

“Alpha? What’s That Then??” – Solving the Mystery!

Scene 1: Philip Marlowe (film noir, late 40s-50s, voice-over detective)

Walks on wearing rain mac, with hat on, gets a cigarette out, talks over moody jazz music playing.

Marlowe: The poster had left me with more questions than answers. Sure, I’d heard the name. It made me think of college and evening classes. Pottery for Beginners, Holiday French, Alpha – An Opportunity to Explore the Meaning of Life. What was this? A philosophy class? Para-psychology? An investigation in to spirituality? I needed to find out more...

Walks off, music still playing.

Scene 2: Starsky or Hutch!

Blast of the theme tune main rift. Suspect runs on. Starsky (curly hair, denim jacket look) chasing after, gun in hand.

Starsky: Freeze punk! Turn around! Don’t move! (*snatches Bible out of Suspects hand*)
What’s this??

Suspect: It’s the Bible!

Starsky: Don’t get smart with me! It’s got “Bible” written on it. I didn’t ask you what it’s called, I asked you what it is!

Suspect: It’s God’s words to man. It’s the history of God’s relationship with man. It’s the story of why Jesus came to earth and what he did for us.

Starsky: Oh yeah? Can you prove it?

Suspect: Actually, people all over the country want to know the same thing. So we’re arranging a time for small groups of people to get together, hear some of the evidence and ask their questions.

Starsky: That’s what you say!

Suspect: Er, yes, that’s what I say...

Starsky: Don’t think you’ve seen the last of me!

Suspect: I hope I haven’t. Come and join us on the 6th October, it’s a Wednesday...

Starsky: Get out of here!

Starsky and Suspect exit.

Scene 3: *Hercule Poirot*

Play intro of Poirot bassoon TV theme tune. Poirot walks on (hat, moustache, bow tie, waistcoat). Speaks in dodgy Belgian/French accent!

Poirot: My name is Hercule Poirot. I am irritatingly self-assured and have more grey cells working in my little finger than all of you have put together. It was not easy but I, I!, have deduced what this Alpha Course is.

Firstly, I can reveal that it is a ten week course. This I know, madam and monsieurs, because the first night is the 13th of October and the last night is the 15th of December. I was almost thrown by the red herring of the 6th of October, but I discovered that this is merely an introductory talk. I am not so easily confused!

On these Wednesday evenings we will meet at 7 o'clock. There will be a meal, there will be a short talk, there will be coffee, and then in our small groups we will talk about the talk. But what are the talks about? I hear you ask. This mystery, too, will be solved...

Exit Poirot.

Scene 4: *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson*

Violin music intro. Sherlock Holmes (smoking jacket look, pipe, magnifying glass) – carrying Alpha booklet - and Doctor Watson (in tweed jacket, smoking a cigar) walk on.

Holmes: The Alpha Course! We are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture and hypothesis. The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact –of absolute, undeniable fact- from the embellishments of theorists and reporters.

Dr Watson: I've heard that it means missing Coronation Street and The Bill, surely too high a price to pay!

Holmes: I have a grip of the essential facts of the case. I shall enumerate them to you, for nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person. Firstly, let us get a sense of perspective. Coronation Street and The Bill are sacrificed in exchange for being cooked for and not having to wash up. Also, videos have been invented so that people can tape their favourite soaps and watch them at a time of their choice.

Dr Watson: That's genius, Holmes!

Holmes: Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary. Secondly, it is not a "conversion" course. There will be no pressure, no hard-sell, there are not targets to be met. The Alpha Course is designed to be informal and allow people the freedom to voice their own opinions and ask whatever questions they so wish without being judged or frowned upon.

Dr Watson: Isn't that rather dangerous Holmes? Allowing all questions to be permissible??

Holmes: It's a risk we're willing to take to get to the truth!

Dr Watson: I say, Holmes, some of those talks are rather near the knuckle! Who is Jesus? Why read the Bible? the Holy Spirit, the church... I've never before heard such things spoke of in polite society.

Holmes: But they are very necessary. To talk about the meaning of life without mentioning Jesus, the Bible or the Holy Spirit would be a travesty! The Alpha Course is one of those rare opportunities to talk openly about such things without censure or embarrassment.

Dr Watson: You mean, I can disagree with what is said? Throw a spanner in the works, play devil's advocate??!

Holmes: Indeed

Dr Watson: Jolly good show! Sounds most entertaining!

Exit Holmes and Dr Watson.

Scene 5: Philip Marlowe (film noir, late 40s-50s, voice-over detective)

Walks on wearing rain mac, with hat on, gets a cigarette out, talks over moody jazz music playing.

Marlowe: So that was the answer. The Alpha Course is for ten weeks on Wednesday evenings at 7 o'clock. There's an introductory talk on the 6th of October, then the main thing kicks off from the 13th of October. There's food, there's a talk, there's coffee. And then there's an opportunity to talk it all through, sound off, ask your questions, get some answers. You get to hear about Jesus, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, find out what Christianity is really all about.

You think religion is boring? Christianity isn't. You think you know it all all ready? You might be surprised. Why don't you check out the Alpha Course and get some more answers, there's no charge...

Walks off, music still playing.