

Talk 1 – Is There More to Life Than This?

Duration 30 Minutes

HTB Transcripts



Key:

P – Personal story that Nicky Gumbel tells in his Alpha talk. These may be replaced with a live speaker's personal story or the speaker may tell the story about Nicky in the same way Nicky tells stories about others.

S – Story that Nicky tells about someone else (about a friend or a story he heard or read about).

Q/Q* – Quotes are key to the talk to emphasise a point and to enable guests to engage and relate the material. We acknowledge that some of the people quoted may not be well known in your local context, however, please be mindful of the value of what is said in the quoted material; not just the guests' knowledge of the person being quoted. If you choose to replace a quote, it should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources. In general, we encourage you not to omit or replace quotes unless absolutely necessary. Quotes marked in the margin with a * symbol are key quotes and should not be omitted from the talk.

Key Bible Passages are identified and you may wish to display these visually for your guests.

Red type identifies a part of the key teaching text that could be removed or altered for contextualisation.

Text left untouched is the standard key message content of the Alpha talk.

Talk summary:

- There are questions about life we all share ('Is this it? Where have I come from? Where am I heading? Who am I? What's the point of my life? Is there any real meaning and purpose to life?')
- There are common objections to / preconceptions about Christianity (it is boring, untrue, irrelevant, dangerous)
- Jesus claimed to be the way (to bring purpose and direction in life) – ie it's relevant
- Jesus claimed to be the truth (there are good reasons for believing) – ie it's true.
- Jesus claimed to be the life (sets us free to enjoy a relationship that is fulfilling and life-giving) – ie it's exciting
- Alpha is an opportunity to explore these claims, to share what you think, and to explore these questions for yourself. There's no pressure, come and go as you please but each talk builds on the previous one.

NOTE: Parts of the talk may need to be contextualised for other contexts or cultures but make sure you maintain the key elements of humour and personal testimony. Notice how quotes, and stories are used throughout to add emphasis to the main points of the talk (theology and testimony).

KEY: **Personal Story** **Story** **Quotes** **Key Bible Passages**

1) Is There More to Life Than This? – Nicky Gumbel – HTB Alpha

	Welcome to Alpha. And congratulations on getting here, because I think it's one of the hardest things, coming to
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P

It's certainly something that I don't think I would ever have done.

For much of my life, I was not a Christian. I wasn't brought up as a Christian. My father was a secular Jew and my mother was not a churchgoer. And really I didn't like this kind of thing at all!

Occasionally I was dragged along to a talk like this. I remember the first time I was dragged along to a talk like this, I was determined not to listen to one word the guy said! I remember there was a clock behind him, and I decided I was just going to watch the hands on the clock go round, because I thought that would be more interesting than listening to what he was going to say!

I had no interest in Christianity or church. All my associations with church were negative. I thought of it as boring, dreary, it made me feel slightly guilty – I didn't know quite why I felt guilty about it – and I just thought, 'God, Jesus, all that stuff, it's just not true.'

My father was an agnostic, but I became an atheist as a teenager. I decided that I was a determinist, and I described myself very pretentiously as a 'logical determinist', and I argued against the existence of God. I wrote an essay at school disproving the existence of God – or so I thought. And I would actually quite enjoy just arguing with Christians and trying to prove that there is no God.

And also I thought, 'This stuff's just not relevant to my life.' I was having a great time: enjoying my life – friends, parties, just having a good time. And I couldn't see what some guy who'd lived 2,000 years ago, 2,000 miles away, what relevance that could have to my life.

And yet I think deep down, now, looking back, I would say that something was missing. I didn't go around at the time saying,

KEY: **Personal Story**

Story

Quotes

Key Bible Passages

Use or adapt this linking sentence to tie in to the personal story you tell above.	And I think it's easy to go through life: you get to the next stage, you get to whatever it is, and then you think: 'Is <i>this</i> it? There's got to be more to life than this.'
Q	<p>Bernard Levin was one of the great columnists of the last century, writing a long time ago, but he wrote this. He wasn't a Christian – one time he wrote: 'For the fourteenth thousandth time, I'm not a Christian!' – but this is what he wrote. He said:</p> <p>'Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside of them. And however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motorcars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it, it aches.'</p>
Q	Russell Brand said this. He said: 'Drugs and alcohol are not my problem. Reality is my problem. Drugs and alcohol are my solution, to fill up a hole inside of me.'
John 6:35	<p>And I think, looking back, that's what I was experiencing: there was kind of like a hole, sort of like a hunger – maybe a spiritual hunger.</p> <p>And Jesus said: 'I'm the bread of life.' He said: 'I'm the one who</p>

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<p>S</p> <p><i>[You may wish to adapt this to a local example that relates to the staple diet in your country.]</i></p>	<p>I heard of one Japanese woman who described it like this. She said: ‘In Japan it’s like we have two stomachs. We have one stomach for ordinary food – for meat and potatoes and that kind of thing.’ And that’s like, I guess, the equivalent of the kind of things Bernard Levin was talking about: good things – maybe, you know, possessions and relationships and all that kind of thing. That fills up one stomach.</p> <p>‘But,’ she said, ‘it’s like I’ve got another stomach.’ And she described this as the ‘rice stomach’. She said, ‘Unless we eat rice, we don’t feel satisfied.’ And I guess if Jesus had been speaking to her, he’d have said: ‘I’m the <i>rice</i> of life. I’m the one</p>
<p>John 14:6</p>	<p>Now, why is that? Well, Jesus said this: ‘I’m the way, and I’m the truth, and I am the life.’</p>
	<h2>Talk Point 1</h2> <p>‘I AM THE WAY’</p>
<p>S</p> <p><i>[You may use this story by adapting the way that it is introduced (text in red).]</i></p>	<p>We have some friends who when their children were younger they had a Swedish au pair girl, and this Swedish au pair girl hadn’t quite mastered all the English idioms. And one time the children were having a big row in an upstairs bedroom. She ran upstairs, and what she meant to say is: ‘What on earth are you doing?’ but what she actually said is: ‘What are you doing on earth?’</p> <p>Now, that’s a great question to ask! What are you doing on</p>
	<p>In other words, ‘Where have I come from? Where am I heading? Who am I? What’s the point of my life? Is there any real meaning and purpose to life?’ These are what you might call like the first-order questions of life. And a lot of people spend a lot of their life trying to find some kind of ultimate</p>

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S

I think of the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, who wrote *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*. He also wrote another book called *A Confession* in which he told his life story.

And he described how as a child he rejected Christianity. And he started to search for meaning and purpose in his life. And at first he thought: 'Life's just about having a good time! Just make the most of life! Have fun!' And he entered the social whirl of Moscow and St Petersburg. He drank heavily, he was promiscuous; he led basically a wild life. And he found that kind of left him feeling a bit empty.

He thought, 'Well, maybe money is the answer.' He'd inherited a lot of money, and he started to make a lot of money out of his books as well. And he found money's kind of like seawater: the more you drink of it, the more thirsty you are. That didn't satisfy.

And he thought, 'Well, maybe like fame, importance, success – if I can be really successful.' And he wrote what the

Q

I was interested in something that the actor Jim Carrey said, this. He said: 'I think everyone should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of, so they can see it's not

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S

And Tolstoy saw that *that* wasn't the answer.

And he thought, 'Well, maybe it's all about kind of relationships: marriage, family life.' He married in 1862 and had a very happy family and thirteen children – which he said distracted him from his search for the overall meaning of life!

He was surrounded by what looked like – everyone looking at Tolstoy would say, 'Wow, you've got everything! You've got complete happiness.' And he said yet one question drove him to the verge of suicide, and the question was this: 'What meaning has my life that the inevitability of death does not destroy?'

And he started to think, and he thought: 'Well, the philosophers must have an answer to this. The scientists must have an answer.' So he started to search in every field of science and philosophy to answer to the question 'Why do I live?' And the only answer he came up with was this: 'In the infinity of space and the infinity of time, infinitely small particles mutate with infinite complexity.' He didn't find that very satisfying!

And then he looked around at his friends, his contemporaries, and they weren't really even facing up to the question. And

Q

A hundred years later, nothing's changed. Freddie Mercury, the lead singer in the rock group Queen, had amassed a huge fortune, attracted thousands of fans, but he admitted in an interview shortly before his death that he was desperately lonely. He said:

'You can have everything in the world and still be the loneliest man. Success has brought me world idolisation and millions of pounds, but it's prevented me from having the one thing we all

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	And ultimately there is only one relationship that is totally loving – and goes on forever – and that is a relationship with God. And Jesus said: ‘I’m the way to that relationship.’
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P

So what difference does it make?

I had never been to an optician in my entire life. I don't know why, I just managed to avoid it! About twelve years ago I started having difficulty reading, and I met an eye doctor and he said, 'Look, all you need to do is go to the chemist, get a cheap pair of glasses – or actually get lots: put one in every room – and gradually go up the grades.' So that's what I've done: I put one in every room. In fact, they all tended to end up in one room and I can never find them!

But the basic principle worked – until last September. Last September I started to get headaches. My wife Pippa very sensibly suggested, 'Why don't you go to an optician and see whether it's something to do with your eyes?' So I went to this optician, and she did these tests on me and she said, 'Not only do you need much stronger reading glasses, but you also need glasses for ordinary life.' I said, 'I don't need glasses for ordinary life. I can see perfectly well, thank you very much indeed.'

And I thought, you know, 'She's just trying to sell glasses.' That's what opticians do, I thought. So I went to another optician. And this one came up with exactly the same results as the other one. So I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to wear the glasses, but at least maybe I'll get some and just try them.'

So, after they'd made the glasses, I went back, and the reading glasses were great. And then I said, 'Well, I'm not going to wear the other glasses, but at least I'll try them on.' And I put them on, and I went: 'Oh my goodness! I can see *everything*! It's like 3D!' And I said – and perhaps I shouldn't have said this: 'I can see people's spots!'

And there was a little gathering happened in the opticians. You know, I think they were pleased for a satisfied customer, but also quite amused, and they gathered round sort of watching me.

KEY: **Personal Story**

Story

Quotes

Key Bible Passages

Q	C. S. Lewis said: 'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I can see it, but by it I see
	And to me it's like Jesus is the lens through which we see God. He's the way to God. And also he's the lens by which we see the world in a totally different dimension and clarity. Jesus said:
	<h2>Talk Point 2</h2> <p>'I AM THE TRUTH'</p>
	<p>And he said: 'I am the truth.'</p> <p>You could say, 'Well, that's great. So nice for you. In this relationship with Jesus you find meaning and purpose in your life. That's great for you, but it's not for me.' Logically that can't be the case. Because if it's true, it's true for everyone. And if it's not true, it's not great for me.</p> <p>So it really matters whether it's true.</p>
Q*	<p>Again, C.S. Lewis put it like this:</p> <p>'Christianity is a statement which, if it's false, is of no importance; and if it's true, it's of infinite importance. The one thing it can't be is moderately important.'</p>
	<p>So that's the question: is it true? Well, we'll look at that in a lot more detail next week.</p>
P	<p>All my family are lawyers, and I wanted to look at the original documents. I wanted to look at the sources. And for me, it was through reading those documents, which we find in the New Testament, that I came to the conclusion it's true.</p>

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And it astonished me how much evidence there is for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Of course, there are many highly intelligent people who are atheists; but equally there are many highly intelligent people who've looked at the evidence, who've come to the conclusion that it's true.

Historians. One former Professor of Modern History at Oxford University described the resurrection as 'the best-attested fact in history'. I hadn't really realised how many of the pioneers of modern science were believers: Descartes, Newton, Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, Faraday, Boyle, Mendel, Kelvin, Pasteur, Lister, Maxwell, Simpson.

Or take one of the greatest scientists of our time: Francis Collins, who was Director of the historic Human Genome project; one of the most respected genetic biologists in the world. He talks about how he investigated the evidence and he was amazed, he said, at the historical evidence for Jesus Christ. And he describes going out one day and looking at the beauty of creation, and then he 'knelt in the dewy grass' and he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

Or take lawyers. Lord Denning: arguably the greatest lawyer of the last hundred years: towered over the legal profession; this brilliant mind; was also very well known for his Christian faith. He'd used these powers of analysis to look at the evidence and came to the conclusion it's true. His Bible was the most tattered book in his library; he was so interested in the evidence for Jesus.

Now, when Jesus said '**I am the truth**', the Hebrew

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P

[You may personalise this example, or use the example of someone close to you.]

I've been married to my wife Pippa for thirty-seven years. But supposing before we were married, before I'd even met her, I went into a bookshop and there was a book in there with the title *Pippa – the amazing woman!* And I picked that up and I thought, 'Oh, that looks really interesting!' Chapter One: Her Extraordinary Intelligence. Chapter Two: Her Sparkling Personality. Chapter Three: Her Potential to be a Long-Suffering Wife. Chapter Four: Her Cordon Bleu Cooking Skills. Chapter Five: Her Sporting Ability – quite a short chapter! But not as short as if it was about *my* sporting ability, I hasten to add!

If I read that book and said, 'Wow, she sounds an amazing woman,' that's head knowledge. Now I can tell you she's an

When Jesus said, '*I am the truth*', he was talking about an experience of truth: that we could have a relationship with him and experience that Jesus – not just that there's evidence for the resurrection, but we can actually experience a relationship with the risen Jesus Christ.

Jesus said: '**I'm the way and I'm the truth**' and then he said:

Talk Point 3

'I AM THE LIFE'

John 10:10,
[paraphrase]

He said: '**I've come that you can have life and life in all its fullness.**' And he said he'd come to deal with the stuff that stops us having that: to deal with the bad stuff, the things that spoil our lives and stop us enjoying life to the full.

KEY: **Personal Story**

Story

Quotes

Key Bible Passages

P/Q

I hate shopping. I just loathe it. I'm sort of allergic to shopping. And I don't think I'm the only person, because I came across this article in the *Evening Standard* which was entitled: 'Official: Men Find Shopping Stressful.' Now, please don't misunderstand me: I don't want to suggest any gender stereotypes. But I just want to read to you what – this is not my words, this is what the article said. It said:

'Male stress levels soar when they're faced with the dilemma of choosing gifts and coping with crowded shops. The research was conducted by psychologist Dr David Lewis, who monitored blood pressure and heartbeat before, during and after the shopping trip. The peak stress levels were equivalent to emergency situations experienced by fighter pilots or policemen going into a dangerous situation. Even the thought of going shopping was enough to send stress levels soaring,

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P

Now, that is what I feel about shopping. I find shopping immensely stressful, and I try to avoid ever going shopping. But a few weeks ago in the Christmas sales, Pippa persuaded me to go shopping. And we went in, and she very kindly bought me – I’ve got a new sweater. This is a new sweater – doesn’t look new because it’s like all the other ones! But it’s actually a new sweater! So she bought me a new sweater.

And then we went into another ghastly shop to get her a present. It was called Zara. So. Not that there’s anything against it! If you work for Zara, I’m sure it’s a great shop, a great place to work, great place to shop! Anyway, it’s only ghastly because they’re so big, and it was so crowded! *All* the shops were so crowded, but this one was particularly crowded. We went in there and we looked around, and you couldn’t really see anything because there were so many people. So we decided to go without getting anything.

As we were going out the door, the security alarm went off. And the security guys just moved in really quickly, and they stopped everyone who was leaving, leaving. And what they did was, because there were loads of people coming in on *that* side, and there were loads of people trying to leave on *that* side, and we were in the middle, and we were part of the group that they stopped. They stopped six people, and they isolated the six of us and put us in a little ring. And this crowd *here* were watching, and this crowd *here* were watching, and then each of the six had to go through the security one at a time.

First one went through – fine. Second one went through – fine. Third one, fourth one – all fine. Then it was Pippa’s turn to go through. She went through – fine. That left me! Then I went through security, and off went the alarms! And I thought, ‘Oh my goodness!’ I felt so guilty! What had I done? I must have accidentally picked up something in the shop. I was going to be caught shoplifting. I was going to be arrested. I was going to be

KEY: **Personal Story**

Story

Quotes

Key Bible Passages

<p>Ensure you have copies of <i>Why Jesus?</i> Available for guests to take if they wish.</p>	<p>And Jesus came to deal with our guilt. And this is the amazing news: God loves you. You are loved. It's the most important thing to take away from this course: you are loved. God loves you. And he came in the person of his Son, Jesus, to die on a cross for you and for me. And he took all of our guilt, all of our bad stuff, in your place, in my place, in order that we should be free to enjoy life to the full.</p> <p>And this is the most amazing, wonderful news. And to me it was totally life-changing. This is a little booklet called <i>Why Jesus?</i> There are lots of them around. Please do take one. And there's a prayer in the back, which you can pray, which I prayed something like that. And it was a prayer in which I encountered Jesus. And it totally changed my life.</p> <p>Doesn't mean to say everything's easy. I don't believe it's easy</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>I read an article in the <i>Sunday Times</i> about Alice Cooper, the rock musician, and he describes his conversion, and he says this:</p> <p>'It hasn't been easy combining religion and rock. It's the most rebellious thing I've ever done. Drinking beer is easy. Trashing your hotel room is easy. But being a Christian, that's a tough</p>
	<p>And it's not easy. But what I would say is my experience of this relationship with God through Jesus, I would say it's not boring, it's not untrue, it's not irrelevant – it's really exciting! I do believe it's true. And it's so relevant to our lives. And I've found that Jesus really is the bread of life. He's the one who gives us meaning and purpose. He's the one who satisfies this hunger.</p> <p>There's so much to explore during this course. I want to encourage you to discuss, to explore together. This is a really exciting thing to do. But what I've found is that Jesus really is <i>the way, the truth and the life</i>. And in this relationship we find</p>

The Alpha Transcripts are taken from *Alpha with Nicky Gumbel* filmed 2014–2015, which are based on *Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel.

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Freddie Mercury, in interview with Sharon Feinstein, May 1985. Used by permission.

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KEY: **Personal Story**

Story

Quotes

Key Bible Passages

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