

MY BIGGEST Adventure

BY DANIEL HOPPER &
LORRAINE MCCARTHY

From the frozen tundras of Siberia to the hellish fires of a volcano in Guatemala, Bear Grylls knows adventure. He's crossed the North Atlantic in an inflatable boat and even climbed Mount Everest, but he's calling Alpha his biggest adventure yet. What would make the renowned survivalist, best-selling author and TV host, become the Alpha Ambassador in 2017 and the face of a transformative program of faith?

Bear's answer is simple, "For so many years I always just strived to be strong in myself. It was as if all I needed was me and my buddies and we'd be, like, invincible. But the truth is none of us are.

And I don't want to do this thing called life, I don't want to do it on my own.

It kind of feels as if my longing for this light inside is now stronger than my fear of what others might think. "Alpha was the best thing I ever did. It helped answer some huge questions and to find a simple empowering faith in my life.

"This faith inside is like a backbone, helping me stand tall and helping me be strong when I'm really up against it, facing those odds, whether it is on a mountain or stuck in some jungle, or just dealing with the storms of life. Sure I need that. But at heart my Christian faith says, 'I'm known, I'm known to Christ.'"



course

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EVANGELII GAUDIUM, 164

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Alpha is a series of interactive sessions that explore the basics of the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment. It is a parish tool for evangelisation based on welcome and hospitality, sharing and prayer, all in the midst of a caring parish setting. Each session includes a meal, a talk, and small group discussion, where no question is too simple and no answer is pre-packaged.

Alpha explores many questions such as: Is there more to life than this? Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? How can

I have Faith? Why and how do I pray? Why and how do I read the Bible? How does God guide us? How can I resist evil? Does God heal today? What about the Church and telling others?

Alpha was first developed by an Anglican Parish in London over thirty years ago and has been experienced by over 29 million people since. There are currently 84,000 courses running in 112 languages in 169 countries in all mainstream Christian denominations. It has been hailed by many Catholic cardinals, bishops, theologians, scholars, pastors, and leaders as an effective tool for awakening faith in people who are on the fringes of parish life, as well as faithful Catholics and those outside the faith.

Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, recently said, “All those who love Jesus love evangelisation, as well as everyone who takes their Christian vocation seriously – and this includes Christians of all denominations ...

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BEAR GRYLLES

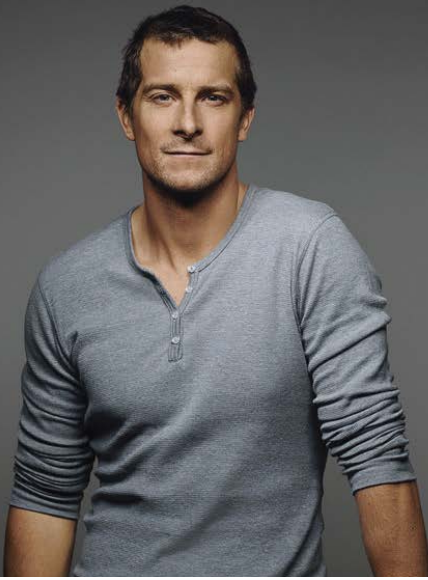
“In my opinion, Alpha accomplishes an incredible task, in making people interested in faith and in making faith relevant.

“It is a wonderful method to introduce people to a first knowledge of faith in a way that is very appropriate to modern man ... One of the advantages of Alpha is that it focuses on the Kerygma.

“In the ancient Church, there was a clear distinction between the Kerygma and the Didache (the *Catechesis*). The Kerygma was the starting point of faith, and the Catechesis had to form the faith. But faith in itself blossoms only by hearing the Kerygma ...

“The name is not the Alpha and Omega course, it’s Alpha course, which means that Alpha is a beginning, an introduction ... It can bring people to a personal relationship with Jesus.”

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Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, is a contributor in the Alpha film series. Cardinal Schönborn said, "Alpha is for meeting Jesus. What I like in all that I have seen and heard about Alpha is the simplicity. For me, the Christian life has something to do with simplicity, friendship, closeness and joy. That's what I feel about Alpha and I think that's a sign that it works and that it's given from the Lord ...

"Alpha can do what has been, since the beginning, the most important job for a Christian – bringing people to Jesus ... the next step after building a first relationship with Jesus is of course what we call Catechesis. The Catechism is one tool to help with this formation."

This endorsement of the pre-catechumenate value of Alpha was reinforced by Cardinal Seán O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston, who said, "Many of our Catholic parishioners have benefited from Alpha by way of its building on their initial interest in the Church, as a pre-catechumenate experience, or for others, a renewal of their desire to more deeply understand and live their Catholic faith."

Alpha is a simple process that can be run by teams of lay people. Resources are available to download for free (after registering your course on the

www.run.alpha.org.au website) and Alpha Australia has a staff member who works specifically with Catholic parishes. Many dioceses are also keen to support parishes with training and advice as they see the potential that Alpha offers.

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CARDINAL SCHÖNBORN

Janette and David Willson have been running Alpha in their parish in Port Pirie, South Australia, for a number of years. Janette said in relation to their 2016 group, "On the first night we had just under 50 guests meet together along with 15 leaders and helpers. This was such a special night as both the leaders and helpers shared their personal Alpha journey. Week-by-week, as each

topic was presented, guests learnt to listen to the experiences and thoughts of others in their small groups as well as express their own. It's incredible to see the transformation of each of the guests. Looking back, this group seems so different to the individuals that had tentatively assembled at the Port Pirie Yacht Club for the Welcome Dinner.

"We have discovered that the experience of Alpha allows the individual to accept the call of Jesus. Over time we have witnessed people who have done Alpha accept ownership of their faith and step out to take on ministry roles and responsibilities within their parish."

Pope Francis is calling us to be more missionary in our approach, yet speaking of faith with others is not

something that always comes easily to us. Alpha helps a parish to become an evangelising community and is a proven tool for evangelisation. In Australia, an increasing number of Catholic parishes are running it. Alpha makes no assumptions about a person's level of knowledge or understanding of faith, so it is a way of reaching those who are disconnected from the Church, or who have never been to Church before.

Will you take up the challenge and join the many thousands of people who are using Alpha to reach a new generation with the message of Jesus?

Bishop Peter Ingham is encouraging parishes in our Diocese to consider working with the Parish Services Team to make Alpha a strategy for outreach and renewal. The resources are amazing and the process is a proven way of making faith relevant, especially to those who don't come to Church. To get started, have a discussion with your parish priest and then others in your parish who might want to be part of a team who share the Good News of a life with Jesus in his Church. ■

Contact either Jude Hennessy, 4222 2407 (jude.hennessy@dow.org.au) or Darren McDowell 4222 2463 (darren.mcdowell@dow.org.au) to see how the Diocese can support your parish to draw those disconnected from faith into a relationship with Christ and your parish community.

Daniel Hopper is the Director of Media & Communications, Diocese of Wollongong

Lorraine McCarthy is the Alpha in a Catholic Context Co-ordinator in Australia.