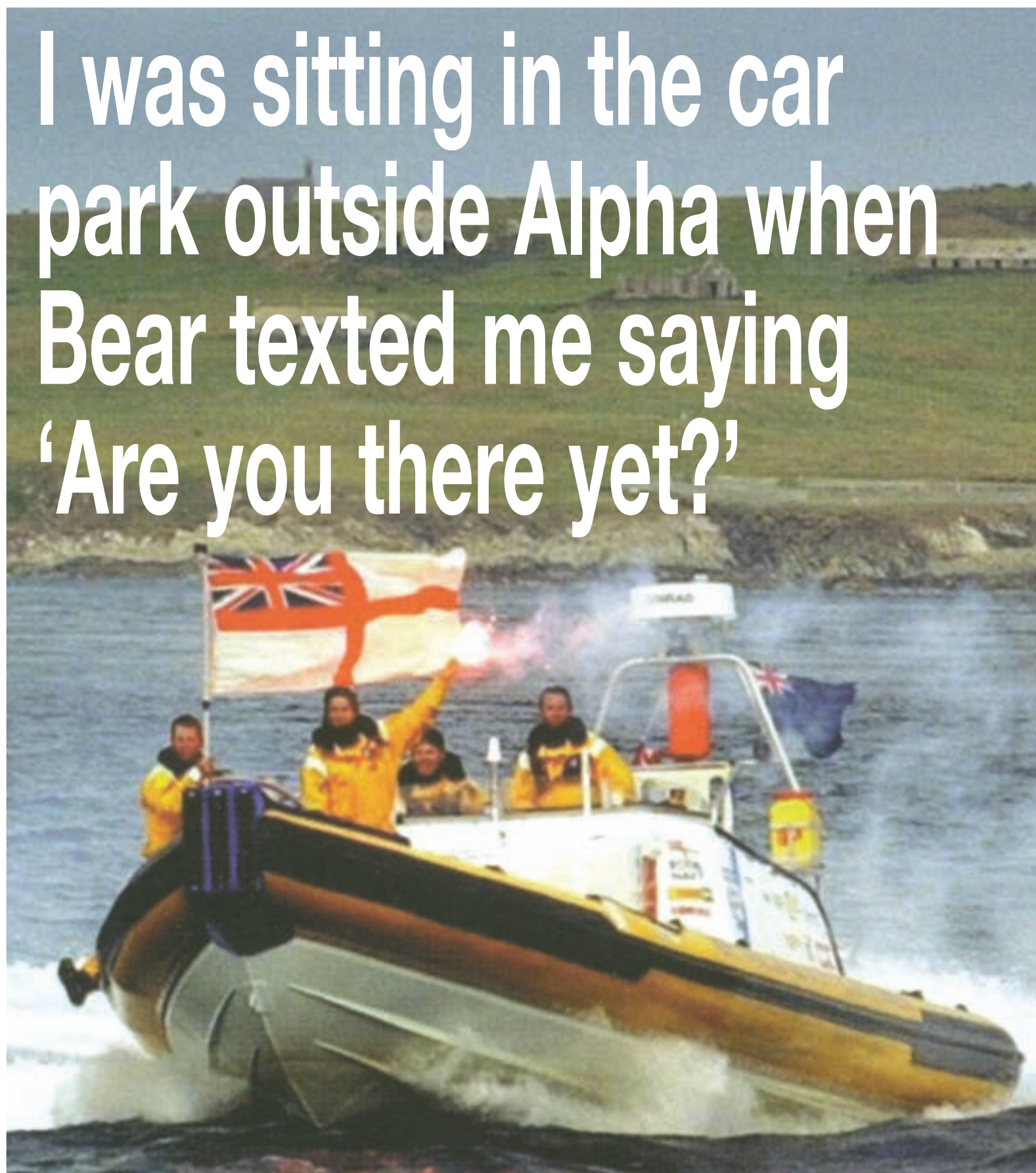
Then we had to try and get sponsorship, which was all very amateur in those days. Bear would email me something and I'd try and print it out at work when no one was looking. I didn't initially tell anyone at work what I was doing.

We'd try and get a picture of an iceberg on the front of our proposal, because we were going via Greenland.

You have to stop in Greenland and Iceland to refuel. You can't take the shortest, most direct route – which would be straight across from Newfoundland – because the boat can't carry enough fuel.

The only way to go is northwards up the Canadian coastline to the Nova Scotia coastline, then across to Greenland and then Iceland and you finish in Scotland, on the north coast.

The longest bit was probably from Greenland to Iceland, or Canada to Greenland – both bits





Nigel Thompson and (background picture) with the team in their open inflatable in which they crossed the Atlantic

were quite long.

We didn't realise how dangerous it was. We took a very broad-brush approach and probably didn't pay enough attention to detail, which is kind of how we did these things.

There were all manner of boating specialists who wanted to offer their advice and if I had a pound for every time someone said to me 'You must be mad', I'd be a very rich man.

We managed to get sponsorship for the boat and engine, the people who made them did it all at cost.

Our biggest sponsor was a watch company called Arnold & Son, who are very high-end. None of us had heard of them and we wouldn't have expected them to sponsor us.

The boat would have cost about £75,000 but it didn't cost us anything like that much because everyone was doing it at cost.

It was 12-meters, by 3.5 meters wide. My original RIB was 5 meters so it was much bigger. Twelve meters sounds a lot but there wasn't much space for five people.

We also took a cameraman called Charlie Laing, who wasn't really a seafaring chap at all. I think he wondered what on earth he was doing.

We set off in August 2003. You can only really do it in August to ensure there isn't too much ice.

We started off in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The boat was shipped over by container, which a company very kindly sponsored us for.

I took three weeks off work. My company was actually one of our sponsors and my colleagues were very excited. They were a great bunch of guys and everyone was interested in what we were doing.

Our main worry was being wet and cold for a long time in rough seas. We were also worried about breaking down. The seas could be horrendous so if you broke down and had little control of the boat, you could be in a lot of trouble.

It would be hard to get the engine going again and when you lose power, the boat turns broadside to waves and that's when you're in the danger zone.

The biggest fear was that in big seas, the boat could capsize in the middle of the night 400 miles away from any kind of land, with icebergs all around you. You'd survive just minutes.

We did have a life raft on the boat but in the event of anything going wrong, the thought of just calmly swimming towards the boat, climbing into the life raft, setting off your satellite beacon and waiting to be rescued, is just ridiculous. It's just not going to happen.

I'd never seen an iceberg before and there are a lot of them around, even in August.

Some float just beneath the surface, so if you are going at speed at night and they don't show up on any radar, then the boat could go over.

At night, it's best to turn off all the lights in the boat and the instrument lighting and just see by the moon and stars.

We'd usually have one person driving, one person navigating and three would be sort of sleeping, eating and resting.

But we didn't get much sleep. Waves would be coming over and showering you, pulverising you. There was water in the boat all the time.

We'd wear these helmets, with a visor like the ones the lifeboat guys wear. They'd protect you if you were thrown around in the boat

because there was a lot of sharp metal on the floor, and sharp edges.

The last thing you want is for your head to hit bare metal. And we'd wear these dry suits, with rubber seals around the neck and the arms, which are supposed to keep you dry.

But water is always going to get in. When you've got a wall of freezing salt water hitting you at speed, hour after hour, nothing is going to keep the water out. It came in around the neck and our heads were exposed.

The helmet kept the worst out but you were still open to the elements to a certain extent.

The worst bit of weather we encountered was in between Greenland and Iceland.

It was beautiful leaving Greenland. As the sun set we thought 'This is brilliant, this is what it's all about.'

We'd spoken to a weather station at the edge of Greenland via radio, and they had said, 'As long as you don't hang around you should be OK'.

So we thought, 'That's fine then, let's go.'

Then about 10 to 15 hours into the journey it started to get choppier but we carried on. I was monitoring the barometer, which is the best indication of a low pressure system, and it was dropping like a stone.

I thought there must be something wrong with it. There was a barometer on my watch too and I thought that had gone wrong.

Pressure

Every hour or so the pressure dropped a couple of millibars. The graph was a vertical drop. It was getting dark and I was thinking 'This really wasn't part of the plan.'

That night it got windier and windier. A few waves started coming over the front, and as it got darker it got worse. I was looking at the watch and it was still dropping and I was thinking we were potentially in a lot of trouble.

We weren't in the business of turning around, so we carried on into the night and it just got worse. Eventually every single wave was washing over the boat.

In those conditions you're only doing 10 - 12 knots, which is frustratingly slow. In perfect conditions, the boat can probably do 20 - 25 knots.

The gale went on all night, I think it was a force nine or ten or something. It was really uncomfortable and unpleasant.

There are no photos of the bad times because it was night and everyone was hanging on for dear life.

I took the view that I didn't want to be strapped into the boat if it went over, which was a real danger. I'd rather be free to swim about and then work out what to do.

We didn't have a doctor on board and we had very limited medical training. We had a first aid kit and that was about it.

I have nightmares thinking about what could have happened if someone really had injured themselves.

That night, we also lost all the electrics on the boat, so we were navigating with a handheld GPS, which we had as back-up, which isn't ideal.

The radar also went down and this beacon we had that would transmit our location every couple of hours to people back home so

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TWO KOREANS tell their stories...

Park Chan Dou, 38, a factory manager in Seoul, South Korea, was brought up in the Korean tradition of ancestor worship. His relationship with his wife was strained by his excessive drinking at nights. Here he tells the story of how God has changed everything:

On the anniversaries of the deaths of our grandparents or past relatives we would place food in front of a photo of them. Then we would bow, giving respect to them. It's something that a lot of families do without it necessarily being associated with being religious.

I was born in the county of Gyung-san and have two brothers and two sisters. Our family wasn't particularly religious but we did the standard traditional rituals for our ancestors.

There is 20 years between myself and my oldest brother. My parents were quite old by the time I was born. So being the little one in the family I was able to do whatever I wanted.

When I was younger my dream was to become a comedian. I wanted to be seen as the cool guy to be around – to forget reality and do things that took me to a different place. That led me into drinking and smoking in my early teens.

Then, when I was 15 a small thing happened which was to have a big impact on my early life.

I was in the school classroom with a friend during a break and I started joking about how cool I was. My friend's pride was hurt and we ended up fist fighting with other people watching around us.

Neither of us got really hurt. It came to an end because I cried.

I got defeated in that fight and my pride was very hurt. From that point on I stopped putting myself forward as much and instead sought more opportunities to go drinking or smoking.

Because I lived in the countryside it was much easier for me to get into alcohol and smoking. There was nothing to stop us.

We would go out into the field, make a bonfire, and I would drink until I got drunk and collapsed. This continued until I graduated from high school. I'd drink Soju, a Korean spirit, and Makgulri, which is a very traditional Korean drink that's generally drunk by farmers.

After school I went to Gyung-sang University to study electronics. My drinking and smoking lifestyle continued throughout university and through my National Service.

In Korea all boys do National Service. I did 30 months. Sometimes we would buy alcohol and drink it in our dorms or rooms. Sometimes we would go to pubs or clubs.

Whenever we drank, some people would stop at their limit whereas I'd always drink until I was in a complete state and had no recollection of what had happened.

I drank every day except maybe twice a week. I never got hung over and everyone was amazed and said that obviously alcohol was natural to my body.

I did my work well in the army and I was seen in a good light by my seniors. When I left, I started working in an electronics company as the factory manager.

There would be times when I would have my entire month's salary in my pockets, use all that on going out, then I'd make sure that whoever I was with spent all they had.

I sometimes even left my car behind as a deposit to fund my

night out.

In November 1997, when I was 26, I married Eun Hye (which means 'grace'). I met her through a very good friend.

We married in a wedding hall in Taegu (in the south). My wife's family were Christians, so the ceremony was conducted in a Christian way.

Initially Eun Hye didn't mind about my drinking and smoking but after we started living together and she saw it on a regular basis, she started to dislike it.

Sometimes I'd go out and meet friends and drink. Then, when I got back, I'd just go to bed and fall asleep.

At other times I'd drink alone at home.

At one point I had my driving licence revoked because of my drinking at a company night out.

By 1 o'clock in the morning I felt that I was quite clear in my head, so I drove home.

The police were on the flyover, so the cars couldn't see the police before they came up. Every car got stopped as they drove up.

In Korea it's quite common for the police to do random checks and stop every car on the road.

I was breathalysed then taken to a big police station where I had to fill in a lot of forms.

At that time I didn't really feel that my drinking was wrong. After all, I wasn't breaking any laws or doing any harm to society.

But when I got home it caused a lot of friction between myself and my wife. We argued a lot after that.

I was a manager at the factory. I couldn't tell work that I had no licence so I continued to drive without a licence – illegally for a

year. Noone knew except my wife. Then I had to re-pass the test to get my licence back.

Through all the arguments with my wife, I didn't really listen to the things she was saying.

I'd be out drinking with my friends and she'd call all the time, which I found very irritating. I found that stressful. So I'd go home in that state and was very unhappy.

Then our children came along. We had two sons – one born in 2000 and one in 2003.

My wife was so stressed during the second pregnancy that she got pregnancy diabetes and became very sick. It meant she had to go almost daily to hospital to get treatment for that.

By the third week I was shocked that I hadn't known the existence of God before

As the children grew up, they would want to come and play with me when I got home in the evening but I just wasn't interested. I don't remember it very well because I was drunk.

I'd get drunk every evening except for twice a week. I'd see my kids in the morning and then they'd be sleeping when I got back after drinking.

Sometimes I'd get home early, but I'd find the nagging of my wife irritating, so I'd drink at home...

Generally I'd be home by 11 o'clock or midnight, but sometimes if it got a bit more extreme, it would be 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning.

My relationship with my wife was bad. We were quite often short of money because of my nights-out. I ran up a large credit card bill.

One night in 2006 my wife had had enough. All the emotion had built up in her and she just exploded when I got home.

We had a huge argument in the middle of the night. She was still sick with the pregnancy diabetes and was feeling under great strain.

I'd been drinking so I wasn't fully clear in my head, but I remember arguing so much that the house got into a complete mess.

We were both throwing things around the house. I even threw our dining table across the room.

By the time I came to my senses, I found that my eldest brother's family were at my house.

Our elder son had called them to say that he was scared of his dad.

I was quite shocked at the result of what had transpired that night. I don't ever recall hitting my wife when I was drunk, but that night the table was broken and some smaller household appliances.

That day my sister-in-law took my wife away with her for a few days. They live very close by. I stayed at home with our children.

After that, Eun Hye said that life was too tough and she wanted to get divorced.

But she gave me one last chance. She suggested that I did Alpha – a course she knew about through her church. She had been on one herself.

Throughout our marriage she had been going regularly to church. Very occasionally I had gone with her but I didn't take very much notice of anything.

I didn't know that my wife had been asking friends at church to pray for me.

After our fight I really regretted what had happened and was very

sorry. So when she suggested the Alpha course I thought it was a good idea.

I made a promise to her that I would go on the next course and that I wouldn't miss one session.

I didn't know in great detail what the course consisted of but she reassured me that it was a place where I would be able to meet God, receive his grace and start over.

I started on the course in March 2006.

The only religious events I took part in regularly up to then were the regular ancestor rituals held at my eldest brother's house (as head of the family).

I would always go with Eun Hye and she would help with the preparation of the food, but she would never bow in front of the ancestor photos, which I did.

My general impression of the first night of Alpha was a good one. It was led by a new reverend – a woman, which was a surprise to me at first.

We sat around a round table to eat. The food was very good. There were about 20 people there that first night. The church was a Presbyterian church and the reverend gave the talks each week.

My wife had advised me to go along open-minded, to enjoy it, to think positively and optimistically, rather than sit there with a bad attitude. So I had that advice in the back of my mind.

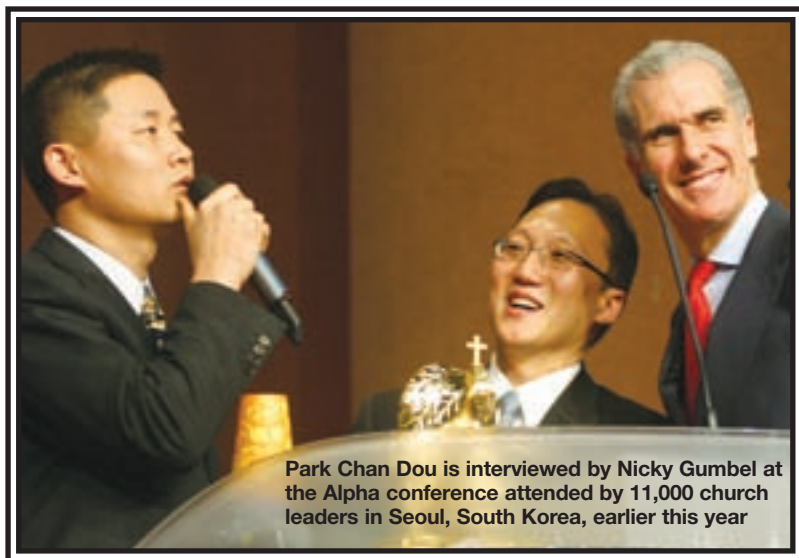
It was held on a Friday night and – quite apart from my promise to my wife that I would make all the sessions – I made my own resolution to go. Even if it was quite difficult to leave work, I made sure that I got there.

By about the third week I was shocked that I hadn't known the existence of God before, and had conducted my life in the way I had.

Soon after the course began, the amount of times I went out

After a violent argument, my wife gave me an ultimatum: go on Alpha or we divorce





Park Chan Dou is interviewed by Nicky Gumbel at the Alpha conference attended by 11,000 church leaders in Seoul, South Korea, earlier this year

drinking rapidly decreased.

I used to keep around five bottles of Soju in the fridge next to the eggs, and normally they would be gone within days. But during Alpha they stayed there for a longer period of time.

By the time of the Alpha weekend I was only drinking maybe once a week – sometimes not even that. Even when I tried to drink with my friends, it felt like my body was rejecting it.

The Alpha weekend was in a nice country setting. I think I felt in my heart, 'God, I've come this far. I've even made myself come on the weekend. Please bring some change into my life...'

I think I felt a bit suspicious about what was going to happen when we came to the Holy Spirit part of the evening, but I remembered that my wife had told me to be open-minded.

I thought, 'I've come here, so I should really take the opportunity to experience whatever may come...'

The pastor came and prayed for me. She didn't touch me – she was about half a metre away from me with her hand held out to me – but I felt this physical trembling in my body.

I wasn't in any doubt that this was the presence of God. It wasn't a bad feeling – I felt that things were going out of my body.

I recalled the conversation I'd had with my wife and I closed my eyes and cried. I was asking for forgiveness and asking for God's joy in my life.

I collapsed to the floor and as I lay there I had flashes of things that had happened in my life, like the time when I was a child when I used to throw stones at the church windows to disrupt the service.

All these events were flashing before me...I felt very bad that I'd been such a sinner. I wasn't a person who cried much normally, but now the tears came. I was sprawled across the floor, crying.

The pastor prayed for all my bad habits to be taken away from me (I'd already told her about them).

When I picked myself up I felt different, like a new person.

Later on my group leader and the helpers prayed for me and I really felt that the Spirit was filling me. As I was getting filled I asked God to show more of himself to me, to be present in my life and to really receive me.

That was the day I accepted Christ and gave my life to him. After such an experience it really built my faith.

Since that weekend I haven't touched a drop of alcohol.

I got rid of all the sex tapes in my car and replaced them with

worship tapes that I felt blessed by.

I completely lost the habit of drinking and smoking. My wife said it's amazing that God's taken these habits away.

She suggested I should use that to do something for him, like helping on the next Alpha course.

So from the next course on until now I've helped on six courses. Alpha's run two to three times a year in my church.

After that first Alpha weekend I started going to Sunday services and began attending the morning prayer meetings from 5.30am until 6.30am each day. I haven't missed a prayer meeting in the last three years.

On Sundays, we normally go to church at 9 o'clock for the kids' Sunday School. I'm also part of the choir, so I train for that. Generally I spend all day at church on Sunday.

During the church services I often find myself filling up with tears. I feel that I've completely given myself to God.

I do all this with my wife. Our relationship's rapidly improved. Things are so great in the family now. And in terms of her diabetes, she almost doesn't need to go to hospital now as it's stabilised so much.

I read the Bible and I pray. My prayers are very simple – quite childlike – asking God to meet me and to be here for me. And because I feel so blessed by worship, I learned to play the guitar. So at home we often have family worship.

My children have seen such a huge difference in me, as have my siblings and my parents. They're very happy for me.

Now Jesus is the centre of my life – my life revolves around the church, the services and Jesus. I give my everything to being involved in the church and his work.

Jesus has got rid of something that I loved most in my life – my bad drinking and smoking habits.

I feel that he's given such amazing grace to someone who's unworthy. I am very grateful for that.

It was only much later on that I discovered that my children had prayed at the breakfast table each morning when I was drinking and my wife was going to hospital almost every day.

Their prayer was, 'Please let dad come back in the evening not having drunk anything, and mum not to have to go to the hospital.'

Now each morning at breakfast we thank God for answering those prayers and making us into a happy family.

I was a Buddhist and hated any talk of Christianity... until I got cancer

Noh Eun Ju, of South Korea, was a committed Buddhist who 'hated Christianity'. Then she was diagnosed with breast cancer and accepted an invitation to a local Alpha course. Here she tells the moving story of how she and all her family have become Christians as a result:

I was born in Hapcheon. I lived with my grandparents, uncles, aunts and immediate family, so it was a huge family. We were practising Buddhists. When I was young I used to go to the Buddhist monastery with my grandmother.

As I got older I went three times a month voluntarily, and did a lot of things to celebrate all the Buddhist traditions. I would go into a very large room and bow in front of Buddha and worship him.

Sometimes there were a lot of people there and sometimes not. It became more frequent after I got married and I became a very devout Buddhist.

Whenever I went to the monastery I felt very relaxed, comforted and at peace there. So whenever I went through a hard period in my life, I used to go.

I got married when I was 27. My husband was a very devout Buddhist. My mother-in-law was an elder in the monastery, so the family were strong Buddhists. We got married in a wedding hall, with a normal service and a white wedding dress.

We had a daughter, Lim Sue Hyun – born in 1996.

After four years the marriage ended because of my husband's violence, gambling and affairs.

We got divorced and my daughter and I moved to Pohang and lived there until 2001. We moved there to be near my sister.

I would go to the monastery when my sister was off work and could drive me. I had a little portable Buddha at home and also some beads that the monks used. So I'd pray at home.

I didn't actively worship, but having those things there was comforting for me.

I also comforted myself through drinking Soju – the

Korean spirit. It's a clear spirit – you drink it straight. I only drank until I felt better – it wasn't extreme levels.

Then I met my second husband, Lee Chang He. My mother introduced us.

We married in 2002. My family were very happy for me. By then we'd moved to a new place where there was no monastery, so we would have to go to a place called Yesan, about two hours in the car. We had a daughter, Lee Min Kwung, in 2003.

My husband and his family were very devout Buddhists. A devout Buddhist would write the names of their relatives on the pillar of their houses, which symbolises giving them to Buddha. My mother-in-law wrote our names on the pillars in the monastery.

On the-coming-of-the-Buddha-day, the relatives' names are written on lanterns to be sent to Buddha. I found it very comforting to have all the signs of Buddhism around me – photos and notes at home to protect me from evil spirits. I very much disliked Christianity and people who went to church.

My elder daughter's best friend's mother was a Christian, and she was trying to tell me about Christianity and get me into church.

But I disliked Christians so much that even when I went to parents' evenings at school, I hated any talk of God or Christianity.

Six months after I gave birth to my second child I felt something in my breast, so I went to the doctor. It turned out that it was cancer.

My GP didn't realise it was cancer, so he kept treating me for other symptoms. After two months, when it hadn't disappeared, I went to a bigger hospital.

They then detected it was cancer. By this time the tumour was 4.5cm and they set a date for an operation. I heard later on that this lady had been praying for me at church. Once I got sick, I was so desperate to live that I was happy to do anything. So at that point I allowed her into my home to pray for me.

Then she started coming with her church deputy pastor to pray for me. They also invited me to the Alpha course. I knew nothing about Alpha.

Their church had only run Alpha once before. They didn't tell me anything about it, but registered me without me knowing.

Then they took me along on a Thursday evening, saying we were going to church, rather than telling me we were going to Alpha.

I'd just had the operation and was undergoing chemotherapy, so I wasn't really able to walk anywhere. I had chemotherapy every other Thursday, so was exhausted and nauseous that day and needed a wheelchair.

On that first evening this lady came to pick me up. When we arrived I felt a kind of welcome that I'd never received in my life or felt I deserved. It was a nice feeling to be accepted in such an amazing way.

There were a lot of people there – maybe 100. The food was wonderful.

Although my husband's side of the family are very devout Buddhists, I called my mother-in-law to say, 'Look, I'm going to church to see if this will help me live.' I wanted to stick it out to the end to see if it would make me better.

I didn't miss any session. What was really memorable for me was that they laid out a mat for me to lie comfortably during the

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ASSOCIATED MINISTRIES

Worship Central tours the world



Tim Hughes and Al Gordon with the Worship Central band play to thousands of people at an event in Hyderabad, India

Europe, USA and Asia



WorshipCentral
worshipcentral.org

TENS OF THOUSANDS of worshippers throughout Europe, Asia and the United States have taken part in Worship Central events this year.

During a tour of the Far East in May, Tim Hughes and Al Gordon led events in India, Malaysia, the Philippines and Hong Kong. Soul Survivor founder Mike Pilavachi spoke at the Hong Kong training day.

On the first day of the tour, 600

worship leaders attended a training day at Pearl City Church in Hyderabad.

The Hillsong London team, which partnered with them, focused on how to approach rehearsals and how to link songs together. Then came an evening event for more than 7,000 people in an open-air stadium in the centre of the city.

The following night more than 10,000 people crammed into the same venue. Many young people told the team afterwards of how God had changed their lives.

Then the team flew to Malaysia and the Philippines, holding

evening celebrations at each, during which Tim and Al spoke to more than 2,000 guests about worship.

In Hong Kong 750 worship leaders and their teams attended a Friday evening and Saturday training conference at the ICA Church.

Al Gordon said, 'It is amazing to see how God is building his church across Asia.'

The Worship Central team also toured the USA in March earlier this year. The tour was in partnership with Worship Together and EMI in the States. Events took place across the

states of Georgia, Alabama, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas. The events were mostly seminar-based afternoons with celebration evenings.

In April, the Worship Central team flew back to America and ran a worship training day in Orange County, California.

In January more than 4,000 worship leaders, musicians and worshippers attended three Worship Central European tour events in Holland, Sweden and Germany.

Around 800 people attended the worship event in Houten, Netherlands.

God at Work tour

GOD AT WORK
godatwork.org.uk

HUNDREDS of people across the UK have attended launch events for the new 'God at Work' course since it was launched by Archbishop of York Dr John Sentamu at Holy Trinity Brompton in February.

God at Work launch events have taken place in Nottingham, Manchester, Belfast, Birmingham and Glasgow - as well as in London.

Ken Costa, Chairman of

financial advisory firm Lazard International and also Chairman of Alpha International, wrote the book 'God at Work' on which the course is based. He hosted each of the launch events.

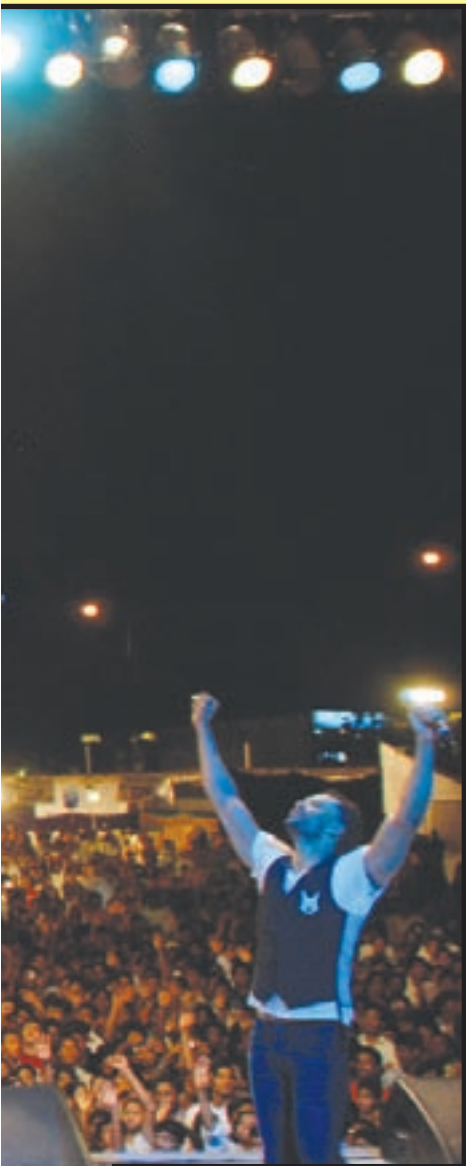
More than 132 Christian leaders and business people came to the course launch at County Hall, West Bridgford, Nottingham, in February.

Ken Costa spoke about the current economic situation. He noted that there was a moral and spiritual crisis in the global markets and that during this time of shaking it was important to



Al Gordon

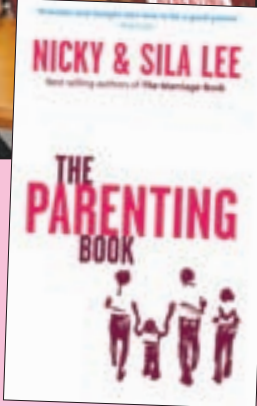
ASSOCIATED MINISTRIES



Tim Hughes



The Parenting Book launch



THE PARENTING Book was launched to the Christian book trade at the Christian Resource Exhibition at Sandown Park, Esher, in May.

Authors Nicky and Sila Lee gave four Family Life seminars at the exhibition, focussing on both The Parenting Book and The Marriage course.

More than 12,500 people attended the four-day event.

The Parenting Book has received praise from one of the UK's biggest Catholic newspapers. The newspaper's review said, 'This clear and readable book will be invaluable to parents struggling

Family Life
relationshipcentral.org

to raise their children in an age when the family is being increasingly undermined."

The Church of England Newspaper also reviewed the 520-page book, describing it as a "reference book to dip into, or when you've time, to read deeply."

The book, which is published by Alpha International at £7.99, has sold more than 4,000 copies since being launched in May.



The Marriage Course hosts dinners all over the UK



DINNERS to promote The Marriage Course to church leaders took place at towns and cities across the UK earlier this year. Venues included Winchester, York, Sevenoaks, and Stockport. The dinners, which featured talks from course founders Nicky and Sila Lee, were aimed to encourage and equip church leaders to start running The Marriage Course.

Nicky and Sila Lee set out the vision of how The Marriage Course can help churches to reach out to their local communities.

Nicky and Sila have a vision that thousands of Valentine's Day dinners for couples will be held all across the country, in various venues, in February 2010 and that local media campaigns will help advertise these dinners.

look to what cannot be shaken. Following the Manchester launch, one church hosted the God at Work course during lunchtime in March. Speakers included the Superintendent of Greater Manchester Police who spoke on 'Making Tough Decisions.'

Almost 100 people attended the launch event for the God at Work course at Renfield St Stephens Church in Glasgow in April hosted by Business in Glasgow and Alpha Scotland.

God at Work was also launched at Singapore in May. Ken Costa spoke to over 1,000 people at seminars titled 'Winning at work without losing in life.' He also spoke at one of Singapore's largest churches at the Singapore

Expo MAX Pavilion, where more than 5,000 attended. The international business daily Business Times, wrote, 'It is 'somewhat unconventional for a veteran banker to view the crisis from a spiritual and moral lens.'

The article covered the Alpha Course and God at Work and expressed interest in how Ken Costa could combine both his faith and his work without tension.



Nigel Thompson continued

continued from page 23

they could see where we were – well that also went down in the middle of the night.

Throughout the expedition, we had great assistance from another Naval contact, Captain Pennefather. He had been coordinating the land side for us and by this point was very very close to sending out a search and rescue party from Greenland, which would have been awful.

So everyone at home, including our families, were all assuming the worst. We just disappeared off their monitors in the middle of the night.

When we arrived in Iceland we made contact with the team via mobile phone and they said, 'We haven't heard from you in 18 hours. We thought the worst'.

We stayed one night in Iceland, long enough to repair the boat before continuing on our way. A guy who was organising the fuel for us put us up in his house. We slept in sleeping bags on the floor.

The whole trip took 17 days. We were completely shattered when we arrived in Scotland. We hadn't slept for more than 20 or 40 minutes at a time, apart from in Iceland where we got about five or six hours.

At the end of it all, I suppose it was a bit of an anti-climax. We'd been planning it for two years and the moment it was over I had to go back to work.

So we did it.

We were the first people to cross the Atlantic Ocean, unassisted in an open

Just a few days after we finished, I was brought immediately back to reality with a bump. I had a meeting with clients in Nottingham and I turned up thinking it was all a bit surreal, talking about shopping centres in Nottingham after what I'd just been through.

I always knew Bear was a Christian but he didn't ever force anything on me and we rarely talked about it. It was of no interest to me whatsoever.

I assumed it was part of him being a bit eccentric, unconventional. I don't think Shara was a Christian when we were at university. She certainly never talked about it.

About six of my friends – including Bear and Shara – did Alpha when we first moved to London. I couldn't understand why they were doing it.

Bear invited me and Mick Crosthwaite, to an Alpha supper some time before our RIB trip across the Atlantic.

I had never stepped foot inside HTB and didn't know who Nicky Gumbel was at all, but something he said that night resonated with me. Nicky was talking about how many of us are just existing and waiting for the next thing, like 'when I'm promoted', or 'when I get paid next month'. That really resonated with me.

At that time I was thinking, 'When I get paid next month everything will be fine'; then 'When I get my year-end bonus everything will be fine...' 'When I buy a new house I'll be happier' I've never forgotten that talk.

But I did nothing about it. Mick and I left the supper in perhaps a cynical frame of mind, thinking it was all a bit weird but the supper was nice. And that was it for six years or so.

I got to know Nicky a bit through Bear. They played squash together and I'd go to the gym with Bear a lot when I was training for the boat trip – so I saw Nicky then. But I never expressed any interest in church at all and Alpha rarely came up in conversation.

Then last September, Bear was being interviewed by Nicky at HTB and he invited me along. He suggested we have supper afterwards so I went with Shara and her mother.

Nicky announced that the new Alpha course would be starting in a few days and I remember whispering to Shara that I was thinking about doing it.

She said 'Yeah, you should' and I said 'Well maybe, I don't know.'

Afterwards, we went for supper in the Vicarage. Pippa – Nicky's wife – was serving up soup and Shara suddenly said, in front of Pippa, 'Nigel's thinking of doing the Alpha Course'.

I said 'Well, I didn't quite say that...' but Pippa said 'Oh, that would be wonderful. You could be in our group.'

Then Bear overheard and said to Nicky that I was thinking of doing the Alpha course, and Nicky said 'That's wonderful Nigel, why don't you join our group?'

So one throwaway comment to Shara half an hour before had now got me totally involved.

I said 'Yes, that would be lovely,' but inside I was thinking, 'How am I going to get out of this?'

A week later, I was at work and thinking what on earth had I got myself into. Bear texted me asking me if I was going to go.

I said 'Yes, probably', thinking I'd be letting him down if I didn't. So I went.

I drove in to the car park and sat there with the lights off so no one could see me. There seemed to be thousands of people and I was looking around thinking 'Is there anyone normal here, anyone I could be friends with?'

At that very moment I got a text from Bear saying 'Are you there yet?'

So I went in and registered and then Pippa grabbed me and said 'It's great to see you, we're so pleased you came, come join our group...'

It was a fantastic group, all quite similar in age – just really cool people.

From that first week I genuinely thought it was interesting. There were things I hadn't given any thought to – like who'd written the Bible, or when it was written. I probably didn't realise it was a compilation of hundreds of people's contributions over hundreds of years.

I barely knew the difference between the Old and the New Testament. That wasn't really part of religious education at school.

I'd also known Charlie [Mackesy] for about ten years through Bear, so it was interesting hearing him give the first talk. I didn't know anything about that side of his life. He



spoke very well.

The weeks went on and Alpha became the highlight of my week.

People kept asking me to things on Wednesdays and I said I couldn't go because I was doing this Alpha course. They asked why and I said, 'I'm not really sure why but I'll let you know.'

I couldn't make the first weekend away – when the rest of my group went – so I had to go on the second weekend.

Not only was I on a weekend with the potential of feeling totally out of my comfort zone, but I was also with people I didn't really know.

I remember driving down there, I was giving a few girls a lift. And I was thinking to myself, 'I must have better things to do on a Friday night.' I hadn't told any of my close friends what I was doing because they'd think I'd gone mad.

Shara suddenly said, in front of Pippa, 'Nigel's thinking of doing the Alpha course'

I felt out of my comfort zone by miles.

Jamie [Haith] was leading the weekend and I joined Jamie and Andy's group, which was fantastic. He made me feel utterly at ease, he's such a warm, humorous guy.

Jamie led the Holy Spirit session on Saturday evening and afterwards he came over and asked if I'd like him to pray for me.

Well nobody had ever asked to pray with me before so I thought I can't really say no. So I said yes. It felt amazing.

And then he asked if I'd pray for him. And I'm thinking 'Right, what do I say now?'

So I thought, 'Say whatever comes in your mind, just thank him for everything. If my friends could see me now they'd think I'd gone completely potty.'

I felt like this was so far out of my comfort zone it wasn't even in sight. This was on a whole new level to the Frozen Ocean.

I'd have rather run across the Frozen Ocean than pray for somebody, especially someone in Jamie's position.

There was no thunderbolt for me on Saturday evening. That came more on the Sunday morning when Paul Cowley did a talk about how our faith affects the way we live our lives.

It was when I was driving home on Sunday evening that I first genuinely felt different.



Above: With the expedition's patron, HRH Prince of Wales Nigel Thompson (second from left)

I thought yes, perhaps there is a different way to live my life. Why don't I give it a go? What have I got to lose?

I thought, 'Why don't you just try and be a better person, starting now?' I thought I'd just try and if it didn't work out, well the Alpha course finishes in a few weeks and that's that.

I used to pray before the Alpha course in a very amateur way. Then, before bed, I'd just thank somebody – well, I called him God.

Even then I didn't really believe in God but, you know, you think what's the harm in it?

After the weekend, my prayers were more like, 'Try to make me a better person and make me treat others better.'

At the next Alpha evening, it became clear that everyone had had very different experiences. Some were breaking down in tears and others were thinking,

'What a waste of a weekend.' I was probably somewhere in the middle.

Wednesday nights had become a major pillar of my life by then.

By the end of Alpha, I definitely felt

very different about my life. At the time I was in the process of handing in my notice in my job to start up a new business venture.

I would usually worry about that but I felt quite calm about it. I knew there'd be a few hiccups along the way but I just felt calm.

I do feel like there's somebody looking over me. I feel that someone has a sort of plan for me and knows what I'm going through and is there beside me. It is like having an invisible friend.

Now I'm obsessed by going to church. I go to the 6 o'clock service at St Paul's Onslow Square [part of HTB] and I couldn't imagine missing it. If you'd have said this would happen six months ago I'd have thought you were mad.

I was away at a birthday party in the Cotswolds this weekend. We all went out to lunch on Sunday and then it got to about 4 o'clock, we were all sitting in the pub garden, and I said 'I've got to go.'

I'm sure my friends all think I'm utterly bonkers. They know I'd done this 10 week course but they thought that would be the end of it and then I'd be back. But no, it just gets more and more.

Actually having a relationship with Jesus is something I find difficult to grasp and recognise.

I'd call myself a Christian now, I don't know when I became a Christian. I go to church now, I'm

not sure if that makes me a Christian, I try and lead a different life to what I did six months ago, but I don't know if that makes me a Christian.

I have different morals to before, I think. I hope I treat people better. I think I'm definitely happier, I don't worry as much.

I'm doing the one-year Bible Challenge so I get the email every morning, try to read the relevant passage and then read Nicky's comments, which I find very helpful!

I read it at work or whenever I get a moment really – or I read it on my Blackberry sometimes.

I pray most days. God knows what I want to say before I say it and I take that as a comfort because my prayers aren't very long or sophisticated.

I remember Pippa praying in the group when we first started group prayers and she just said 'Dear God, thank you for the group.' So I thought, if she's done that, then I can surely do it! I relaxed then.

I have come a long way since October/ November 2008.

I love going to church – but who wouldn't love going to the 6 o'clock service? It's like going to a rock concert every Sunday with friends.

I haven't really explained everything in too much detail to my parents. They know I sometimes go to church with Bear. They know Bear very well and they know he has a strong faith. I've probably undersold it.

I started planning this new business around the first week of Alpha. It worries me a bit. I'm giving up a career I've been working at for 12 years to go into the wilderness.

It's a similar kind of property-based business which I'm starting with a New Zealander friend of mine.

I've been very keen to escape my current job and start something on my own. Succeeding or failing is sort of secondary, I've just got to give it a go.

I genuinely do feel that God is with me and behind me every step of the way. If the business succeeds, then great. But if it fails, then I'll do something else.

I've made so many Christian friends through Alpha. They're a completely different group of friends.

I've just finished helping on the Spring Alpha course. I went on one of the weekends and I prayed for people there.

I think Bear thinks it's wonderful that I'm going to church. I also bump into Charlie [Mackesy] quite a lot at the 6 o'clock service.

He told me he said to Bear 'What have you done? What's happened to Nige?' and Bear said 'I don't know, I'm not sure what's happened to him but something's worked.'

Chris Beers continued

I prayed to forgive the man who murdered my grandfather



continued from page 21

So on that Saturday afternoon things started to take a turn for me.

And as I sat in that room it didn't feel like I was just sitting in a conference hall. There was a different feeling in there. Something was going on.

And then Nicky said, 'You don't have to, but if you want to, ask God to give you the gift of speaking in tongues.'

And suddenly everyone started. It was this beautiful sound that I'd never, ever heard before. It was pure and incredibly spiritual and deep, and for the first time in my life I could feel the Holy Spirit in the room.

This went on for a while and I sat down. Nicky had asked the group leaders to go around and put their hands on people's shoulders and pray for them.

As it happened, Ben was sitting right in front of me.

As I sat there, people were being prayed for and I really felt peaceful. Then it felt like I was hit by a huge wave of emotion that I'd never felt before. I had tears running down my face and I couldn't figure out why.

I never cry so it was very strange. I saw a lot of people deep in worship and I didn't understand what was going on. But I knew that it was right. Then Ben came over, sat down beside me and said, 'Chris, do you want me to pray for you?'

I did want him to pray for me but the problem was that I couldn't speak. It was like I was trying so hard to prevent any speaking in tongues from happening... But he understood what I was trying to say and he prayed for me.

I closed my eyes and I really felt God. It was like someone had just plugged me into broadband. For the first time in my life I was communicating with something spiritual.

It was a serious wave of emotion and it was peaceful. It was like God was speaking to me.

The tears were continuing to flow but it wasn't because I was upset – it was like I was almost being cleansed.

I felt God's presence, but I was trying my best not to communicate with him. I was almost trying to hide. But this was

the first time I'd let that barrier down a little.

I asked Ben to pray for me again because I felt like I really needed it. I really enjoyed the first experience so much. So he prayed again. By this time everyone was going into dinner, but I wanted to stay right where I was. I didn't want to go anywhere.

It was an incredible, unforgettable feeling. After the second prayer we sat there for a while and talked. Then he said words to the effect of, 'Are you ready to give your life to Christ?' For a guy who's lived his whole life so un-Christ-like, I had a massive feeling of stepping into the unknown.

My whole life – all the values, all my friends, the way I thought, what I did at weekends, the shows I watched – everything was based on ungodly things.

I knew that if I was to commit my life to Christ, all of those things were going to have to change. But I thought, 'What I've seen over the last five weeks and what I feel now is very real and pure – and I want some of this.'

So I decided to give my life to Christ. I said a prayer asking God to forgive me of all my sins and the way I'd been living. I said I wanted to live more like Jesus.

As I prayed, almost instantly this void that I'd felt for a long time was filled with God.

I felt like I was walking beside God and he was with me. I was very emotional and thought, 'Wow!'

This was a very serious decision for me and I absolutely meant it. That was November 2008.

I had always lived to do the coolest things possible – hanging round the cool crowd, listening to the best new music...

Now I felt I was being asked to abandon what was hip and cool and to become one with Christ. That was a big thing to ask.

After Ben took me through this prayer, I started telling him about Eric Ross, the

guy that murdered my grandfather. Over the years I'd felt so much hatred and vengeance towards Eric – I really wished the worst for him.

I knew that he had tried to commit suicide in jail and I was extremely happy about that.

I asked Ben to pray for Eric but Ben said, 'I think that you should be praying that prayer.'

Before he could even finish the sentence I said, 'You're absolutely right.' And so my first prayer as a Christian was to pray for the guy that murdered my grandfather – not only to pray for him, but to relieve me of all the torment and hatred that I'd been feeling for so many years and to lift that weight off my chest.

For me to forgive Eric was a massive thing. I also prayed that Eric would see some of God's light at the end of what must be a very long and dark tunnel in jail. I prayed for that and I really meant it. After the prayer I felt a lot better.

On the Sunday morning I felt totally different – light, peaceful and happy. For the first time I really looked forward to going to church. I didn't miss my marijuana at all. That weekend was probably the first weekend in 15 years that I hadn't taken any drugs.

We prayed as a group that morning and it was great. I felt really tuned in to what was going on and the sermons were making so much sense – I found I enjoyed them

on a different level, which was fantastic.

At the end of the weekend someone said, 'Do you want to go to HTB for the 5pm service?'

I thought, 'You must be kidding me, I'm totally church-ed out.'

But I went and I absolutely loved it. I drove home after that and dropped in on my dad and step-mom on the way. I told them what had happened and they couldn't believe it.

They were ecstatic, over-the-moon. I slept very well that night.

The following week I felt like God was beside me. Usually I would smoke two or three joints a week. I tried dope once more after that weekend but it didn't go down very well. I think I was conscious of the fact that I didn't need it in my life any more.

It was the same with my drinking after work, I didn't feel like I needed to go for that pint or, back at home, crack open that bottle of wine. Now I have a glass of wine when I go home, but I don't have a bottle.

I've started praying every morning. I

have a book of meditation with three verses, a brief description contextualising them, and then a verse to end it off.

I'm really enjoying that.

Waking up in the morning and reading what to be thankful about, being able to appreciate what God has given us, has made so much difference.

I'm trying to pray in the evening as well. I find that once you start praying, there's a lot more to pray for than you'd think.

Since the Alpha weekend I've been going to church every Sunday and I've made some great friends. I've bought the One Year Bible. I never read the Bible before.

I'd never have called myself an atheist but before Jesus meant nothing to me. Now he means so much. I am taking this one day at a time.

My life has always been based around sales and making money, but now it has changed dramatically. I know I'm called to help others and I'm trying to think how I can do that.

My drinking pattern has completely changed. I haven't felt the need to go out and get completely pissed every weekend. It's virtually the first time in my life since I was about 15 that I've not got drunk.

It's the first time in years that I've not taken drugs. So my life's changing quite a bit and I'm really excited about it. Christianity isn't as un-cool or as naff as I thought!

I really do feel a sense of inner peace that I've never had before. It's something I enjoy every time I wake up.

I think a lot of people have an interest in who God is, but they don't know much about Him.

That's what's so great about the Alpha course. It allows you to be around people who are 'normal' and to share views that don't need to be Christian. For me that was really important.

Alpha's a great opportunity to hear a really interesting talk – whether you're a Christian or not. And then to get into small groups and reflect on what's been said and hear everyone's point of view.

You're not only forming great relationships and talking about issues that you would never be able to speak about outside Alpha, but you're also learning more about what and who God is.

How would you ever do that if not on a course like Alpha?

Now I understand why I saw all that peace in Christian people's eyes. It's because they're thankful and they're giving.

I'm just a baby Christian but it's already been an incredible journey. I would recommend it to anyone.

It is the best decision that I've ever made.

It's the first time in years that I've not taken drugs, so my life's changing quite a bit

Noh Eun Ju continues her story

continued from page 25

small group discussion. My entire group used to pray for me and afterwards I was able to walk around.

During that time I experienced quite a few miracles. The doctors had said with the size of the tumour, it was almost certain that it would spread either into my bones or elsewhere in my body.

But the operation was completely successful. The tumour was removed and nothing had spread through my body. Medically, this was not seen to have been possible.

Just before the Alpha weekend I received a re-examination and

was told that I was clean.

When I went on the Holy Spirit weekend, I had an amazing experience. Initially I couldn't receive, because I was still hurting very badly from my first marriage.

I knew I hadn't forgiven my ex-husband. My small group leader said, 'You need to forgive.'

When I did forgive him, I received the gift of tongues and felt such an amazing presence of the Holy Spirit in me. I knew then that I was healed of the cancer for certain.

By that time I had already accepted Jesus Christ but it was

only on the Alpha weekend that I really felt in my heart that I'd accepted him and had given him my life.

Since that weekend I haven't missed church. I also never miss the prayer meeting at 5.30 every morning.

Every church in Korea has these prayer meetings – Monday to Friday. Our church assigns us three chapters of the Bible a day, so I read the Bible every day.

I look much happier and brighter now. My whole appearance has changed.

When I went to Alpha my husband used to say that I'd turned into a crazy woman. But after seeing me healed he started to change. It took him some time to come with me to church, (obviously he had such a strong Buddhist faith).

But three courses after my course he signed up to Alpha, and he had an experience of the Holy Spirit while registering. He then

started to go to church regularly and he accepted Christ. He did Alpha in 2005.

Through seeing me healed and the change in me personally, my parents have now verbally accepted Christ, but they haven't gone to church yet. They haven't quite made the transition.

My dad especially hated Christianity because he was a strong Buddhist.

Now my parents-in-law have been converted and have started going to church – that's through my husband believing.

Jesus is my everything now. I could give my life for him. Before I didn't even believe that he existed – I thought he was just a myth.

I never really knew the gospel stories. I only knew what I picked up from different sources, so no picture was complete.

I didn't know about the crucifixion and I wasn't interested. I'd seen films about Christ, but I just took them as fiction.

Alpha was my first real

introduction to Jesus' life. I've been a pastorate leader since becoming a Christian. My husband and I have a long term vision to set up a church in China, so both of us are really praying about that.

Our church has a very strong link with China and they send quite a lot of missionaries there. So when they're running an Alpha course, we go out to support them.

I have actually given an Alpha talk in China. At the moment we give material support and prayer.

My marriage is so much better now. Before, when I hadn't forgiven my previous husband, it caused a rift between myself and my current husband.

We pray together now. He also goes to the morning prayer meetings.

Both my daughters go to church and they're very devout. My eldest daughter is a huge evangelist.

I feel I can't do anything in my life now without Christ.



THE 2009 ALPHA INVITATION

The new 2009 Alpha Invitation materials asks the UK where they stand on the big questions of life, offering the opportunity to explore further by attending an Alpha course.

To purchase resources visit the Alpha shop online at alphashop.org

To download these files, e-tools and other free resources visit alphafriends.org

To register your course, find your local Alpha Adviser, and for handy tips on planning launch events, course promotion, and lots more visit alphafriends.org



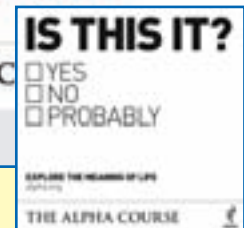
POSTER



POSTCARD



POSTER



DRINKS MAT



Ready to Launch?

With almost 1,000 Marriage Courses running across the UK, we are planning a nationwide campaign in February 2010 to launch The Marriage Course to the nation! Our plans include romantic Valentine's dinners (on or around Valentine's Day) for couples all around the country to introduce them to The Marriage Course, combined with a local and national media campaign.

If you are a Marriage Course leader or would like to get involved in this initiative, we would like to invite you to:

Ready to Launch?

A day of training and refreshing to equip you to put on a Valentine's dinner and approach the media effectively.

Saturday 19th September

St Pauls Church Onslow Square, London SW7 3NX

10am - 4.30pm

For information about the day or if you are interested in attending, please contact family.life@htb.org.uk

Worldwide Contacts

There are currently 42,530 registered Alpha Courses in 163 countries around the world. If you would like to know more about Alpha courses in a particular country, please contact either the National Alpha Office or the Regional Office (EMEA, Americas, Asia Pacific), or visit alpha.org/findacourse. If you are interested in any other Alpha speciality ministries, Family Life ministries or Worship Central please contact your National Alpha Office or the Regional Office (below) in the first instance, otherwise please contact the Head Office, details below.

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If you are interested in any other other Alpha speciality ministries, Family Life ministries or Worship Central please contact your National Alpha Office or the Regional Office (above) in the first instance, otherwise please contact the Head Office, details below.

HEAD OFFICES - ALPHA MINISTRIES

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Youth Alpha

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w. themarriagecourse.org

God at Work

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Worship Central

e. info@worshipcentral.org
w. worshipcentral.org

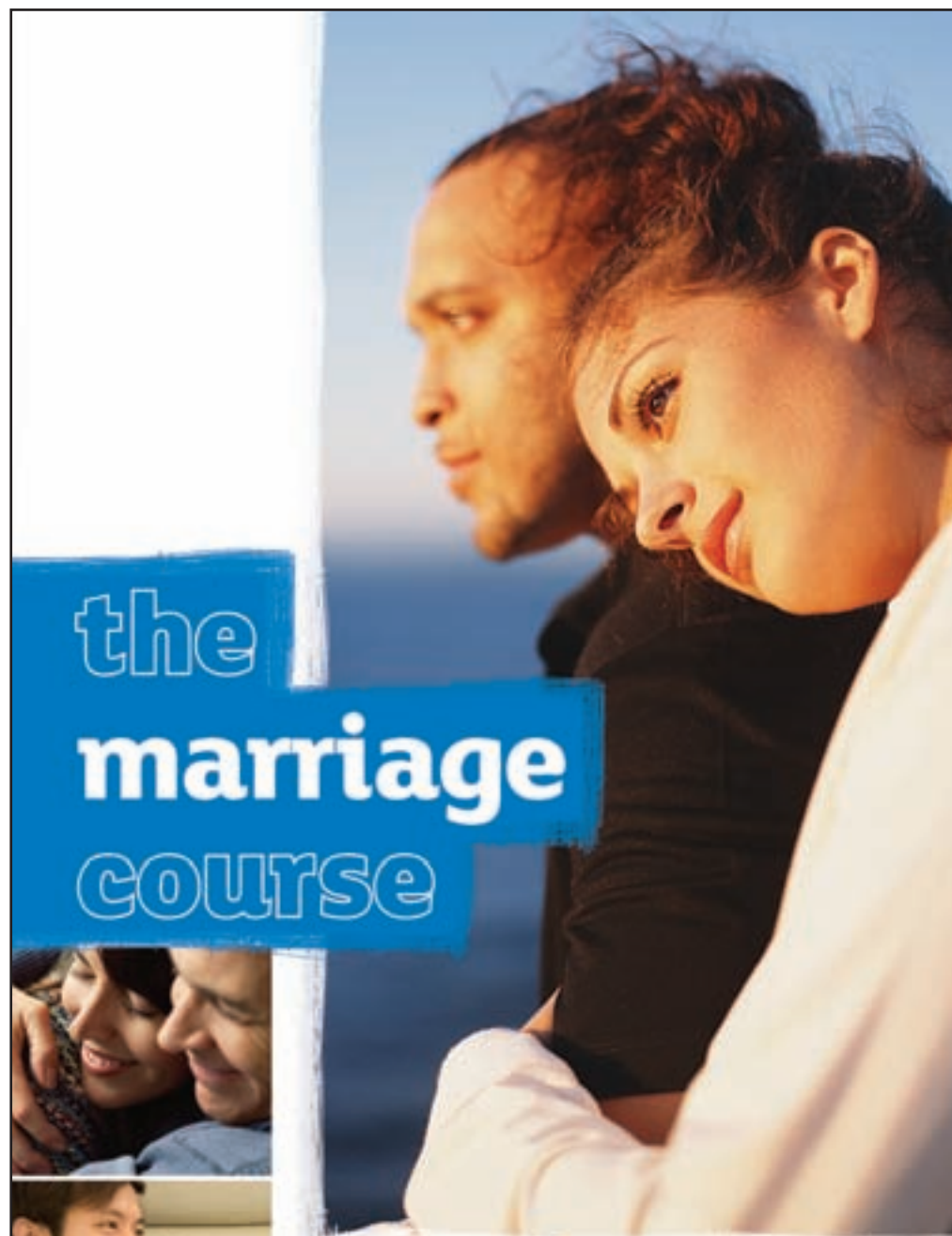
Conferences at Holy Trinity Brompton, London

www.htb.org.uk/conferences

HTB Conference Information +44 (0) 207 052 0440

For more information on any of the conferences listed below, please contact: htbconferences@htb.org.uk

For general enquiries about Alpha International, please contact +44 (0) 845 644 7544



the marriage course

conference
18 September 2009

Learn the tools to support engaged and married couples and learn how The Marriage Course and The Marriage Preparation Course can work alongside Alpha to reach people in your community.

Main speakers:
Nicky & Sila Lee

Book online now at themarriagecourse.org





Prison Ministry Conference
20 November 2009

'Working Together Inside and Outside the Prison Wall'

This conference will cover work on both sides of the prison wall and is aimed at churches, volunteers and organisations involved or wishing to become involved in these fields.

Talks and interviews will be given by Police Officers, Church Leaders, Volunteers, Ex-Offenders, Politicians, Victims and Prison Staff; as well as new seminars, training, worship and time for prayer.

Alpha for Prisons   

from **vision to action** conference

TRANSFORM YOUR TEAM,
TRANSFORM YOUR COMMUNITY

Thursday 26th November, 2009

This conference is an attempt to pass on organisation and management skills to any church leader who would like them. The material will suit leaders of churches of all sizes, and their teams.



ALPHA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES www.alphafriends.org/events



THE ALPHA CONFERENCE

USA

Orlando, FL 20-21 Oct 2009

USA - To register or for more information on USA Conferences, please contact Conference Registrations on: +1 800 362 5742 or alphaconferences@alphausa.org

THE MARRIAGE CONFERENCE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

Andover, Hampshire, UK
14 July 2009

+44 (0) 020 7052 0326
Please register online at themarriagecourse.org/conferences/listing.asp

THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE CONFERENCE

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
26-27 Oct 2009

+603 2698 8200
conf@familylife.org.my

THE MARRIAGE CONFERENCE

SOUTH AFRICA

Johannesburg 21 Nov 2009
Durban 24 Nov 2009
Cape Town 28 Nov 2009

To register or for more information, please contact Alpha South Africa on +27 (0) 12 998 8144 or themarriagecourse@alphasa.co.za



LATEST RESOURCES

NEW FROM ALPHA INTERNATIONAL

NEW FROM ALPHA INTERNATIONAL

NEW FROM ALPHA INTERNATIONAL

the marriage course

updated & revised

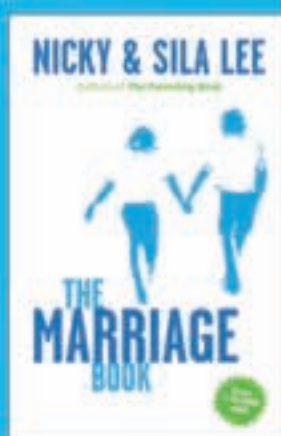
NEW



Held over seven sessions and offers any married couple the tools to build a strong and healthy relationship that lasts a lifetime.

A promotional DVD for guests and leaders, plus introductory guides, leaders' guide, guest manual, posters and invitations are also available.

See alphashop.org or request a Publications Catalogue from the Alpha Publications Hotline.



The Marriage Book

Book / Code /
978 1 904074 55 7 / £7.99
ISBN 9781905887392

The Marriage Course DVD

The Marriage Course DVD
New for 2009! Refilmed,
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DVD Code MCDVD08 / £50.00



Leaders' Toolkit

Contains invaluable training sessions, filmed clips for experienced leaders to illustrate their live talks, promotional films for potential guests and leaders, training notes and much more.

DVD and CD-ROM /
Code MCTKDVD / £35.00

Promoting your alpha course 2009-2010

Be a part of inviting the nation to hear the good news about Jesus Christ through an Alpha course.

ELECTRONIC ARTWORK AVAILABLE

Electronic artwork available – follow the "Resources" link on alphafriends.org

ALPHA POSTERS

Posters available – sizes A4 to A1, portrait and landscape, in two different designs. £0.50 to £2.00.

ADVERTISING

Plain poster pack also available as well as drinks mats, a banner (large and small) and balloons. See alphashop.org or the Publications Catalogue for full details.



TO GIVE TO POTENTIAL GUESTS

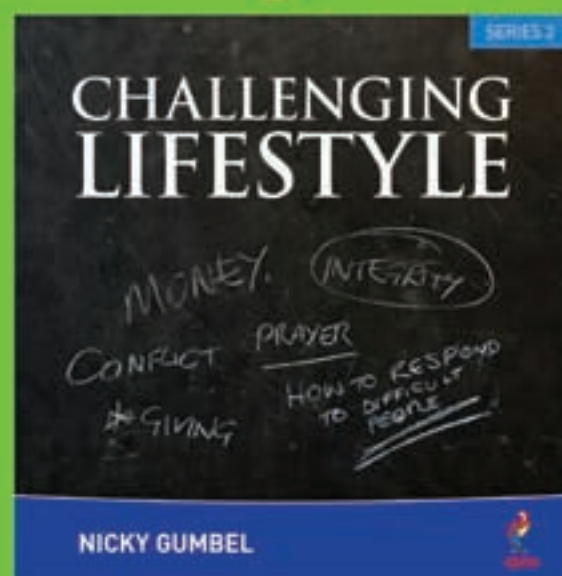
Alpha postcards A6 size, Alpha Course invitations/registration forms, The Alpha Course Introductory leaflet (for guests), Alpha Wallet Cards (business card style). See alphashop.org or the Publications Catalogue for full details.

Resource from this year's publicity campaign.

These resources are designed for you to overprint your details and they will work on most printers, depending on their specification.



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Series 2 DVD and Manual

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Challenging Lifestyle DVD Series 2

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HOW TO ORDER:

Alpha Publications Catalogue & Alpha News:

Everything you need can be found on alphashop.org. If you would like a hard copy of the Catalogue or Alpha News contact the Alpha Publications Hotline.



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