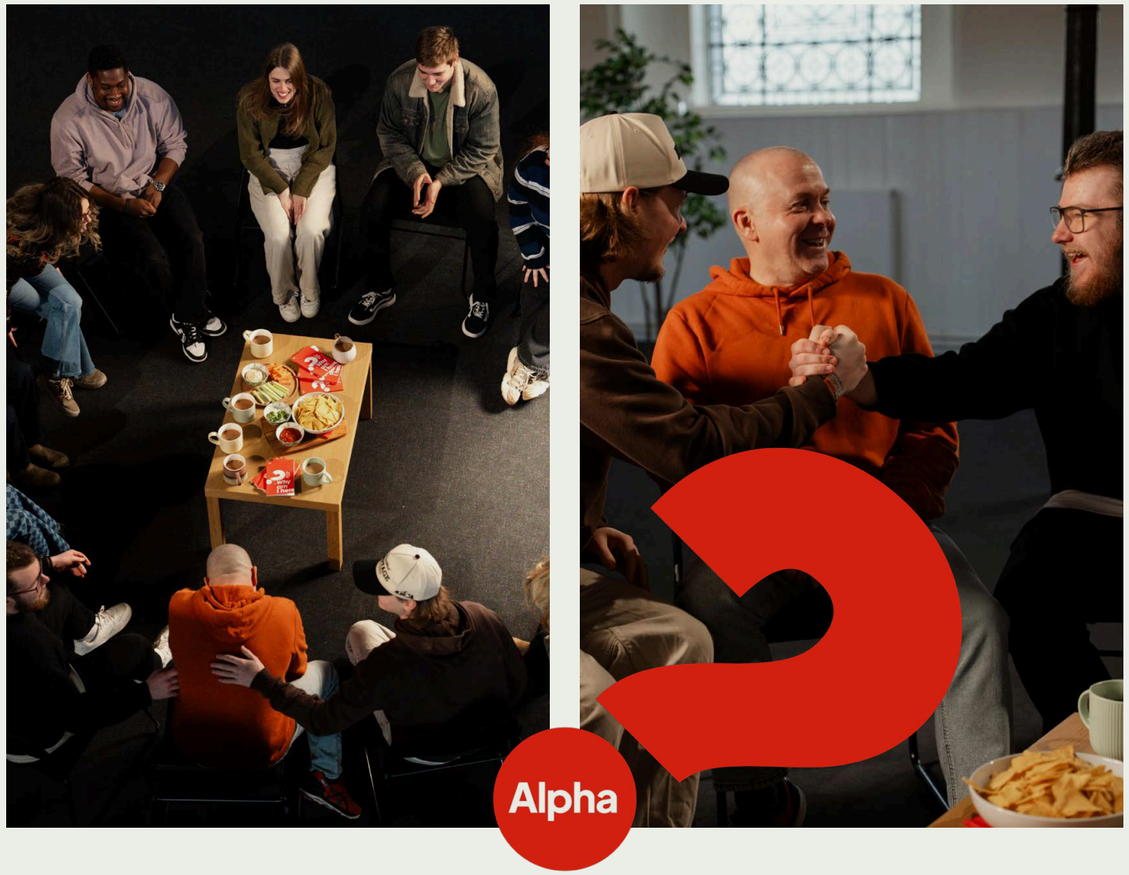


Is It Time To Set Out Another Chair?

ANNA WATSON

Anna Watson from Alpha UK considers the invitation gap – those non-Christians who know about Alpha but have not yet been invited.

Can you sense the stirring across the UK? As I meet with church leaders and hear stories of people encountering Jesus, I'm increasingly convinced that God is drawing people to himself in fresh and unexpected ways.

Back in May, whilst at Alpha Leadership Conference in the Royal Albert Hall, I was particularly struck by the testimonies shared of people's encounters with Jesus and experiences of Alpha. As the different testimonies were shared, a pattern started to emerge. People were encountering Jesus for the first time outside of the church setting: in their bedrooms, on their way to work, and even through the social media algorithms.

I'm hearing more and more of this as I meet with church leaders across the region. On week one of Alpha, the first question is always: 'What brings you to Alpha?' and traditionally, the answers range from 'My friend dragged me', to 'I heard there was free food'.

Now, though, there feels like a shift. Many guests share about reading the Bible, having a tangible experience of the Holy Spirit, or simply feeling a pull towards the church building. One church leader recently shared with me that they had a guest come to Alpha because they asked ChatGPT where they could find their purpose, and ChatGPT suggested they join an Alpha! God is drawing people to himself, and we are invited into what he is already doing.

The best part of my role is hearing testimonies each day of people finding faith in Jesus. 2025 was a record-breaking year for Alpha UK, with 10,000 Alpha courses across the nation and a 35% increase in the number of guests. But there are still millions of people who are waiting for an invitation.

In 2024, we carried out research to measure Alpha's brand awareness amongst the UK population. What we found revealed that Alpha continues to be recognised but we have a missed invitational opportunity:

- 1 in 5 adults in the UK know what Alpha is.[1]
- Of those 1 in 5, 71% have never been invited to Alpha. That's roughly 7 million people who have heard of Alpha but haven't yet received an invitation. [2]

We know that 2 in 3 people who are invited to Alpha, say 'Yes' to coming. This means that if we invited those 7 million people, we could potentially see up to 4.7 million guests on Alpha – this is before we even invite those that haven't heard of Alpha!

We call this the invitation gap – the number of people who know about Alpha, are curious and spiritually-open, but haven't been invited yet.

Our vision is for everyone, everywhere to hear the Good News of Jesus. Alpha helps creates spaces for people to be heard, and to ask their questions, and to meet the person of Jesus.

The invitation for us as the Church is not to manufacture a move of God, but to notice where he is already moving – and make room for the people he is drawing to himself.

I particularly love the story of Philip and Nathanael in John 1:43-46. 'The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see', said Philip.

In the face of Nathanael's doubt, Philip responds to Nathanael with the simple invitation to 'come and see'. Philip doesn't pretend Nathanael's doubts aren't real, he doesn't have all the answers or applies lots of pressure; he simply invites him to encounter the person of Jesus.

Philip trusts that an encounter with Jesus can speak for itself.

Perhaps this is part of what it means for us to join in with what God is already doing. We don't have to create a hunger for God in people. We don't need to have the perfect answers to every question. We can simply notice those who are searching, make room for them, and extend the invitation: come and see.

God is drawing people to himself. The invitation is already being written.

Perhaps our task is simply to set out another chair.

1. IPSOS Mori carried out research surveying 2,238 respondents from around the UK. Respondents were between the ages of 16 and 75.
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Anna has the joy of overseeing Alpha across the North and Midlands. She loves creating spaces for others to have an encounter with Jesus and has a heart for hospitality-led evangelism. When not at work, Anna leads the youth in her local church in Liverpool.

