
Alpha Facilitator Notebook



Alpha Prison & Reentry

2020

Volume 1, Issue 4

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Welcome and THANK YOU for volunteering to serve

Dear Course Facilitator,

As the title indicates, this guide is meant to serve you in your successful presentation of the Alpha Course in an institutional setting. As a part of the Alpha USA Team, we are here to assist you in your decision to follow the leading of the Lord by participating as an Alpha Course Facilitator. We offer support through the Chaplain or Alpha Leader at your facility.

Although as each institution is different and thus to some degree will your course be different from others, there are some components of the Alpha Course that we call *Alpha DNA*, which should be consistent among all courses. We have found over time that a truly successful course will contain the following:

1. Adequate training and consistent prayer
2. Sessions are planned and structured
3. NO PREACHING
4. All talks are presented
5. Holy Spirit sessions are conducted in a different manner than other sessions
6. Facilitators represent themselves as role models of Christ-Centered thinking and behavior everywhere in the facility.

This path to which the Lord has called you will not always be smooth and convenient to travel. From experience, however, of having lived most of my adult life in the company of inmates, I know that when you see Christ in the eyes of those whom you meet each week inside those walls you will know without a doubt that your steps were truly directed by Jesus Christ Himself.

May God Bless You,



Jack Cowley, National Director
Alpha USA Prisons & Reentry

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission:

Volunteers are precious in the sight of God. They are physical expressions of His compassion.

Ultimately, we represent Jesus. We bring our heavenly Father 's words of hope and forgiveness, the Son's compassion, and the encouragement and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to enter the lives of other inmates with wisdom and compassion and always be pointing toward the cross.

As you are aware, prison is often a hopeless, dark, restless, frightening place. Jesus Christ can bring hope to the hopeless, light that chases away the darkness, peace that surpasses all understanding, and can take away our fear of the physical world. Our mission is to provide our guests the opportunity to discover for themselves how Christ might play a role in their lives or to rein-gage those guests that are searching for a deeper relationship with Him in order that they may lead a socially acceptable lifestyle while in still in prison or upon their release.

Vision:

Jesus came to serve. We are authentic about our faith and follow the examples of Jesus to love and serve others on Alpha, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the mission he set before us. Our vision is to share the gospel with inmates, to allow them the freedom to ask questions and to determine for themselves "is there is more to life than this?"

Values:

1. Guests come first – this will inevitably result in sacrifice on our part
2. Everyone on Alpha will feel loved, cared for, accepted and valued – we will never do anything to make anyone feel small, judged, or unworthy.
3. Attitudes matter – we must be REAL and sincere – no faking.
4. It's not about us – it's about HIM. We serve humbly, depending totally on Him for the results.

Servant Leadership (2 Timothy 2:14-26)

Background

1. Servant and Leadership almost seem like an oxymoron. People in leadership often think that they are the leader and everyone else is there to serve them. Jesus in normal fashion though challenges our worldly perspective and gives us the perfect picture of a true leader - that is a Servant Leader!
2. Servant might be better defined as a slave. As follower of Jesus Christ, we have put to death our sinful desires and passions that once enslaved us and we have become willing bondservants of Jesus Christ. A bond servant is one who willingly serves his master. And this is exactly what Jesus modeled for the disciples and for you and I as the way to be a leader.
3. Therefore, to become a servant leader we must pursue humility! We need to have the perspective of John the Baptist in John 3:30 where he said about Jesus, "He must become greater, I must become less." Being a servant leader is not about being the center of the show or the man in charge. It is about allowing Jesus Christ to be the center of the show and you and I doing everything in our power to let him lead. That requires much humility, the removal of pride and ego, and allowing the Spirit of God to live through us.

Characteristics of the Servant Leader

1. Do not quarrel over words (vs. 14)
2. Worry about yourself (vs.15) we are responsible for presenting ourselves to God.
3. Rightly handle the truth (vs. 15) Knowing the scriptures helps us to leading in a godly way. Our personal relationship with Jesus is what fuels our relationships with others. Therefore, we cannot lead people to a place where we are not. Make it a priority to rightly handle and study the word of God.
4. Focus on what matters (vs. 16) If we are focusing on things that are not important it will lead others into more ungodliness. There are many distractions as a leader and so many things competing for our attention. Take time to prioritize and only give time and energy to the things that really matter.
5. Purify yourself (vs. 21) Confess our sin and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. In getting our own rights heart before God it prepares us to be used by God and prepares us to do his work.
6. Pursue Godliness in your own life (vs. 22-23) As scripture and the holy spirit reveals sin in our lives flee from it and chase after: righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Concentrate on how these things can be practiced in your service.
7. Be patient & gentle (vs. 24-26) Sometimes the hardest thing to do in a position of leadership is to be patient. We have an idea, a plan, a goal and when people mess that up it becomes frustrating. We need to be patient and gentle in our leadership role in hopes that God can grant people repentance and they can escape the snare of the devil. The next time you must practice patience don't look at it as a negative thing but rather as a positive thing that could lead someone to repentance.

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked who was the greatest he responded, "The first will be last and the last will be first." Hmmm what was he talking about? Jesus was saying the greatest leader is the one who makes himself last, a servant of all others. And isn't that what Jesus himself did. God himself, the one who should be worshipped by all, humbled himself to human form. He was born of a poor virgin (not a royal family) in a barn (not in a palace), he was a woodworker (not a government official), he came to serve the world (not be served) he died on a cross and was thrown in a tomb. But he is willing decided to humble himself, make himself lower than what he deserved because he knew that it would elevate God Almighty, and accomplish his will.

Application for Facilitators

How does this apply to you? While in a prison setting one inmate should not be "over" another inmate. Just like being the Captain of a prison baseball team or debate team, Alpha Facilitators are often viewed as "Leaders". As such, you have a responsibility to those on your Alpha Course to "walk the walk" while using Christ as an example for your role, "Servant Leader". The success of the Course may very well depend on how you are preserved and interact with your guests to a much greater degree than how you manage the Course.

Expectations for Facilitators

1. One hundred percent (100%) attendance on all sessions, including
 - a. Know the material
 - b. Attend facilitator prayer time
 - c. Model Christ within the facility always
 - d. Debrief each session with all facilitators
 - e. Communicate with Chaplain or Alpha Leader

Guiding Principals

1. Bringing people into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the reason we do Alpha.
2. Everything done with GREAT LOVE!
3. Come prepared—PRAY, know the topic—PRAY!
4. Meet the guests where they are—pace the group accordingly.
5. Show respect for people, even if you disagree. In prison culture, respect is valued even more highly than on the —outside.
6. Create a safe atmosphere where people feel free to be honest and ask questions.
7. Be an ENCOURAGER and a LISTENER, not a teacher and a talker! It cannot be expressed how important it is to LISTEN. Prisoners rarely have people who listen to them. Matters of faith are deeply personal and spiritual conversations stand out in stark contrast usual prison talk. They are hungry for deeper conversation. Inmates look forward to seeing you when you come in. Personal conversation is a humanizing activity, and you are helping them to stay in touch with their genuine selves. Learn not only to be a good listener but a genuine one. Once you —earn the right to be heard, you will be able to be an effective influence.
8. Maintain a consistent devotional life being —Prayed Up, Read Up, and Filled Up.
9. Keep short accounts; a) With God through confession; b) With one another. Don't give the devil a foothold!
10. Pray daily for your small group picturing them in your mind's eye and when praying speak their first/last names. This will help you remember their names early on. This is very important when you meet them and greet them to know their names.

Facilitating a Small Group

1. Small Group Time

- a. An Alpha small group typically has 2 facilitators plus 8-12 guests. Always be prepared!!
- b. People come for many reasons, but people will stay sometimes because they come to care for the people in their small group.
- c. People learn together and grow together. In a small group, people can be ministered to on individual levels vs. a large group.
- d. We are facilitators of small groups, not —leaders|. The attitude is not teacher/student. It is guest/host. You want to make your group feel as if they are a guest in your home
- e. Guests come first – this will inevitably result in sacrifice on our part
- f. Everyone on Alpha will feel loved, cared for, accepted and valued – we will never do anything to make anyone feel small, judged, or unworthy.
- g. Attitudes matter – we must be REAL and sincere – never fake.
- h. It's not about us – it's about HIM. We serve humbly, depending totally on Him for the result.

PREPARE...PREPARE.... PREPARE!!

- i. Facilitate discussion – be prepared and know your group and the subject matter.
- j. Guide and steer the conversation, manage the silences, ask follow-up questions, draw people out
- k. Foster an environment of openness. No teaching, preaching, sitting in judgment, or making people feel small.

2. Introductions and Icebreakers

- a. Start by introducing yourself and briefly sharing a little bit about your life and your reason for being a facilitator and part of the Alpha team. Don't be afraid to personalize it a little to make the guests feel at ease later in their sharing.
- b. Start each night with an icebreaker. There are many good ones that pertain to the subject you are about to discuss located in this training manual. The icebreaker will help your group to begin to bond as they share and laugh together.

3. Be aware and sensitive to a different dynamic here than in a regular Alpha group. Those guests don't have to see each other again. Our inmate guests cannot avoid seeing each other, so they may be less likely to share personal things easily. Be creative in your icebreakers – some guests may not share beyond the icebreaker for several weeks.

4. Ground Rules

- a. Complete confidentiality in the group. There is no question too simple, too hostile or too silly. There are no stupid questions. Ask anything!!
- b. Respect others and their opinions.
- c. No hogging the conversation, no bogging it down, no jumping from topic to topic.
- d. End on time.
- e. Assure guests they will not be called upon to pray out loud or read anything unless they volunteer ahead of time. This may relieve any areas of stress they might have about being in a small group with people they don't know.

5. Discuss the Talk

- a. Usually, someone will have a reaction to what was brought up in the video.
 - i. Keep it simple
 1. What do you think?
 2. How do you feel about...?
 3. Did anything Nicky said surprise you?
 4. Did anything you saw in the video speak to you?
- b. Ask open ended questions...there is no wrong answer.
- c. If you hear something that is complete heresy, you don't make the person who said it feel stupid. Instead, you say something like —That's very interesting...I've never heard it put like that before. I think the Bible talks about something like that. Then point them to scripture to investigate Scripture.
- d. Draw others into discussion without calling on one specific person
 - i. What does someone else think?
 - ii. What does this side of the circle think?
- e. Ask follow-up questions
 - i. Tell me more?
 - ii. I'm not sure I understand. Can you explain it again/differently?
- f. Manage the silences
 - i. 10 second rule – always count to 10 before saying something. Many times, this gives the quiet guest time to work up the courage to speak
 - ii. Prime the Pump – after you have counted 10 seconds, if it is still silent, it is appropriate to ask another question OR share something that is personal to you to get the conversation going i.e. The story Nicky told about (blank) really touched me. I never thought about (blank) having such an impact on my life...has anyone else felt that?
 - iii. **Redirect people to their books (after 10 seconds of silence) asking; —Was there anything else you jotted down while you were watching the video?**

6. Learn to Study the Bible Together

- a. Model Bible Study at least once
- b. Move at the rate of the slowest person in your group
- c. Keep it simple. Read the passage, then ask:
 - i. What does it say?
 - ii. What does it mean?
 - iii. How can I apply it to my life?
- d. We want to keep it easy so that they can start learning to do it on their own.
- e. **30 days** by Nicky Gumbel is a good book to have, because it gives many easy, short Bible studies.

7. Learn to Pray Together

- a. Keep prayers short and simple. No long eloquent prayers – some people may be unaccustomed and uncomfortable with praying aloud. We want to keep it real and simple i.e.—Thank you, Lord, for the weather. Amen
- b. If facilitators pray something long and beautiful, they will think —I could never pray like that. I shouldn't even try. But if we pray simply, they may think —I can do that.

- c. One facilitator should not pray aloud, so if others don't want to pray, they won't feel like they have to because they are the only ones not praying aloud.
- d. Leave easy things for guest to pray for. If you pray for everything the group has requested prayer for, or if you pray for all the easy, obvious things, you leave them with nothing to pray for.

8. Learn to Minister to Each Other

- a. As small group members become friends and learn more, they tend to start ministering and praying for each other.

Praying for Others

1. What is prayer?

- a. Prayer is first and foremost about building our relationship with God. Just like earthly fathers long to spend time with their children, so does our Father in heaven. We, therefore, should spend time praising Him, thanking Him, telling Him that we are sorry when we do things that we should not, and then ask Him for things according to His will.

2. How do we pray?

- a. Find a place where you can devote your attention to God and relax.
- b. Be authentic when you pray – God knows your heart and wants to hear things in your words. C.S. Lewis wrote —Lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.
- c. Be specific in your prayers and try to keep notes or a journal of what you pray. When you see prayers getting answered, it will start to build your faith.
- d. Listen....Don't just talk, but give God time to respond. It is kind of like going to a doctor and telling him what is wrong and then not staying for the diagnosis.

Check out some of God's promises in the Bible:

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God"*

1 John 5:14 *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: That if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."*

Matthew 28:20 *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Isaiah 30:21 *"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way; walk in it."*

Prayer Busters from Bill Hybels

Unconfessed sin – *Ask God to reveal anything that is in your life that is blocking the path He has for you. (Isaiah 59:2)*

Unresolved relational conflict – *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5: 23-24)*

Uncaring attitudes – *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13)*

Selfishness – *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4:3)*

Prayerlessness – *"You want something but don't get it... You do not have because you do not ask God" (James 4:2)*

3. Why do we pray for others?

- a. God is everywhere. He is always with us. Why do we need to pray –Come Holy Spirit? He is with us, but we can pray for a greater sense of His presence. He promises that when 2 or more are gathered, He is with us. He also commands us to pray and that when we ask, we will receive.
- b. Sometimes there is a fear to pray for others. What happens if I pray for someone, and nothing happens?
 - i. Every time we ask, He comes. Nothing never happens.
 - ii. Moses and the Red Sea
 - a. Army of Egypt behind them, Red Sea in front. God tells Moses to put out his hand and God would part the waters
 - b. Moses might have been thinking —What happens if I pray for this, and nothing happens? Why do You have to ask for me to be involved? Why don't You just part the Red Sea?!
 - c. For whatever reason, God invites and desires us to be involved in His work on earth. Like Moses, we should obey.
 - d. Imagine Moses' relief when he holds out his hand and the waters' part. He might have looked really good to the Israelites at that moment, but he makes sure that they know he didn't do much. He just held out his hand in obedience. God does the work; He allows us to be part of it.

4. Jesus gives US power and authority!

- a. **The Twelve.** *“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”* Luke 9:1
- b. **The 72.** *“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them...heal the sick who are there and tell them, „The Kingdom of God is near you.“...the seventy-two returned with joy and said, „Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.“”* Jesus reminds them, *“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* Luke 10:1-20
- c. **The rest of us.** *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Matthew 28:18-20

5. Values of Prayer Ministry: It is not our ministry, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit

- a. We ask He comes: We must get the perspective right. Don't worry about what happens or doesn't happen.
- b. Luke 10:17 Don't be distracted when things do happen. Keep your eyes on the vine, not on the fruit.
- c. We can't take credit for anything that happens during or as a result of prayer ministry time. We also don't take blame if it seems something doesn't happen. It is all up to God. This frees us to be obedient vessels.
 - i. Don't try to rate your spiritual health on what happens or doesn't happen when you pray for someone.

- d. Since it's HIS ministry, we aim for simplicity and truthfulness in our prayers
 - i. No need for the –Christian|| voice or hushed tones
 - ii. No super –Spiritual|| language
- e. Sometimes there is a fear to pray for others. What happens if I pray for someone and nothing happens?
 - i. Listen for God working during prayer ministry. Ask Him, —Lord, what do you want to say to this person now?
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 14 If you sense something, check that it is encouraging, comforting, uplifting before you say it aloud
 - iii. It is okay to ask after some silence, –Do you sense anything?
 - a. Sometimes they will have a sense of something (for example, an overwhelming sense of God's love for them) that you're not feeling. You may feel that the prayer time is not working, but they will feel that it is.
 - b. If they say that they sense a —block, you can pray that God shine the light of the Spirit into their hearts and reveal anything that they need to confess and repent for. If anything comes to mind, they don't have to share it aloud with you, but ask them to give it to God. Then resume praying.

6. Biblical Authority

- a. Spirit of God and the Word of God never conflict, they complement, Jesus said *"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free"*
- b. Build all prayer on Biblical truth and promises
 - i. Learn verses that are important to you and that you think might be important to others. Use them in your prayer
 - 1. Repentance – Psalm 51
 - 2. Fear – Psalm 91
 - 3. Anxiety – Philippians 4:6-7
 - 4. Guidance – Psalm 37:5
 - 5. Temptation – 1 Corinthians 10:13
 - ii. Share that one aspect of faith is finding a promise of God to hold on to and believing in it and that He will act.
 - iii. If they are praying for guidance, you can show them in the Bible that if you commit your way to God and trust in Him, that He will act. Tell them to hold on to that promise
- c. Pray that people have an experience of God's love for them. (Luke 3:52)

7. Dignity of Individual/Respect

- a. Remember that each person you pray with is a beloved child of God
- b. Confidential
- c. Quiet / Private. Be sensitive to their feelings
- d. Affirm, don't condemn
 - i. God points out things in people's lives, but it is not our job during prayer ministry to do that
 - ii. Don't put additional burdens on people. If you feel on overwhelming sense that you feel compelled to mention something delicate, double check yourself. If you still feel you must, be very gentle.

8. Preliminaries

- a. Greet with a warm smile.

Establish the issue, ask in an interested manner: How may we pray for you? OR How would you like us to pray for you? Use gentle follow up questions to determine the issues. When they are through describing the issue, ask —Is there anything else?

- b. Encourage the person to be expectant and to assume a receptive posture (hands out in front of them as if they were receiving a gift from God). Encourage them to focus the best they know how on Jesus, this is their time to receive, they don't need to pray.
- c. Explain what will happen.
 - i. Close your eyes, relax and receive
 - ii. There may be periods of silence while we are listening to the Lord
 - iii. We may ask a question or two to see how things are going
 - iv. When done, we will say —Amen.

9. Praying

- a. Pray with eyes open, to see the person's reaction to what God is doing through the spoken and silent prayers.
- b. Invite the Holy Spirit to come. Pray for the issues discussed previously. If they asked for prayer for another person, pray for that person first, close the prayer, and say, "Now how may I pray for you?"
- c. Bless what you perceive to be God's work. (Remember: eyes open)
- d. Focus on Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not the evil one.
- e. Review. It's okay to ask, "Do you understand God to be saying anything to you?" OR "Are you aware of God doing anything?" Continue or adjust your prayer or close as appropriate.
- f. Concluding. When you feel that prayer time is nearing completion conclude by thanking God the Father for his unconditional love for them and for how God will answer these prayers. Then conclude with AMEN. Let the person know that answers to prayer can appear to be gradual or they can be immediate. Invite them to continue coming for prayer during Sunday services.
- g. Thank them for coming.

10. Reminders

- a. Nothing never happens
- b. Never advise, suggest, hint, or imply discontinuation of any course of treatment or medicine. Leave that to the doctors.
- c. Love demands we maintain confidentiality always. Always ask permission if you would like to share anything in a wider context.
- d. Confidentiality is the responsible use of information. If someone is about to harm themselves or others, share that information with a coach, team member, or staff
- e. Don't give advice.
- f. Don't approach the prayer time with YOUR agenda, only trust in God's agenda.
- g. Don't linger after the prayer time chatting as this often turns into a time of problem solving and advice giving.

11. Praying "The Prayer" Leading someone to Christ

- a. We want to allow our guests the opportunity to receive Christ in their lives. If this is

- their desire, make this as easy for them as possible.
- b. Jesus Christ needs to be Lord of their lives before we invite them to be filled with the Spirit. If someone approaches and asks to be filled with the Spirit, ask questions to be sure they have accepted Christ.
 - i. When did you give your life to Christ?
 - ii. If someone says they are not sure, ask them would you like to make sure? Then lead them in the prayer to receive Christ.
 - iii. If further clarification is necessary, it's okay to ask the clarifying question Do you feel you know Jesus personally? If the answer is no, then ask, would you like to?
 - c. If someone has not accepted Christ and they come for prayer with this desire this is one prayer they need to pray for themselves. They can repeat this prayer after you, or you can offer them the outline of how to pray... the main point is they should pray this themselves.

Lord Jesus Christ,

I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (take a few moments to ask His forgiveness for anything that is on your conscience.)

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

Thank you that You died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank You that You offer me forgiveness and the gift of Your Spirit.

I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by Your Holy Spirit, to be with me forever. Thank You, Lord Jesus, Amen.

Keep focused on the Lord and the individual – don't get distracted by what else is happening in the room.

First Night Welcome Outline

- 1) Welcome & Introduction of Facilitator(s). Let the guests know how excited your team is to be there!!! Each facilitator should say a few words of introduction and something about themselves.
- 2) What is Alpha—well, Alpha is a practical introduction to the Christian faith. It is classified as a course in Character Development. How many of us don't need that!!! Our course will be running 15 weeks. It is a place where anything can be asked.... a place to discuss our questions about Christianity in a non-pressured, friendly atmosphere. No question is too basic, no question is too hostile. We're to help each other sort it all out. Above all else there will be NO PREACHING!!
- 3) Alpha was started over 30 years ago, in England, and is run by practically every Christian denomination in the world. Over 8600 courses are running in the U.S. churches on the streets and over 300 prisons. To be a part of Alpha is to be part of a worldwide movement in discovering what life is all about.
- 4) We like to think Alpha stands for:
 - A**-Anyone from non-Christians to seasoned Christians are encouraged to attend
 - L**-Learning and laughter – have fun!
 - P**-Prison, church, college, nursing home, practically anywhere
 - H**-Helping one another
 - A**-Ask anything
- 5) Each night we will spend a little time in fellowship. We will then open in prayer, sing a couple of worship songs, then watch a video of Nicky Gumbel. After the video, we will break up into small groups that will stay together for the entire course to discuss what we heard. About mid-way through the course we will have Alpha Saturday which is an entire day that we'll get to spend together to really focus on the topic of the Holy Spirit. Many Alpha graduates say that day is their favorite part of the course.

(Note: Worship time is a way to set the tone for the evening. Since not all guests will know the words to the songs, they should either be shown on an overhead projector or passed out on song sheets. Alpha is a time as well for fellowshiping over food, as with courses on the street's food is provided to the guests. If possible, approval should be gained to allow drinks and snacks to be provided or either allow the guests to bring canteen items which can be shared by all in attendance)
- 6) So, let's get this course started out right, by laughing!
 - Shark Joke – The Shark Joke is always good to illustrate —wondering what I'm jumping into. We like to tell this joke because some of you might be wondering just what it is that YOU are jumping into here.
 - a) However, tonight we are going to do things a little different than the other nights of the course. We are going to watch a couple of short videos. One is a video of Paul Cowley

who heads up Prison Alpha in the U.K. and the other is a testimonial of some folks who have been through Prison Alpha. After the videos, we will break out into our small groups. After small group introductions, we will come back together for a few more words.

- b) For those of you who have 100% unexcused absences there will be completion certificates placed in your files for program completion.

- c) Invite them back next week and give them the handout on the topic: (Is There More To Life Than This).

Small Group Discussions Guidelines

Session 1 – Is There More To Life Than This

- 1) Warm welcome and thanks for coming back. Are there any new people?
 - a. If new people, welcome and very short review and assign to a small group

 - b. There are many reasons people don't want anything to do with Christianity – some of which are they think it's boring, or untrue, or completely irrelevant to their lives.

- 2) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small groups
 - i. Briefly touch on ground rules
 - Complete confidentiality
 - Respect one another
 - Explain that their facilitator will go over these rules again in small group and they can ask any questions

- 3) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week's session: Who is Jesus

Session 2 – Who Is Jesus?

- 1) Warm welcome. Are there any new people?
 - a. If new people, very short review and assign to small group

 - b. Tonight, we're going to look at topic: Who IS Jesus? In our western culture, most people have heard of the name Jesus, even if they know nothing about Him. Most people have some opinion about Jesus, right or wrong. So, who is He? Who do historians say He is? Who did HE say He was? Who do you say He is? That's what we're going to focus on tonight.

- 2) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small groups

- i. Briefly touch on ground rules
 - Complete confidentiality
 - Respect one another
 - Explain that their facilitator will go over these rules again in small group and they can ask any questions
- 3) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week's session: Why Did Jesus Die?

Session 3 – Why Did Jesus Die?

- 1) Welcome
 - a. Many of us have heard how Jesus died, by why did He die? Was it more than just the fact that as humans, we all die? Was there a purpose, and if so, what does that mean to our lives? These are some of the things we'll be looking at tonight.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small groups
 - i. Briefly touch on ground rules
 - Complete confidentiality
 - Respect one another
 - Explain that their facilitator will go over these rules again in small group and they can ask any questions
- 4) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week's session: How can I come to my faith?

Session 4 - How can I be sure of my faith?

- 1) Welcome
 - a. In our modern day, there are always things trying to tear down our faith: science, other religions, people, our own observances of the world, the media, the constant distractions of life. With so many things bombarding us, how can we be sure of our faith? Tonight, we will look and why and how we can be sure of what we believe.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small Group
- 4) Give date for Holy Spirit Saturday and talk just briefly about why it is so important to come
 - d. Be sensitive to the fact that Saturdays are often visiting days for families. If it is at your prison, acknowledge it and let them know that you understand it might be a sacrifice. However, express how vital you think it is that they try their best to attend, and how much you think they will get out of it

- e. The Ministry of the Spirit is crucial to Alpha – without it, it would not really be an Alpha Course. We have found that time and again God has honored simple requests for Him to send His Spirit among us. Amazing and profound changes always occur in people’s lives as a result.
- 5) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week’s session: Why and how do I pray.

Session 5 - Why and how do I pray?

- 1) Welcome
 - a. We pray for many reasons in our lives.... some of us only when we’re in that speeding Taxi praying for our lives! Or when we need God to get us out of something, even if we’re not even sure He’s really listening! But is there more to it? Can there be more to it? Can prayer make a difference in our lives and in our world? And if so, how do we go about it? That’s our topic for tonight’s discussion
- 2) Just a quick reminder about Alpha Saturday date.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small group
- 4) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week’s session: How and how should I read the Bible?

Session 6 – Why and how should I read the Bible?

- 1) Welcome
 - a. Why do Christians think it is so important to read the Bible? Why do we encourage others to do so? What’s in the Bible? Who wrote it? Has it changed in these years? Is it necessary or relevant to my life? Those are some of the things we will look at in tonight’s discussions.
- 2) Remind of weekend date & express your enthusiasm and sincere desire that all attend.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - a. Worship
 - b. Video
 - c. Small group
 - i. Show and briefly discuss different types of Bibles
 - ii. KJV, NKJV, NIV, New Living Translation, study Bibles, other versions.... whatever you have.
 - iii. Stress the importance is not which version you read, but that you try consistently to make it part of your life everyday
- 4) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for next week’s session: How does God Guide Us?

Session 7 - How does God guide us?

- 1) Welcome
 - (a) Although the Bible has answers to many of life's dilemmas, it isn't some magic 8 ball that you shake up and hope to get the answer you want! But if that's not how you do it, what is? Does God guide individuals in their everyday lives? Can God help with life's decisions, big and small? That's what we hope to learn more about tonight!
- 2) Before we get started, we just want to tell you how excited we are about Holy Spirit Saturday this weekend! We hope that you will all be able to attend!
 - (a) Give them start and finish times
 - (b) Let them know that there will be an extended time for worship and quiet prayer, and it might be appropriate for them to bring their Bibles and journal.
 - (c) If you can eat lunch or have anything special really emphasize that, as it is something out of the ordinary they will not want to miss.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - (b) Worship
 - (c) Video
 - (d) Small Group
- 5) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for The Holy Spirit Day: Sessions 8, 9 and 10.

Holy Spirit Day

“The ministry of the Spirit is crucial to Alpha – without it, it would not really be an Alpha Course. We have found that time and again God has honored simple requests for Him to send His Spirit among us. Amazing and profound changes always occur in people’s lives as a result. We are continuing to see people give their lives to Christ, to be filled with the Spirit, get excited about Jesus, and bring their friends to the next course.”

Nicky Gumbel

Background

Where at all possible Sessions 8, 9 and 10 should be delivered as a special time of teaching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit and is a vital part of the course which should not be missed. It is a time to teach about the Holy Spirit and provide ministry to the guests. Ideally this should be accomplished on a full day. Typically, this is done on a Saturday but can be done in a prison setting any day of the week depending on the prison schedule. The important thing to remember is that this day be set aside as a special Alpha Event. It is highly recommended that the guests eat lunch together as well as drinks and snacks be available throughout the day. It is also recommended that Alpha Leaders from outside the prison be allowed to facilitate the day’s activities.

Sample Schedule

7:45	Arrive / Set-Up
8:00 – 8:15	Guests arrive and get settled
8:15 – 8:25	Opening Prayer and Intro to Weekend
8:25 – 8:45	Opening Worship
8:45 – 9:15	Video – Who Is the Holy Spirit (and break)
9:15 – 9:45	Small Group Time
9:45 – 10:15	Video – What does the Holy Spirit Do?
10:15 - 11:00	Small Group
11:00 – 12:00	Lunch
12:15 – 1:05	Video – How Can I Be Filled With the Spirit?
1:05 – 1:15	Explanation of Worship and Prayer Ministry
1:15 – 2:15	Quiet Worship / Prayer Ministry/ Special Sessions
2:15 – 3:00	Small Group Time
3:00 – 3:15	Closing

Sample Holy Spirit Day Introduction/Opening

Thank you, for coming to Holy Spirit Day. It is my prayer that everyone here today will be blessed by God's mighty presence. As we open our hearts and minds, we should all expect the Holy Spirit to do great things.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says **"For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."** We worship an awesome God, and we trust that He will be with us mightily today, through His HS!

I would like to outline the plan for today.

First, we're going to have an extended time of worship – yay! More than one song!

Next, Session 8 **"Who is the Holy Spirit"** and Session 9 **"What does the Holy Spirit do?"** Then we will get some small group time before lunch. After lunch, Session 10 **"How can I be filled with the Spirit."**

After the video comes my favorite part of Holy Spirit Day. We can look forward to a really special time of extended prayer and worship. This will be an opportunity for those who would like to come and be prayed for by our prayer ministry teams. We have seen and expect extraordinary blessings as God's Spirit works during this time of sanctuary and renewal. After this time, we will gather in our small groups again to discuss the video. Finally, we will close our day with some testimonies and prayer.

Before we open in prayer and worship, I'd like to look at a passage from the Bible. John 16: 13-14 says: **"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."**

Elsewhere in the Bible, we will learn that Jesus says the Spirit's job is to testify to Him. Today is all about the Holy Spirit, and we are going to learn a lot of things about the Holy Spirit, but today is about Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit points to Jesus, guides us to Jesus, testifies about Jesus. And it's also about the Father, because the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father.

We hope that you will have a great day, that you will enjoy the fellowship, the worship, the talks, etc.

As we enter this time of worship, Lord we ask that your Holy Spirit come into this room and into our hearts.

Sample First Small Group Questions

1. Before this morning, what was your experience or thoughts about who the Holy Spirit was? How about now?
2. Did you learn anything new about the Holy Spirit or His character today?
3. We heard that the Holy Spirit is called the Counselor, the Encourager, the Helper, the Comforter, and many other things. Which way would you most like to have Him work in your life?
4. We heard that the living water (the Spirit) would pour from the Temple (Jesus), bringing fruitfulness and healing wherever it flowed. Where in your life would you like Him to bring fruitfulness? Healing?
5. How do you feel about being the children of God, being adopted into His family?
6. Have you ever experienced the type of close intimacy with God through the spirit? The deepest experience and assurance that you are God's child?
7. How do you feel about being considered an heir to God's kingdom? A co-heir with Christ?
8. Have you ever had any experiences where the Spirit helped you to pray to God or helped you to understand something God was saying to you?
9. Which fruits of the spirit would YOU like to experience more of in your life? *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*
10. Do you feel that you have any spiritual gifts? What are they? How are you using them?
11. Are there any spiritual gifts that you don't have that you would like?
12. Since the Bible tells us there is ONE spirit that resides within us, how can we, as Christians, become more unified?

Sample Second Small Group Questions

1. Is there anything from the video this afternoon that you guys would like to discuss further?
2. In an ideal world, every Christian would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of conversion. Why do you think this doesn't always happen?
3. We heard that sometimes we're filled by the Spirit, but then we sort of leak it out like a balloon. Why is that, do you think?
4. Does anyone want to share what their experience of the day has been?
5. Did anything happen during the worship time and prayer ministry that you would like to share with the group?
6. Nicky talked about some of the barriers to receiving the Spirit: doubt, fear, not forgiving ourselves or others, feelings of inadequacy. Has anyone broken through these or other barriers today?

Session 11 - How can I resist evil?

- 1) Welcome
- 2) Brief thanks for coming to Holy Spirit Day. Ask if anyone would like to talk about their experience. These “testimonies” should be brief but allow everyone to speak who wishes to.
- 3) Let them know that they are just past the halfway point of the course. Tell them the graduation date and that it will be a celebration with certificates, and special treats (approval for food of some kind, and permission for outside guests to attend must be made in advance)
 - a. There are all kinds of cute jokes about the Devil, but do they accurately represent him? Is there a devil at all? Is there anything behind the suffering we see in the world or is it just humanity? Those are some of the issues we will be discussing tonight.
- 4) Explain outline for tonight
 - (e) Worship
 - (f) Video
 - (g) Small Group
- 6) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for Why and how should I tell others?

Session 12 - Why and how should I tell others?

- 1) Welcome
 - a. I think we can all agree that there is ways to go about telling others about Jesus. But how should we? Is it even necessary for us to talk about our faith at all? What if we get tongue tied every time we even try to share what God has done in our lives? This and many more issues will be discussed in tonight’s video
- 2) Remind people of date for graduation
 - a. IF your prison is going to allow the guests to invite other guests to the graduation celebration, now is the time to tell them.
- 4) Explain outline for tonight
 - (a) Worship
 - (b) Video
 - (c) Small Group
- 5) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for Does God heal today?

Session 13 - Does God heal today?

- 1) Welcome
 - (a) We've heard that God wants to heal of us through His Holy Spirit, that we can be set free from addictions, burdens, guilt, all sorts of spiritual problems. But does He heal us physically in this life? Can He heal us spiritually? Those are some of the topics under discussion tonight
- 2) We've only got 2 nights left after this before our celebration graduation!
 - (b) Build excitement
 - (c) If they can invite, encourage them to. If the prison will let you pass out invitations, do so
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - (a) Worship
 - (b) Video
 - (c) Small Group
- 5) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for What about the church?
 - (a) Let them know that you need their names exactly as they would like it printed on their graduation certificates.
 - (b) Thank them for coming and invite them for next week's topic What about the church?

Session 14 - What about the church?

- 1) Welcome
 - (a) Some of us may not have been to church much at all. Does God want us to go to church services? Is it that important? Is church just a building, a service, or is it something more? All this and more coming right up!
- 2) Explain outline for tonight
 - (b) Worship
 - (c) Video
 - (d) Small Group
- 3) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements. Give worksheet for What about the church?
 - (e) It's VERY important that finalize how you would like your name printed on your graduation certificate.
 - (f) If the prison is allowing invited guests and you need counts for food/cake/cookies, you may want to get a final count tonight as well or let them know that they can continue to invite right up until the night. Check with your Chaplain.
 - (g) Invite them back to our last topic -How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

Session 15 – How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

- 1) Welcome
- 2) Even if we have made mistakes in the past, it is possible with God's help to make something of our future. How can we make the most of the rest of our lives? Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2. Let's look at that verse. God does have a perfect and pleasing plan for our future.
- 3) Explain outline for tonight
 - (a) Worship
 - (b) Video
 - (c) Small Group
- 5) After small group discussions return to large group for announcements.
 - a) Discuss plans for the Graduation Ceremony
 - b) If inmate guests can be invited explain process
 - c) If outside guests can be invited explain process

Graduation

- 1) Welcome
 - a. Allow inmates to introduce their guests
 - b. Introduce Facilitators
 - c. Introduce any special guests
- 2) Explain outline for tonight
 - (a) Worship
 - (b) Brief explanation of the Alpha Course (content)
 - (c) Guest Testimonies-allow all to make brief statement
 - (d) Pass out Certificates
 - (e) Announce the next Alpha Course
 - (f) Closing Prayer
 - (g) Refreshments