



CUMBRIA  
CHRISTIAN  
LEARNING

Growing disciples for mission

# WHICH ENQUIRERS' COURSE?

Notes based on Moving Mountains booklet 3



## WHY AN ENQUIRERS' COURSE?

Being intentional about prioritising growth and being intentional in nurturing disciples are two factors associated with growing churches.

Regularly running an enquirers' course is a valuable part of a focus on growth. They provide an opportunity to explore questions in a safe environment. Participants can help each other along their faith journeys.

Whilst many have found a course to be very helpful, that is not necessarily true for everyone. Take time to consider whether a course (with its structure that shapes conversation) is right in your context. It maybe that it is more appropriate to start with an open evening in a local pub (or similar venue) where people are encouraged to come along and raise the questions that they have, rather than have a series of questions given to them. Once those have been aired, then suggest that the most popular ones form the basis of discussion over the coming weeks (depending on how long you plan to meet for).

## ARE WE READY TO RUN THE ENQUIRERS' COURSE?

We now focus on the core issues of choosing which enquirers' course to use and running it successfully.

## WHICH COURSE?

The advantage of a course is that it is relatively easy to use, and can be led by people who are used to running small groups, but may well not have specialist theological knowledge. There are a lot of courses to consider. The Cumbria Christian Learning web site ([www.cumbriachristianlearning.org.uk](http://www.cumbriachristianlearning.org.uk)) has a range of information on options (see the section on Learning & Growing as disciples). The Disciplekit web site ([www.disciplekit.org](http://www.disciplekit.org)) is also a useful source of information.

We will consider **Alpha** and **Start** in this booklet. If you have good experience of another course in your church grouping you may well want to consider that as an alternative option.



## ALPHA

Alpha is probably the best known enquirers' course and it has been run very successfully over many years. New materials (DVDs etc) have been released recently but the course remains largely the same.

Alpha says 'we believe that everyone should have the chance to explore Christian faith, ask questions and share their point of view'.

Each session starts with a meal, or at least food of some sort. There is then a talk of 20-25 minutes followed by a discussion. Most groups will use the DVDs for the talks. You should allow 2-2.5 hours for a session.

A lot of information, including a participants' guide, a leaders' guide and training for leaders is available free on the Alpha web site ([www.uk.alpha.org](http://www.uk.alpha.org)).

There are 11 weekly sessions and also an away day / away weekend. The sessions are:

1. Is there more to life than this?
2. Who is Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus die?
4. How can I have faith?
5. Why and how do I pray?
6. Why and how should I read the Bible?
7. How does God guide us?
8. How can I resist evil?
9. Why and how should I tell others?
10. How does God heal today?
11. What about the church?

The time away can be a very valuable part of the course. For the away day/weekend the sessions are:

- Who is the Holy Spirit?
- What does the Holy Spirit do?
- How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

Critics of Alpha say that it is best for people some way along the journey to faith and



also that it can come across as middle class and big city.

## START

Start is an enquirers' course that runs over 6 sessions and comes as a DVD and leaders guide. A participants' guide is on the DVD and can be printed.

The material says 'the Start course makes no assumptions about participants' background or experience or knowledge of Christianity or the church.'

Each session has a variety of elements: talks from the video; short activities; discussion. Overall a session lasts about 90 minutes.

The 6 sessions are:

1. What is life really about?
2. Does God exist – how can we know?
3. Who was Jesus and why does it matter?
4. Why is the world as it is?
5. Why did Jesus die on the cross?
6. What might it mean to become a follower of Jesus?

See: [www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/start](http://www.leadingyourchurchintogrowth.org.uk/start)

Start is more interactive than Alpha as it doesn't have the extended talk, but that also means it doesn't have the clear teaching. Critics of Start might say it is 'light weight'.

## COMPARISON OF ALPHA AND START

In summary key features of the three courses are as follows:

	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>Start</b>
Number of sessions	11 plus weekend	6
Length of session	2 hrs.	90 mins
Cost	Free (can buy booklets)	£55
Hospitality	Core	Optional
A session in outline	Food – Talk - Discussion	Variety of discussions / activities



Resources	Videos of talks Participants & leaders notes Online training resources	Videos of talks Participants & leaders notes
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The choice is yours. Alpha and Start have both proved to be very effective. What's most important is that you run an enquirers' course and focus on the wider aspects of running one successfully.

**Start** has fewer sessions so it is easier to get a commitment to attend. It may also fit better with people with no experience or contact with Christianity.

**Alpha** is well known, the hospitality element is very successful in helping relationships develop. The greater number of sessions and especially the weekend are important in building relationships.

If you begin with Start you might add in some element of hospitality, copying Alpha. You can always move onto Alpha or another course as a possible next step for people to learn more about their faith.

## OTHER OPTIONS

As well as the courses already available you might consider putting together your own. It can be very successful. The Cumbria Christian Learning website has a helpful list of other options including:

- **Pilgrim** takes a new approach, emphasising participation and engagement with the Bible and prayer.
- **Christianity Explored**: 15 sessions over a 10 week course with a day away. Based on Mark's gospel.
- **The Y course**: 8 sessions based on exploring questions people ask.
- **Soul**: Christianity Explored. Soul from 'Christianity Explored' is designed to introduce Jesus to older teenagers and young adults (15+). It features a range of activities, talks and Bible studies to communicate the gospel in an accessible and relevant way.
- **Youth Alpha**: same approach as Alpha but for a younger age group.



## RUNNING THE COURSE

*How you run the course is almost certainly more important than which course you run. Important factors relate to preparation, running sessions and follow up.*

- **Invitation:** advertising a course is important. Make sure there is a flyer at all the events during Moving Mountains. Use newsletters, and noticeboards. Most important is personal invitation. Just ask people to come along with you to the first session; if they don't like it they don't have to come back. Most will carry on.
- **Building the team:** you are best to have 2 or 3 people leading as a team. Who is responsible for: welcome and hospitality; the content of the session including leading discussion; and prayer? At least split leading the sessions from hospitality.
- **Developing leaders:** who will these leaders be? If you need to build experience why not run one of the courses as a pilot for church members this autumn or in early 2018. They can develop their leadership skills and also be better placed to invite others in 2018. If you have good leaders already, think about how you might use this opportunity to identify and nurture new leaders.
- **Follow up:** start to think about 'what next' early on. What will participants do after attending the course? Is there a small group they might attend? Will the group from the enquirers' course keep meeting and move onto new material?
- **Focus on the enquirers:** don't overwhelm enquirers with church members at sessions of the course. Numbers of 'non-enquirers' can grow very quickly: the leaders, those learning to be leaders, people who have invited others. If you're not careful participants will be overwhelmed by leaders and observers. Why not have the first meeting as a taster/welcome evening that church members can bring people to, then run the rest of the sessions just for the enquirers themselves?

