

first and last name of interviewee: Joanne Irwin

occupation/role/title: Youth Leader

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- **Anecdotes and personal stories – Yellow**
- **Perspectives and opinions – Blue**
- **Factual information or statistics – Green**
- **Connections to your research topic – Pink**

00;00;03;18 - 00;00;11;11

Alicia

Okay, so,

00;00;11;13 - 00;00;31;09

Alicia

First, My first question is, so to start off, I'd love to hear what changes, if any. Have you noticed how teens today relate to organized religion?

00;00;31;11 - 00;00;56;16

Jhoan

Love that question, by the way. And one of the things I thought about was, the digital piece of it in that, it use like it used to be, you know, back 30 years ago or whatever, that, to be a part of, like a church community, you would go to a place, right, and be there in person.

00;00;56;18 - 00;01;39;01

Jhoan

And now a number of people. Right. Especially since Covid, right, where we all like, did church online, for a while. A lot of folks are keeping up with that. That, you know, doing church, doing life or faith digitally. And so, when I got to thinking about that, I thought, oh, well, okay, I'm going to stop and say, I have a nephew who considers himself a Christian, and he isn't a part of a church community anywhere.

00;01;39;04 - 00;02;11;26

Jhoan

He just, like, does it online kind of in some way. And I was and I was thinking about that. I'm like, That feels really interesting. And I was a little concerned because I'm just like, ooh, if you

think that that's like it struck me anyway. And I might be going off on a tangent. But, there's a lot that you miss when you're only doing it digitally.

00;02;11;28 - 00;02;19;06

Jhoan

So I think your question for me, the question was.

00;02;19;08 - 00;02;26;08

Alicia

What changes, if any, have you noticed how teens relate to. Yeah. Organized religion.

00;02;26;10 - 00;02;51;24

Jhoan

Okay. So, a piece of it is you can do it digitally. And then I was starting to say, and I won't go on this rabbit trail for a long time, as it might give you a like if you're just approaching God and the people of God digitally. Or like through digital pathways, you might miss some pretty important stuff about it.

00;02;51;27 - 00;03;24;11

Jhoan

So that is an element where things are different. Another thing that's different about right now, as opposed to earlier times, is there's a lot of good reasons, not to be not to pursue faith, at least the Christian brand of it. In that there's a lot of things going on politically, that are kind of ugly, right?

00;03;24;18 - 00;03;25;20

Alicia

Yeah.

00;03;25;23 - 00;03;46;23

Jhoan

And so it's pretty easy to just dismiss the whole thing and just go, I don't want to have anything to do with that. So I think that's a challenge of our time is to be able to, not look past that, but to kind of go, you know, my hope is anyway, again, a rabbit trail.

00;03;46;26 - 00;04;17;11

Jhoan

But that's not going to get in the way of people. Saying like, like Jesus's teachings are really different from what is happening in this political moment and that and that what's happening in

this political moment, often has like, a religious piece to it that is like. So back to the question, what is different?

00;04;17;14 - 00;04;27;07

Jhoan

There's just some, there's some, roadblocks, I think for people that are unique to this time period.

00;04;27;10 - 00;04;29;21

Alicia

I agree.

00;04;29;23 - 00;04;49;05

Jhoan

So, what changes, if any, then really talking about teams relating and more talked about like just a cultural moment. I don't know. I don't know if I have anything more to say about teams. Yeah.

00;04;49;08 - 00;05;13;15

Alicia

Well, it was interesting when you were talking about how the new political standpoint has changed a lot, but I'm also curious about the role of the digital world. Okay. And how has the digital world changed how teens think about faith and identity today?

00;05;13;17 - 00;05;48;05

Jhoan

Okay. I think I, mentioned that in part in my first answer. Faith and identity. I guess a big two part question here, right? Because some people's identities don't involve faith much at all. And some people have a, have a faith identity, and then they have another identity, right? Like, here's how I show up at school and then, oh, yeah, when I'm with my church friends, like, this is my identity.

00;05;48;06 - 00;06;22;13

Jhoan

So that can be complicated. So how is that? I don't know if it's true or not, but it could be that the digital world might force people to integrate those two things, because, like, depending on how people do, like social media. Like, people could catch you in your two-sidedness, right? Yeah, definitely. So but I, I've never I've never been aware of it.

00;06;22;14 - 00;06;23;29

Jhoan

I think people curate pretty well.

00;06;26;25 - 00;06;41;28

Jhoan

Different friend lists and all that. So yeah. So I'm going to say it. So how does the digital world change how teens think about faith?

00;06;42;01 - 00;06;55;07

Jhoan

Well, alpha might be an example of how it is able to,

00;06;55;09 - 00;07;35;05

Jhoan

I mean, that use of, like, with the different episodes, right. Bringing in, like, they're very intentional about those little, like, around the world, you know, like, they have a question and they ask people around the world what their thoughts are. Right. So that's an example of a good use of digital tools so that we can sit in this room, right, and be thinking about not just our own little place in the world, but what people in different, cultural contexts, have to say about a particular question.

00;07;35;08 - 00;07;50;21

Jhoan

So that's a way that the digital world has changed, at least the alpha, you know, the alpha. So things,

00;07;59;04 - 00;08;36;21

Jhoan

I want to get you one more thought also. That your average American, anyway, has access to worldviews and viewpoints that earlier times it would be like you could learn about, you know, what people in Saudi Arabia think, you know, or whatever, but it would take a lot more effort, right? So people are, I would say, more, it's easier to know about other cultures, other worldviews.

00;08;36;24 - 00;08;44;03

Jhoan

So that has an impact that I think is positive, but.

00;08;44;06 - 00;08;50;14

Alicia

There's a lot of positive impacts on us knowing about other places in the world.

00;08;53;05 - 00;09;04;16

Alicia

But transitioning and I'm thinking specifically about the students you work with like alpha and of course youth.

00;09;08;12 - 00;09;14;10

Alicia

I'm asking who are the teens who come to Ellis and what usually brings them here?

00;09;14;18 - 00;09;44;14

Jhoan

Okay. The, so we've I think I've had the privilege of being involved in, like, five rounds of alpha, so, you know, go back five years. We try to do it once a year. And usually, like most of the students who come, they were part of our church already, but not everybody.

00;09;44;17 - 00;10;06;26

Jhoan

And so, and I would say the last three years, we've always had 1 or 2 people in each, you know, alpha session where there's been 1 or 2 people who didn't, you know, weren't already a part of the youth group. Which in my opinion, that's like alpha at its best, right? When there's differing viewpoints in the room.

00;10;06;28 - 00;10;21;26

Jhoan

And so, so most of the people who come are familiar with Christianity, they may not have bought into it themselves. It might just be a family thing, you know, like Mom and dad say, we're all going to church. And so we do.

00;10;22;20 - 00;10;45;04

Jhoan

And Mom and dad said, you should go to Alpha. And so they do. But, that's I think, I think one of the reasons why students keep coming to Alpha, because Alpha, as you know, is very much, at least what we hope for communicating is come check it out. If you don't like it. You know, you don't have to keep coming.

00;10;45;04 - 00;11;11;01

Jhoan

It's fine. And so one of the things that I hope keeps people coming is, is that, that culture we have of all questions are welcome. And this is a place to, to sort it out and, and explore and with, with no pressure to believe a certain way, as we say a lot at Alpha.

00;11;11;04 - 00;11;51;22

Jhoan

So I think that what, what brings people to what brings people to Alpha might be a parent pushing them. Not in all cases. Right? I think another thing that brings people is curiosity. What I, what I'm super hopeful for is, and, and I think alpha at its best is people who haven't had a, a fair shot of knowing much about Jesus and, and, and the movement that grew from Jesus and his teachings, is that people will have, like an honest shot at exploring what, what what does he say?

00;11;51;22 - 00;12;16;19

Jhoan

And, do I buy it? Right? And is this worth it? Is this worth pursuing? I guess what I hope can happen. I mean, Alpha's only eight weeks long, right? But I think it's a good introduction anyway, to someone who's curious and wants to know but doesn't want any pressure. Right? Like, they can come check it out, do what they want with it.

00;12;16;22 - 00;12;26;13

Jhoan

So I hope that's what keeps people coming is the freedom to disagree. The freedom to never come back again if they want.

00;12;31;12 - 00;13;08;11

Alicia

Yeah, definitely. I'm still here because of the openness and, and mostly openness and also to friends to getting to know them, but to, to understand more about mental health and needs I'd love to dig into the emotional side a little more. The question is, how do mental health struggles show up in teams today?

00;13;08;13 - 00;13;35;03

Jhoan

What I've observed, especially like I. Okay, I think this has been true for a long time, but accentuated because of the pandemic. So I think the primary and most obvious thing that I see, as far as mental health, is anxiety, for sure.

I'm also aware of some eating disorders, which can be a piece of anxiety. Right. Not always. And I'm sure that there are other mental health issues that I'm just not aware of because people, of course, are judicious about who they share their personal information with. Right. And even though Alpha is a loving, accepting community, you're still that that level of intimate information may or may not, you know, come out fully.

00;14;15;08 - 00;14;29;04

Jhoan

And even if it does, it might be in that group. And I'm over here. So, that I would say anxiety primarily, it is the biggest and most obvious. Yes.

00;14;29;06 - 00;14;39;09

Alicia

Definitely. Also, just being a few weeks long, I'm not sure if people can open up and spill all of their guts out in one day, right?

00;14;39;09 - 00;14;44;12

Jhoan

Right, right. It's not that it's not going to happen on week one. And it might not happen at week eight.

00;14;44;15 - 00;14;49;03

Alicia

Yeah, but.

00;14;49;05 - 00;14;59;29

Alicia

When you think about students who walk through the door, which specific mental challenge do you see most often among teens who come into alpha?

00;15;00;03 - 00;15;16;26

Jhoan

Anxiety again? It is the one that is, I guess, most noticeable. The thing is, yeah, I don't know if there's more to say there, but that's the primary one.

00;15;16;29 - 00;15;47;03

Alicia

Definitely. As much as I've heard. But, there's been a lot of research raising anxiety and loneliness among teens. So my question is, the recent show that many teens experience anxiety and loneliness. How does Alpha respond to those emotional needs?

00;15;47;05 - 00;16;21;06

Jhoan

I think that alpha can be a real positive. It's not going to be a cure all, for sure. But some of the things about Alpha, where we have the high value of people, respectfully disagree. Right. And being honest. Right. Like, like, we don't want people to be shy about sharing what they think, even if the other people in their group don't, you know, think the same way.

00;16;21;08 - 00;16;54;26

Jhoan

So by, like, encouraging that culture, right. Of, of, good listening. You know, **respectful disagreement and all questions are welcome**. That can help with anxiety and loneliness both in that, you know, if you, if you keep calm in the, the level of conversation gets better and better, right? And so and the like, the trust builds between people.

00;16;54;26 - 00;17;24;00

Jhoan

Right. And so friendship grows like, **it's like a petri dish for friendship** in some ways. Right. And after you have significant conversations with people, you sometimes feel less alone. Right? **You feel known and understood and heard**. Now it doesn't take much. You could have **one person in a group who isn't respectful right, and can dash a lot of those good things**.

00;17;24;02 - 00;17;56;08

Jhoan

But that's why our student leaders are paying attention to stuff like that and trying to make sure that it doesn't, you know, that if that happens, it is extinguished. So that I, I'm hopeful that, people don't leave alpha, feeling lonely that see it leave Alpha feeling unknown and and hurt. Alpha is also a place where you kind of figure out what you think, right?

00;17;56;08 - 00;18;27;10

Jhoan

You might not have even been aware that you think this or that, but because of the kind of questions that are being asked, there's more self understanding as well. And so that also kind of sets you up for connecting with people because you kind of know yourself better, right? And then as far as anxiety goes, I think that deeper friendships can help.

00;18;27;12 - 00;18;46;28

Jhoan

Again, it doesn't it doesn't wipe away anxiety, but it might help you, be able to, like, have someone to bounce ideas off of or just get a hug from. Right. Things that can reduce anxiety, at least in part.

00;18;47;00 - 00;18;57;22

Alicia

Thanks for having faith in leaders. And definitely, the people here are very welcoming and definitely give a lot of hugs, as you have.

But, the conversations themselves, like we have now, if, when people talk about anxiety and purpose now for example in the videos, how much attention do you put into the concerns, like, people's mental health?

00;19;17;20 - 00;19;20;19

Jhoan

Like me, Joanne, as a leader.

00;19;20;19 - 00;19;22;25

Alicia

Yeah.

00;19;22;28 - 00;19;48;19

Jhoan

Well, one of the things I love about Alpha is that, like, it gets a lot, right? You know, as far as creating a space where, again, I feel like a broken record, but, where different perspectives are welcome, right? People are where, you know, like the fact that Alpha isn't just like a video and then you go home, right?

00;19;48;19 - 00;20;10;06

Jhoan

Like, it's all like, we're downloading all this information into you. It's not set up that way. It's like, here's some things to think about. Right? And now here's a space to talk about it with other people and kind of sort of, you know, sort it out, hash it out, if you will. And so, give me the question again because I forgot why this connects.

00;20;25;00 - 00;20;33;26

Alicia

I think, yeah, when people talk about anxiety and pressure and alpha, how much attention do you put into them? The concerns?

00;20;33;26 - 00;21;12;16

Jhoan

Yeah, that's that's a part. The pressure part especially is one of the things that I love, love, love about Alpha is that there is no pressure to believe a certain way. And I think that that frees people up to be themselves. Right? To be, to show up authentically and maybe even, you know, maybe even speak out about what they think, in spite of it being at a church, you know, and that sort of things where, it's not uncommon in other situations for people to, like, be on their best behavior.

00;21;12;17 - 00;21;35;28

Jhoan

Right. And if the idea in their head doesn't match with what's being said, that they just keep to themselves, right? And alpha, it's not like that, right? It's just like, whatever. Whatever you think, please share. And that with, you know, the way they do the, the episodes where they have person on the street interviews.

00;21;35;28 - 00;22;02;08

Jhoan

And so you hear a lot of different ideas. So, that creates an environment where, hey, my idea is, is one of many. Right. And so, so that no pressure thing is baked into the video itself, to the way we train our leaders to, you know, to facilitate, no pressure. That's what we're aiming for.

00;22;02;10 - 00;22;33;17

Jhoan

And that's, I think, hard to accomplish in reality. But, I think, I think we've done a pretty good job. So that's good. As far as anxiety, I don't know that we address that one head on, but I think, for some of the things, what we've already said, because of the environment being accepting and respectful, that that contributes to just, just a safer place to be.

00;22;33;20 - 00;22;55;17

Jhoan

Right. And that, hopefully will have at least an indirect, I guess my hope would be that, that coming to Alpha and being a part of this kind of discussion because not further contribute to some Insight, I hope that it.

00;22;58;00 - 00;23;23;17

Jhoan

It's not at all about anxiety, except maybe to talk about it openly and I and I'm a big fan. I think that when you talk about things, you often realize things, right, you know, and make progress on things that don't happen unless you put words around it. Yeah, yeah, that was bonus information.

00;23;23;20 - 00;23;50;15

Alicia

I definitely agree with people, sometimes you hear everything they're saying and understand, like when people are, like giving their ideas to someone, they should also listen to their own ideas and internalize it. Definitely. From what you've seen in Alpha, in what ways, if any, have you seen Alpha, help teens dealing with declining loneliness?

00;23;53;07 - 00;24;01;25

Jhoan

I think the way you phrased it now is a little different in that you're saying, like, okay, let's talk about real people, right?

00;24;01;25 - 00;24;03;09

Alicia

Yeah.

00;24;03;11 - 00;24;18;04

Jhoan

And I would like to think that, I think it's true, actually, like, I haven't, like, sat down with certain students and said, hey, do you feel less lonely now?

But I do think I have proof, like, you know, just by observing, you know, students that there's, friendships deepen and alpha. Right. And people who have previously been maybe a, a loner are, are less so. Right. Like, they are more known. Right. They've felt comfortable enough that they might reveal some things about themselves that they have, you know, in the past not shared about.

00;24;53;22 - 00;25;12;16

Jhoan

Right. So, I know also of, one student that, had Severe enough anxiety that suicidal thoughts were part of, what she was dealing with. And, while Alpha didn't like it, directly addressed that. I do know that this student is now thriving. You know, like, four years on, it is doing very, very well. And I and I, if I were to sit this person down and say, so how is Alpha a role in this?

00;25;43;07 - 00;26;16;07

Jhoan

You know, it's man, just been a smart, a small part of that person's story, but, but I think now, actually, I think that, I think that alpha was a piece of, you know, there's, you know, there's a lot of things that need to fall into place, right? For anxiety to be well managed. But I think I'm losing track of what I was trying to say.

00;26;16;09 - 00;26;41;26

Jhoan

But, again, the acceptance, the honesty, the authenticity that was encouraged here. It was a helpful stop along the way, to what is now a more manageable life with anxiety.

00;26;41;28 - 00;26;55;12

Alicia

Definitely. Using that alpha definitely helps people be more open and share things that probably didn't before. That definitely popped up in the, where we went to the mission spring.

00;26;55;15 - 00;26;56;00

Jhoan

Oh, yeah.

00;26;56;00 - 00;27;06;13

Alicia

Yeah, yeah. Some people who wouldn't have shared more about themselves, shared more about themselves. And it was very shocking. Wow. Yeah.

00;27;11;13 - 00;27;32;17

Alicia

Of course. But definitely. You're talking about Alpha. But, what is Alpha trying to offer beyond, like the traditional religion? You said, of course, communication and being open. But is there anything else that Alpha is trying to offer?

00;27;32;19 - 00;27;55;27

Jhoan

I love that question because it makes me think about, okay, so, what is what is traditional religion, right. And is alpha that that is all we got? Right? Is that the end goal? And so the distinction here, I hope I can make sense because sometimes when you start talking about deeply spiritual things, it's just hard to find words to match up.

00;27;55;28 - 00;28;25;24

Jhoan

Right? But yeah, I'll do my best. So, when I think I like traditional religion, I think like the common person's, what comes to mind anyway for people is rules of do's and don'ts and being a good person and being a good person so that God will love you right or be pleased with you. And that is not it's it's not what Alpha is about.

00;28;25;24 - 00;28;47;18

Jhoan

And I would further say it's not what I would say. The core of Christianity is not about that at all. The core message kind of I say because it sounds really informational and, and, and life with God and faith is way more like information is required but it's way.

00;28;48;10 - 00;29;19;02

Jhoan

More than just, you know, believing a set of facts or whatever. So the heart of Christianity that I like those words better, is not being good. So God loves you. It's more like understanding, like comprehending somehow like the mystery of God's love for us. That then, kind of like, grabbed hold of us.

00;29;19;08 - 00;29;30;00

Jhoan

And that's how, like the good things, you know, that, like that good life. And when I say good life, I don't mean like wealth in a sports car. I mean.

00;29;31;16 - 00;30;01;25

Jhoan

Like a life that is marked by caring for other humans, right? That good life, that kind of good life, that that's a result of, like, knowing God. These other things are kind of like fruit growing from that. So, I hope that's what Alpha eventually becomes. Can result in, like, what we've already said is there's no there's no pressure to believe a certain way.

00;30;01;25 - 00;30;19;07

Jhoan

So some people are going to come to Alpha and they're going to go, yeah, I'm not that interested. Right. You know, and move and move on. But others are going to go, oh my gosh, there's some, there's I don't know what it is yet, but there's something real going on here. And I want to stick with this, you know, and see if it holds.

00;30;19;10 - 00;30;46;03

Jhoan

Right. See if, if this holds up to scrutiny. Right. And if, if, if, if God really is real, and then a step beyond that is going, oh, okay. I'm, I'm going to go for it. Right? I'm going to have a relationship with God as best as, as best as I can. Right. And then from that, it's going to be more than traditional religion.

00;30;46;03 - 00;31;10;28

Jhoan

It's going to be a relationship with God. It's not like following a set of rules. It's being in a relationship with the creator of the universe that then produces good fruit in us. That changes the world, right? And in our own little way. Right. You know, in, in that, to, to use it, big dramatic example.

00;31;11;04 - 00;31;33;17

Jhoan

But like, we're all just humans, right? But a human in the hands of God can make remarkable change in the world. For example, Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King Jr, right? These are people who were inspired by God to do things that led to great change. Yeah. Right. So.

00;31;33;20 - 00;31;48;29

Alicia

Yeah, that was amazing. For someone who has never seen Alpha before, like that kind of like, Christianity kind of thing before. How is our form different from normal church programs?

00;32;13;22 - 00;32;45;20

Jhoan

Yeah. So, the thing that I think makes alpha distinctive and late, so I, I would like to say there's no difference between, like normal church youth group and alpha like, like, like the, the quality of conversations and the honesty and the welcoming of doubts and and being free to ask, you know, tough questions, I hope. And I've seen this carry over into youth groups.

00;32;45;22 - 00;33;02;06

Jhoan

Right. But for like let me stop for a second. So you started your question with someone who doesn't, who isn't familiar with any of it. Like what? How would I describe the difference?

00;33;02;09 - 00;33;02;29

Alicia

Yeah.

00;33;09;01 - 00;33;36;23

Jhoan

It's not uncommon to go to church and there to be a, like, which includes, like, just going to, like, a typical youth group where there's just sort of an expectation that everyone believes in God and everyone's brought in. Right. And so the one of the differences is alpha is like some people here believe and some people don't.

00;33;36;23 - 00;34;05;26

Jhoan

And that's all okay. Right. So it's there's a, there's an honesty about the different places where people are on the continuum of no belief to like, I'm all in. Right. That is, one of the things that I love about Alpha is it's just like it just puts it out there, you know, like, the reality is the same in youth groups and here that people have a variety of opinions, right?

00;34;05;26 - 00;34;21;11

Jhoan

And readiness and interest in God. Like some people, you know, especially someone who's been raised in the church, it's like something that their family does. And so they just go because it'd be more trouble to not go. Like, actually have that conversation with your parents. This is why I don't really want to go.

00;34;29;07 - 00;34;54;06

Jhoan

So, I guess that's one of the differences is that there's, there's a recognition and I welcome, like, wherever you're at, we'd love you to. We'd love to. We'd love you to be here. And we'd love to hear what you have to say, even if it doesn't agree with, like, traditional Christianity.

00;34;54;09 - 00;35;05;08

Alicia

Definitely. I've noticed people from all kinds of, like, who've been brought up from Christian families coming here and them actually showing their true selves out.

00;35;05;11 - 00;35;06;03

Jhoan

Yeah.

00;35;06;05 - 00;35;19;03

Alicia

And being honest. But, a big picture level. What is the overall goal of like, alpha?

00;35;19;05 - 00;35;30;24

Jhoan

The overall goal for Alpha is.

00;35;30;27 - 00;36;03;20

Jhoan

To give people a fair shot at understanding, and experiencing God like, in a sense, like. Like the thing I really like about Alpha is that it doesn't expect people to, like, have one conversation about Jesus and go, okay, I'm all in. Like, that's not really safe, right? I mean, occasionally that happens, but I don't think that's normal.

00;36;03;23 - 00;36;38;27

Jhoan

So the idea is that people get a chance to not only hear about the basics of the Christian faith, right, but also put it to the test. Right, to go. Well, I don't, you know, I don't buy this part of it or whatever or well, what about, you know, blah, blah, blah, right. So there's so the overall goal of Alpha is to give people freedom and a safe space to kind of sort through some of this stuff, with the hope that, like it.

00;36;39;00 - 00;37;17;23

Jhoan

Well, maybe not just hope, but the expectation, like if if God is real, you'll perceive that somewhere along the line it might not be in the eight weeks of alpha, you know, it might be 12 years later, who knows? But that by having had these conversations, right, and becoming familiar with, the basics of like who Jesus was and, you know, the, Jesus's profound, controversial radical teaching about, for example, loving your enemies.

00;37;18;23 - 00;37;52;25

Jhoan

Not an easy or popular thing to do. Right. But by so, so alpha exists because we think Jesus is worth considering. Right. And we want people to have like, a safe place to be to be introduced, to think about it, to,

00;37;52;27 - 00;37;58;08

Jhoan

Reject it if it doesn't hold up to scrutiny. Oh. How about that?

00;37;58;11 - 00;37;58;16

Alicia

Yeah.

00;38;43;03 - 00;38;52;28

Jhoan

I think we are coming to the end of that one. Okay. Oh, I guess I was just saying that alpha all over the world, I think. I think I gave a fair speech.

A fair summary of.

00;38;55;10 - 00;39;16;18

Jhoan

Like, if you were to walk into an alpha group, Zimbabwe or the Philippines, whether it's a youth alpha or an alpha that's geared towards adults, like, I think I think what I just said is probably true in all of those spaces.

00;39;16;21 - 00;39;46;08

Alicia

Yeah, I yeah, definitely. Overall, I mean, the video definitely shows that through every single alpha, what their morals are and what they're trying to do, we can definitely understand the video and, and just in the rest of we're just trying to teach them. But, If someone walked into Alpha right now, where do the most meaningful conversation usually happen?

00;39;55;06 - 00;39;59;25

Jhoan

Absolutely. For sure. In small groups. Well, wait a second. I mean.

00;40;00;19 - 00;40;36;16

Jhoan

So yes, there are meaningful conversations in the, in the, in the small groups that you have, direct experience with. Right. But on the retreat itself. Right. The overnight retreat that we have, I think a lot of times it's the UN program, the time, right, where people are just hanging out and playing games together or whatever, there are also significant conversations that can pop up.

00;40;36;19 - 00;40;50;03

Jhoan

Yeah. So I guess my first answer was, of course, in the, you know, the breaks for conversation, but also the side conversations.

00;40;50;06 - 00;41;06;07

Alicia

And definitely when you trust some people in Alpha more than others, like when you've formed a close bond with some of them. Yeah, definitely. You're more honest with them. And when you get private time, you talk to them more. Yeah, I see that a lot on the retreat. Definitely.

00;41;06;10 - 00;41;06;20

Jhoan

Yeah.

00;41;06;20 - 00;41;27;25

Alicia

And sometimes here too. Yeah. I think definitely in Alpha, you form that connection with known honesty and with, closeness of the room.

00;41;27;27 - 00;41;34;28

Alicia

What does a typical alpha night feel like emotionally for teens?

00;41;35;00 - 00;42;06;17

Jhoan

Well, I'm not a teen, so you might do a better job answering this one than me. My hope is that it would feel safe like that. That's the big goal, right? That people will feel safe sharing what they authentically think and feel. Yeah. And that takes a while to get there, right? That's one of the reasons we have the meal ahead of time, because there's that casual time together where you can just, you know, talk about whatever, right.

00;42;06;21 - 00;42;36;17

Jhoan

That builds or can build safety, that sense of safety. So yeah, I hope it's I hope and I think for most people it's an emotionally safe place. Yeah. And when it's not like if there's a combative person in the group, right, then, either the student leader or an adult leader is going to, try and talk with that person on the side and say, hey, you know, we're aiming for something else here, right?

00;42;36;17 - 00;42;58;14

Jhoan

Yeah. And so even when we've had folks who are a little bit more on the combative side, so far people have, kind of gelled with, the idea of let's make this a safe place.

00;42;58;16 - 00;43;15;13

Alicia

Yeah, definitely. I'd say that the games and the. Yeah, that, you know, time definitely shows that this is a hangout more than, training camp.

00;43;15;18 - 00;43;34;01

Jhoan

Right? Right. Yeah, yeah. Good point. The game, the games are fun. You know, the fun element that we have to include is a piece of building friendship that feels safe and fun because if you can be goofy together. Right. Yeah, that goes a long way.

00;43;34;04 - 00;43;42;21 all the others stinky stinky stink stink so the means you need a confirmation

Alicia

And of course, definitely be like, having dinner time and sitting together, eating food definitely helps to,

00;43;48;27 - 00;44;07;18

Alicia

One thing that stands out about Alpha is the openness and the questions of course. But how do you create a space where teens feel safe and expressing doubt like you said this really. But is there anything else you'd like to say about it?

00;44;07;21 - 00;44;28;29

Jhoan

Three cheers for our student leaders because it really it's it's, this the the student leaders are the ones who do the most to make that happen. Because me, as, you know, as, like, the adult in the room, I don't say that much. Right. You know, I might get to say my little thing at the beginning.

00;44;28;29 - 00;44;46;27

Jhoan

That's just kind of a little setting the tone for the night. And repeating that thing about, you know, being respectful and no pressure to believe a certain way. So. Okay, you repeat the question again, like, how do we create them?

00;44;46;27 - 00;44;50;23

Alicia

How do we create space for a team to feel safe in expressing doubt?

00;44;50;26 - 00;45;21;00

Jhoan

Yeah. I, I think the stance of our leaders as good listeners has a time to do with that. If, if you or any of the other, you know, student leaders were like, you know, well, you got to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, that, that doesn't, you know, that that's contrary to people feeling safe about expressing doubts.

00;45;21;02 - 00;45;25;07

Jhoan

Right? So,

00;45;25;10 - 00;46;02;10

Jhoan

So there's a few things that can be set up front, but also of the things more, more importantly than the things that we say, it's how we interact with people. And, the student leaders who are just listening, like asking the question and like genuinely listening to what different people have to say. Right? And then genuinely like, if someone is again, being combative, you know, like, like helping that person participate in a more healthy way, right?

00;46;04;05 - 00;46;08;26

Jhoan

That's, that's what brings it about I think. Yeah.

00;46;08;28 - 00;46;29;18

Alicia

I would agree honestly. The honesty and thanks to yeah. And also you do amazing part to make a lot of people feel safe here too. If it was just kids probably won't feel as safe. But, yeah.

00;46;29;21 - 00;46;54;16

Jhoan

Yeah, I, I will say the, the way Elsa designs its episodes also again with that piece where they, you get to hear lots of different opinions. I think that that contributes to the, like, in a sense, it's evidence that all opinions are welcome here. Yeah. And that helps others agree.

00;46;54;16 - 00;47;29;10

Alicia

Definitely. I saw the video asking people from all kinds of demographics and beliefs is a very good part of if you are uncomfortable to share your own ideas. Yeah. Relating to that is alpha designed more for teens with face or also with, who are unsure or isolated.

00;47;31;29 - 00;48;17;00

Jhoan

I would love, love, love to have an alpha where we have more students who aren't familiar with Christianity, than we do students who, you know, raised, you know, in the faith. I think they'll be fine. And I think that alpha is designed exactly for that. But I think it's super valuable for, I guess both because, again, there's, I think a large number of high schoolers who were raised in the faith, and, you know, that like it.

00;48;17;02 - 00;48;34;24

Jhoan

It's great for them to have a place where it's like, safe to ask questions. Right? Because up till now, not to say we're the first time right. But like when you're in elementary school, you're taught, you know what to believe and not really asked your opinion.

00;48;36;22 - 00;49;00;07

Jhoan

But as you get older. Right. And if you're forming your own ideas and more aware of other ways of being and thinking and doing, that it's, it's nice to have a safe place to kind of sort some of that stuff out. So I think, I guess I would say, I would say it's.

00;49;00;10 - 00;49;11;17

Jhoan

Equally valuable for both folks, high schoolers especially who, you know, because they're asking different questions, like, you don't even feel permission to ask it's question.

00;49;13;25 - 00;49;41;14

Jhoan

But I think that there are plenty of churches around where you don't feel permission to ask the big questions there either. Right. So anyway, it's intentionally designed for folks who aren't familiar with faith. Like, you don't have to have read the Bible or even know what the Bible is to come into an alpha group and catch on, right, what they're talking about.

00;49;41;16 - 00;49;50;02

Jhoan

And I like that a lot that it seems easily accessible to me.

00;49;50;04 - 00;50;14;00

Alicia

Yeah, definitely. Of course, from my experience coming to Alpha, I never heard of the Bible. And definitely, being Alpha makes me kind of curious about what the Bible even says. Yeah. But

00;50;14;02 - 00;50;28;11

Alicia

Do you know, like, can you tell me exactly if you could, a moment when the view of belief or doubt changes?

00;50;28;13 - 00;50;39;25

Jhoan

Great question.

00;50;39;27 - 00;51;09;27

Jhoan

I don't know, like I would say, I haven't had the privilege of, like, being in the room, right? And where someone's like, like, oh, I, I used to think this, but now I think this, and I don't know that I've had that experience. Which is not to say it hasn't happened. It's just like I wasn't in on it.

00;51;09;29 - 00;51;15;24

Jhoan

Right. Give me the question again. Like.

00;51;15;27 - 00;51;26;22

Alicia

Like, do you know, like when people, like, walk me through a moment when in a teen view, has belief or changed?

00;51;50;12 - 00;52;01;17

Jhoan

I would love to talk to Ashley's friend. And see,

00;52;01;20 - 00;52;13;19

Jhoan

See if there's anything that's brewing in her. That wasn't before. She was a part of Alpha. That would be an interesting conversation. But I haven't had that conversation.

00;52;13;21 - 00;52;15;23

Alicia

I haven't.

00;52;15;25 - 00;52;27;21

Jhoan

Yeah, I haven't, I haven't chatted with her much. Just a little bit here and there. And because I'm usually in this group and not that group, it feels a little like a little intrusive.

00;52;29;04 - 00;52;42;06

Jhoan

Say, hey, yeah. I don't think I can walk you through, a moment of. Oh, like clear change,

00;52;42;08 - 00;53;11;15

Alicia

Interesting. I think definitely. There definitely has been, with a bunch of students, putting me, but, definitely. I think it may soon happen, but is it like that? Hopefully. But, I also want to understand more of the full picture. Like, who tends?

00;53;11;18 - 00;53;20;00

Jhoan

I'm. I guess I'm going to stop for a second and that,

00;53;20;03 - 00;53;57;04

Jhoan

I remember when a student made a decision to be baptized and then, in our church when people, are baptized. One it's a it's like it's when you say the adult decision that that doesn't count at youth, like it's it we don't baptize babies. We reserve baptism for when you're old enough to understand and make that decision for yourself, which, you know, could be elementary school even.

00;53;57;07 - 00;54;11;26

Jhoan

But it's a decision made by the individual, not by the parents. So anyway, I and when someone have you been to one of our baptism services?

00;54;11;26 - 00;54;12;20

Alicia

Yeah, yeah. One.

00;54;12;25 - 00;54;37;23

Jhoan

Okay. So you know what I'm talking about. And when someone decides to be baptized, they're given the opportunity to to share it, you know, to share with, church family. Like what? They, you know, like, kind of what brought them to this moment or whatever. And, I remember a student talking about alpha.

00;54;37;25 - 00;54;59;09

Jhoan

So I guess that is, like, can I walk you through that person's process? No, but I'm just like, oh, yeah. You know, those, like, they went through Alpha, like when they were freshmen and they decided to be baptized when they were junior like that. So, you know, the timing on it is not immediate. Right.

00;54;59;15 - 00;55;04;15

Jhoan

And, and in many cases, but so there's one. There's one example.

00;55;06;00 - 00;55;17;17

Jhoan

Of someone who decided that they wanted to go all in with God through. And baptism is evidence of that trust. And, I'm into this. I'm going to stick.

00;55;19;19 - 00;55;22;09

Jhoan

With Jesus, I especially like it.

00;55;22;12 - 00;55;34;23

Alicia

Like, but, question that's like, not on here. Okay. Relating to this person, but, is it just freshman year that they came here or they can come here after freshman year and in junior year.

00;55;34;27 - 00;56;02;01

Jhoan

So this person was raised in the church, but did Alpha when they were a freshman. And then, And then we have the pandemic and then after like we regrouped, right, and started to have church in person again. And there was another opportunity to be baptized. But this person said, I would like to do that.

00;56;02;03 - 00;56;05;08

Alicia

Do you know if they were in Alpha during the pandemic?

00;56;05;10 - 00;56;06;11

Jhoan

It was before.

00;56;06;13 - 00;56;09;17

Alicia

Oh, so just before, not just that.

00;56;09;19 - 00;56;19;20

Unknown

Just like, yeah.

00;56;19;23 - 00;56;36;03

Alicia

Is Alpha designed more for teens to like? We actually ask you that question. Has there been a situation where Alpha didn't resonate with a teen? What do you think made the difference?

00;56;36;05 - 00;57;02;26

Jhoan

I love that question. The. Oh, here's what I've observed, and I didn't, like, follow up with the student and say so. So the thing I again, what I love about Alpha is come check it out. And if you don't want to keep coming, no problem. You know, that's totally okay. And so that's not uncommon that people come and check it out and then don't come back.

00;57;02;28 - 00;57;33;26

Jhoan

But I don't like giving exit interviews. Right. So I don't really know. Did they not come back because they didn't like it or did they not come back because they had basketball practice, you know, so, So I'm assuming and some of those cases are people it just, you know, it wasn't. You know, it wasn't compelling enough for them to come back.

00;57;33;28 - 00;57;35;09

Jhoan

Yeah.

00;57;35;11 - 00;57;57;12

Alicia

Definitely many. You will probably have many different reasons, probably some of them because of basketball practice or some of them, are very much like completely opposite beliefs. Definitely. Beliefs are a big part of it. But I think Alpha definitely introduces more about it.

00;57;57;15 - 00;58;18;02

Jhoan

Yeah, I would, I would hope and I don't and I don't know again that. That we are able to communicate on that first night. You know that all opinions are welcome. But I think, you know, another reason why people might not come back is because they don't believe it. You. Right. And I think.

00;58;20;17 - 00;58;46;12

Jhoan

That, I think that churches have, like, people who are suspicious that churches are going to push them into something. Right. And so people want, I think it's a pretty common human response to

go, I don't want to be pushed to do anything. No thank you. Right. So that might be something that keeps people, you know, keeps them from coming in the first place.

00;58;46;12 - 00;59;00;02

Jhoan

Like when they're invited. They just don't believe that it's a no pressure environment. It's just like, can't can't be true. Or that they come and it just doesn't feel.

00;59;00;04 - 00;59;09;21

Jhoan

Safe. I hope not. I hope you feel safe. And then they just don't come back for other reasons. But I don't know. Okay.

00;59;09;24 - 00;59;35;27

Alicia

I definitely think that people feel obviously very welcome here. And, I'm sure there are definitely a lot of reasons that they couldn't say no to coming here, but, yeah, I think definitely this is like the best place for people who are curious about it or want to ask questions about it.

00;59;35;27 - 00;59;45;06

Alicia

And. When it does work well, what element of alpha do you think are most responsible for helping teens feel supported?

01;00;06;28 - 01;00;57;10

Jhoan

The way the student leaders facilitate the groups, has a is like the, the foundation, right? For friendships to grow, right. And so if, if we can nail that, goal of people feeling comfortable, expressing their honest opinions, right, and asking hard questions. If, if we can create the environment where that happens and, you know, that doesn't happen in week one, but it starts to happen that I noticed around it, if there is a pattern, like at week three, the conversations start to go deep.

01;00;57;13 - 01;01;03;25

Jhoan

I just love that way that I remember coming, this last, you know, it was in January when we had week three and I came home like. It happened again, right? The conversations were so good today. Good I know. Well, it's like that sometimes.

01;01;13;24 - 01;01;32;03

Jhoan

But when you're having significant conversations together and you feel safe, right, that friendships form or deepen or get stronger, and now I want to say that's what leads to. But I forgot what the. What the question was about. Exactly.

01;01;34;22 - 01;01;41;29

Alicia

The question was, what element of alpha do you think are most responsible for helping teens feel supported?

01;01;42;03 - 01;02;27;09

Jhoan

Okay. Right. And so when you have, like, genuine I mean, genuine friendship really is supportive, right. So yeah, there you go. Honest conversation leads to genuine friendship. Plus the fun in the food. You know, those things together. So maybe, maybe the like. I didn't mention the fun in the food in the answer to this question, but I think that those are just as important as the honest conversation, because if you're relaxing and having fun together, that also is a piece of I mean, what do you do when you're with your friends?

01;02;27;09 - 01;02;31;19

Jhoan

You go out and you try and do something fun, right?

01;02;31;22 - 01;02;54;24

Alicia

Definitely. And I noticed, especially the boys like, definitely, figuring out how to hang out more often. And I was like, I was surprised that they weren't already friends, but they seem very close. And they call each other by their first names and.

01;02;54;27 - 01;03;02;12

Alicia

Looking back on your time with Alpha, when did you realize Alpha was truly making an impact on students?

01;03;02;14 - 01;03;08;01

Jhoan

Oh,

01;03;08;03 - 01;03;16;07

Jhoan

I would say,

01;03;16;10 - 01;03;47;06

Jhoan

A particularly sweet one. And this is to answer the question just slightly differently. And one of the things I absolutely, absolutely, absolutely love about Alpha also is that it's student led. I just love that. And, last summer, we and so we invited many of our, like, youth group graduates who are now off at college to consider coming back as, as a summertime youth leader.

01;03;47;08 - 01;04;11;20

Jhoan

And six of them said yes. And like, five out of six of them were alpha or, like, alpha leaders. And I was and, and I was so pleased to see one, like we had, we had people who just finished their freshman year, people who just finished their sophomore year, and also people who just finished their junior year.

01;04;11;22 - 01;04;58;10

Jhoan

And, and it's really so like, I don't know the exact numbers on this, but I think it's about 60% of students who were raised in the church when they go to college. They put God on the back burner. And faith is just not a priority anymore. And sometimes people come back, sometimes they don't. But like these six students who are back for the summer and I just because they were on the leadership team, I got to have lots of conversations with them and to hear how in college, they're still making a priority to be a part of a Christian fellowship.

01;04;58;12 - 01;05;22;27

Jhoan

And that's life giving for them, right? That's a good thing. They're not just doing it out of obligation, but because there's something real for them there. That in a sense, I'm going to go to graduate level alpha. But in a sense it's like, it's moments like those where I'm like, wow, this was formation or alpha was formation for you.

01;05;22;27 - 01;05;29;08

Jhoan

It was a, you know, it was a piece of your faith growing.

01;05;29;10 - 01;05;49;17

Alicia

And I would definitely agree with that. And definitely seeing people who are like, who just graduated from college, coming back here, I was like, I was surprised that they would still come here. They're not getting paid because they're coming here because they want to come.

01;05;49;20 - 01;06;02;08

Jhoan

Yeah, because they found some I'm going to say, like they found something valuable and they, I guess, to other youth off that, hey, this is worth this is worth investigating. Stick around. It gets good.

01;06;04;26 - 01;06;28;27

Alicia

Yeah. Definitely seeing, surprised that like, younger youth are, like, when college students come back, they're like, oh, my God, you're back. And they are, like, so happy. And to see that, like a college student and like a freshman is coming together and like, happy. I was like, wow, you guys like, know each other somehow.

01;06;29;00 - 01;06;45;22

Alicia

It's very interesting. What were some of these challenges that are currently like? What challenges does Alpha face working with teens today?

01;06;45;24 - 01;07;11;07

Jhoan

I think we talked about this at the very beginning with your opening question, which is there's a lot of good reasons not to consider Christianity as an as a good option. I, I would say that, that. That Jesus's name is used to throw out immigrants.

01;07;13;24 - 01;07;28;26

Jhoan

And, and do all sorts of ghastly things that when you read, when you read what Jesus is teaching people to do, it's like it's like the complete opposite, right? Like Jesus does not approve, in my humble opinion. A lot of the things that are being done in Jesus's name, so, so I think that that's, that's one of the things that is hard about like, just right now in this political moment is that there's so many good reasons to just go, no, thank you. I think once people check out Alpha, they'll quickly go, oh, this is not that.

01;08;02;16 - 01;08;04;21

Jhoan

This is not a hate group. I don't have to hate people to belong here.

01;08;10;22 - 01;08;13;06

Jhoan

Or or be mean. Which is a weird combination with. Anyway,

01;08;25;04 - 01;08;28;22

Jhoan

Give me the question one more time. Make sure I'm your.

01;08;28;24 - 01;08;35;08

Alicia

Okay. What challenges does Alpha face working with teams today?

01;08;35;14 - 01;09;15;22

Jhoan

Yeah I would say that that's probably the biggest challenge, at least for American and Bay area teams. That they're, you know, just the political moment. One of the things that alpha I think it's doing pretty well is like they update their materials every 2 or 3 years. And so, like things that are interesting and hold interest of a young person.

01;09;15;25 - 01;09;45;05

Jhoan

Right. It changes quickly. Right. And so the fact that they redo their materials and try and be increasingly relevant or stay relevant with what is relevant to these people now, but I would say that that's a challenge, to, to do things in a way that are going to be appealing to, young people of, you know, this, this culture.

01;09;45;05 - 01;10;15;11

Jhoan

And what's particularly hard, right, is also it's not just this culture because Alpha is trying to be relevant to someone in Spain as much as someone in North America, as much as someone in Singapore. Right? That's what they're trying to produce materials that are relevant across cultural contexts. I just think it's a tall order.

01;10;15;14 - 01;10;43;06

Alicia

Yes. Definitely. I'm sure that once people come to Alpha, they'll see that they like the hate group. This is not a hate group, especially because the videos are showing all kinds of people, all kinds of religions and all kinds of like, different backgrounds.

01;10;47;11 - 01;11;38;25

Jhoan

So I guess in summary, misperceptions of what Christianity is, is, is a barrier. And, And, I was going to add just remaining relevant when things can change so rapidly. But alongside that, when you were talking, I was thinking they are like alpha taps into something that I think is universal for most humans. Maybe not all humans, but most humans do wonder about God, and wonder what is what is true and what is not, and does, you know, does Christianity have anything relevant to say about that?

01;11;38;25 - 01;11;40;20

Jhoan

Because then they might be in the camp of things that.

01;11;42;10 - 01;12;05;29

Jhoan

Are off base, right. So anyway, I, I guess I was just toying with the universe, I guess feeding off of that, like how on earth do they make something relevant worldwide? And it isn't, you know, completely relevant worldwide, but it's a fairly good fit for a lot of different cultures. And I think it's because of that.

01;12;06;01 - 01;12;09;09

Jhoan

It's addressing some universal questions.

01;12;09;12 - 01;12;26;11

Alicia

Yeah, especially some people who don't really believe in God and stuff. But I'm curious about life and stuff. Definitely. Also curious about Alpha.

01;12;34;29 - 01;12;44;22

Alicia

Do you think anybody like, of course you read racist, but do you think people misunderstand teen faith today? And like what? In what ways?

01;12;44;24 - 01;12;51;28

Jhoan

Oh for sure.

01;12;52;00 - 01;12;54;04

Jhoan

I'm laughing because it's my own mother in law.

01;12;56;05 - 01;13;16;12

Jhoan

She just is heartsick over youth. These days. Because things are so different than, you know, the era in which she grew up. And, so I think that she is.

01;13;16;14 - 01;13;55;20

Jhoan

Like, her worries about how hard it is to follow God, you know, in this, she doesn't use the word heathen. That's an old word. That kind of means someone who's not following God, I guess. But she sees so many distractions and, and diff like, 50 years ago, there was a sense that you shouldn't sleep around, and and and the ideas about sexuality have changed.

01;13;55;21 - 01;14;10;01

Jhoan

Like, what is okay has changed so much. So how does this relate to your question? It was about people being this misunderstanding teens.

01;14;10;04 - 01;14;21;20

Alicia

People thinking like, what? You read again, what do people misunderstand about teen faith, about teens?

01;14;23;14 - 01;14;27;26

Alicia

And faith. Yeah.

01;14;27;29 - 01;14;41;08

Jhoan

I think I think it's pretty common that people think,

01;14;42;29 - 01;15;18;10

Jhoan

Yeah, to me, people think that if students talk about their doubts that it will seed their doubts. Like it's like it's a slippery slope. And if you start talking about doubts, then you're probably going to end up rejecting God. And I don't think that's true at all. I think if you don't talk about your doubts, it's awkward and makes you, like, keep secrets.

01;15;18;12 - 01;16;04;15

Jhoan

Right. And I don't think that's ever good. Well, I mean, there's some things that need to be kept confidential, which is a little different. But, I think a misunderstanding about faith is that encouraging people to talk about the things that give them trouble about faith is dangerous? I don't think so. I think that it helps people, in a sense, clear the air and kind of get and kind of it if there are valuable reasons to move past those things that cause you hesitation about faith, like, again, if it holds up to scrutiny, then what do we have to worry about?

01;16;04;18 - 01;16;39;07

Jhoan

Right? So, having a place where you can be honest about your questions is why I love the office so much, and why I want to do it every year. Because I think it's helpful. But that would be a basic misunderstanding that people have like that. That's dangerous. What do people misunderstand about teens? That they don't care, but they don't care about spiritual stuff.

01;16;39;09 - 01;16;52;19

Jhoan

I don't think that's true. I think a lot of people, a lot of teenagers do care, and are very curious and just don't have a safe like they don't even know where to begin.

01;16;52;22 - 01;17;04;17

Alicia

Yeah. Would you say that alpha is a good place for this safe curiosity to be? Because I remember one day, you were saying to everybody like, I won't tell your parents.

01;17;04;23 - 01;17;05;05

Jhoan

Yeah.

01;17;05;05 - 01;17;07;18

Alicia

So.

01;17;07;21 - 01;17;09;10

Jhoan

Yeah, I felt it was.

01;17;09;11 - 01;17;38;12

Jhoan

Important to me, like, because I was an adult in the room. Right. I just wanted them to know. I don't know what the question was that gave that where I felt the need to say that. But I wanted people to know that this is truly a safe place. And if you tell me, you know, that you don't believe in God or don't want to be here or whatever, I'm not going to share that information.

01;17;38;18 - 01;17;41;11

Jhoan

It's safe here. Yeah.

01;17;41;13 - 01;17;45;22

Alicia

And it's a very good thing.

01;17;45;24 - 01;17;52;21

Alicia

01;17;53;04 - 01;18;00;16

Alicia

What is something most people don't understand about Alpha?

01;18;13;17 - 01;18;27;02

Jhoan

I, I wouldn't say that this is most people, but I was talking with one student and said, hey, you're going to come. And he said, oh, I don't have any doubts. So I don't need God. And I said, oh, no. No, no, no, no, that's it's not.

01;18;29;26 - 01;18;44;20

Jhoan

Just for people, you know, who have questions. I mean, it's for everybody, right? Whether you feel solid in your faith or not, I think it's I think it's a helpful thing to go through.

01;18;44;22 - 01;19;02;24

Alicia

Yeah. And definitely people in interviews in Alpha, definitely have probably strong beliefs, but are still probably there because they're curious about other people's opinions. They just want to like the experience of it.

01;19;02;26 - 01;19;08;21

Jhoan

Good. Okay. It was pesky. Is there anything.

01;19;08;21 - 01;19;17;16

Alicia

Else? Oh, yeah. Well, one last question. What do you hope teens carry with them long after leaving Alpha?

01;19;17;19 - 01;19;43;27

Jhoan

Here's my hope. And this is, especially true for student leaders because y'all have, I guess you're the ones who guide the conversation, right? What I hope this is my dream. Is that, when you all are off and not that everyone goes to college, but. But these things happen at college more often than they happen in other places.

01;19;44;02 - 01;20;12;08

Jhoan

But I hope that people will be able to have a posture of listening to, like, I want people to have genuine, helpful spiritual conversations with other people. And I think the way to do that is by doing a lot of listening and not just saying, well, I think rah rah rah rah rah, rah rah, you know, and and expecting that to be a good conversation.

01;20;12;10 - 01;20;41;19

Jhoan

That's a part of a good conversation. If it's if it's along with asking what they think and listening genuinely to what they think and not trying to have an argument about it. So I would love to see honest, interesting conversations that sometimes have to do with spiritual things because I think spiritual conversations are fascinating, in lots of different contexts.

01;20;41;21 - 01;21;06;22

Jhoan

It's one of the fun things about college is you have these late night philosophical conversations with, with people, and, I can imagine someone in that late night conversation, being a bit of a Christian bully. Right. And the former Alpha leader goes, oh, hold on a second.

01;21;07;21 - 01;21;15;12

Jhoan

I want to hear what Greg has to say, you know, and just facilitate a really good conversation. Yeah. That's what I want.

01;21;19;27 - 01;21;26;28

Alicia

The alpha helps bring positive, understanding, and patient.

01;21;27;04 - 01;21;50;01

Jhoan

People. Yeah. And, and I would go so far to say that what is missing in our political discourse right now is people actually listening to each other, that there's a lot of people making posts on social media and not, you know, and just like, and, and having these digital arguments, right, that aren't face to face, they don't don't include a lot of listening.

01;21;50;01 - 01;22;08;04

Jhoan

It's just point scoring about, well, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so if we actually were able to take what goes on here and like, recreate this all over America, democracy would return.

01;22;11;06 - 01;22;21;27

Alicia

So we do also say that one part of Alpha's goal is to make people more listening and make people more like, open.

01;22;21;29 - 01;22;33;09

Jhoan

I think I think it's a byproduct of it. I don't think it's like they're. I don't think that they would list this as their primary goal. Right, is to save American American democracy.

01;22;37;23 - 01;23;07;24

Jhoan

But truly, I mean, it's it's, and I'm thinking about, a quote in one of our leaders training that said something about it was, I'm not going to get the quote exactly right, but something like listening is so close to love that they're almost the same thing. And so Alpha, what I love, again, I keep saying I love alpha and it's true.

01;23;08;00 - 01;23;33;26

Jhoan

Like what I love about Alpha, is it like it puts some things in place. So the context. Right. People experience love when they come here. Right? Because people genuinely want to hear what other people have to say. Like, it's a simplistic definition of love, but a large part of love is giving someone your attention.

01;23;33;28 - 01;23;35;04

Jhoan

That's a lot of it.

01;23;35;06 - 01;23;44;01

Jhoan

It is like showing up and being interested. And people experience that here. I love that.

WHAT'S MISSING (GAPS)

- Teen Confirmation (other perspectives from teens to verify this information about alpha, and how they feel)
- Explain which teens may not connect with Alpha

Reflection:

My annotations show that the Alpha leader describes the program as an open space where teens can talk honestly about anxiety, loneliness, and belonging. Several highlighted moments explain how Alpha tries to help by creating emotional safety through small groups, respectful conversation, and community time. This connects closely to my larger research about Gen Z mental health. The interview is especially helpful because the leader admits Alpha is not a “cure-all,” which adds important balance to my story. However, there are still gaps, especially in understanding which teens may not connect with Alpha. I also need more direct input from teen participants to confirm whether they personally feel supported. For my audience, teens, parents, and educators this interview helps show why Alpha matters today, while also pointing to questions that still need further investigation.

New

00;00;01;05 - 00;00;11;20

Alicia

so my question is, would you like. How did this Palo Alto Vineyard Church Alpha start? If, you know.

00;00;11;23 - 00;00;48;16

Johan

I, I know in part I know they started doing alpha, for adults and, and I had done alpha, for adults, like 20 years ago at the church I attended in Colorado. And I loved it. I didn't think, I thought there's nothing better as far as people having a safe place to explore faith, and some where I learned that they have that they were developing materials for youth.

00;00;48;19 - 00;01;12;01

Johan

And because I was a youth leader, I'm like, I'm all over it. Bring it on. So I, I don't I so I was a part of that first group who did alpha like five, six years ago. I don't know how I found out. Like, if somebody told me, I don't remember that piece of it, but I remember being very excited.

00;01;12;04 - 00;01;16;26

Johan

And so I was just like, yes, let's let's try this out.

00;01;16;29 - 00;01;18;04

Johan

That's our story.

00;01;18;06 - 00;01;19;09

Alicia

Nice.

00;01;19;11 - 00;01;24;16

Johan

We've tried to do it once a year since then, except for the pandemic.

00;01;24;19 - 00;01;28;29

Alicia

Well, so far it's going great. Yeah, I'm not sure if you noticed, but going amazingly.

00;01;29;02 - 00;01;31;24

Johan

I would agree. Yeah, yeah.

00;01;31;26 - 00;01;45;02

Alicia

But do you have another question? Like, what would you say your background is before you, like, went to Alpha? Especially when before you went to, like, the first adult Alpha.

00;01;45;05 - 00;02;20;00

Johan

I had been raised in a church. I was adopted, actually, in, So, like, the family that I was adopted into was a Christian family. And they started taking me to church when I was like, you know, before I could walk. So, so I came to Alpha, not as someone who, like, I already believed, but I still had big questions, so I wanted a place to, like, talk freely.

00;02;20;02 - 00;02;21;28

Alicia

Did you have any siblings?

00;02;22;01 - 00;02;37;27

Johan

Yes. I'm the youngest of four, and my three older siblings were made the old fashioned way. But, my family wanted to adopt, my mom's adopted.

00;02;37;29 - 00;02;50;11

Alicia

Ancestry. I mean, if you don't want to answer, this is perfectly fine, but do you know, if you're like, biological parents are religious or not?

00;02;50;13 - 00;03;26;10

Johan

Interesting. Because I met my biological parents for the first time about four years ago. That's a whole nother very interesting story. Feel free to ask me about it. I don't mind talking about it at all. And so what I now know about my biological parents, my mom, was like, barely anything. And then midlife, like, in her 30s, she started dating someone who was pretty serious about his Catholic faith.

00;03;26;12 - 00;03;47;17

Johan

And so she's like, okay, you know, let's give it a go. And she was like, now she's a very, like very, deep thinking, very spiritual woman. It's really fun to talk to me.

00;03;47;20 - 00;03;49;26

Alicia

How were your dad?

00;03;49;28 - 00;04;14;00

Johan

I don't know when faith became something important to him. But I know that it is now. But I don't know enough of his story to, to know, but I but I know that he's, Got something real going on with God, but I don't know enough.

00;04;14;03 - 00;04;25;04

Alicia

One more question. Is there, like, any, like, where you could tell me about the first day you started to use Alpha Hoo?

00;04;25;06 - 00;04;29;04

Johan

So.

00;04;29;06 - 00;04;53;26

Johan

The, something very cool. I think about the way we do Youth Alpha is that it's student led and that when we were originally, like, the original idea of the youth Alpha, that wasn't the way we were going to do it. And then I think God tipped me off. Like, I just got that idea of, like, let's have students do it.

00;04;53;29 - 00;05;25;28

Johan

It's the best decision we ever made. I think personally, and, so when we the very first day, the very first alpha, one, we were coming out of the pandemic, so church had resumed, but it was outside. We were meeting at, Dallas Middle School outside in the in the breezeway itself, covered in case it rained.

00;05;26;00 - 00;05;55;14

Johan

But so we had I think we have like three student leaders for each group. And we had three groups actually, to start with, as people were checking it out. And then I think the first one went pretty well, you know, that the first night is always people are, like, trying to figure out, you know, is this okay?

00;05;55;17 - 00;06;16;19

Johan

You know, so but as things went on, people got to that level where we were having like real discussions where people were, like tonight, you know, how you, So hang on a second. I don't I don't think so. Right. And then the conversation turned it up to other people, you know, like joined and they're like, yeah, I agree with you, but feel sometimes, but not all the time.

00;06;16;22 - 00;06;27;00

Johan

What's that all about? So they got to that, that kind of honest conversation where people are just giving the polite church answers. Sure.

00;06;27;03 - 00;06;40;09

Alicia

Yeah. It's okay. There's more questions. When you said, like, you, did you choose who was going to be the first people who to lead Alpha I invited?

00;06;40;14 - 00;07;02;13

Johan

Yeah. So I, I like, looked around the youth group and like, in a sense when I said, so who would be a good host? Because it's important. Like when I invited you to consider it, I mean, I, I chose you. I invited you to do it because you've got the kind of skills where people are like, you know how to draw people out, right?

00;07;02;13 - 00;07;25;19

Johan

You're comfortable person. You got, like, the right personality for it, right? So I did, you know, like, I handpicked people. Not everybody said yes. You know, like you, you say, this is what we're going to try and do you want to join it? Right. And some people were like, sure. And that's great. Another we were like, yeah.

00;07;25;21 - 00;07;43;02

Alicia

Yeah. I would also want to ask, like, how did you one like this church to function? Like how like how did you know when dinner time should be or like, was it already a thing? Was it already like, thought of?

00;07;43;05 - 00;08;10;27

Johan

So, because I was in Alpha before, as you know, like the, the adult alpha. I like if it were up to me, I probably wouldn't have been smart. And I don't want to say smart enough, but I probably would have thought, oh, dinner was just too much trouble. You know, I might have skipped it,

but because when I was in it the first time, I realized, oh my gosh, dinner is a real important part of this, right?

00;08;11;01 - 00;08;35;22

Johan

Just to give people an opportunity to just relax together and have, you know, whatever conversation they want to. So, when we did Youth Alpha, the first time, it was on Sunday mornings, like during church time, so there wasn't time to do the meal like we did the game part and we had donuts because that's what we had.

00;08;35;25 - 00;08;43;16

Johan

But it wasn't as good as now. Like where we have the the dinner. To answer your question.

00;08;43;18 - 00;08;52;20

Alicia

Yeah, you did. Yeah. So.

00;08;52;23 - 00;09;06;20

Alicia

Yeah, you did answer my question. The question was like, how did it first spread the news? Did you like, how did you first spread the news? Was it like people already knew about you, the alpha or people were just you just tipped over people.

00;09;06;20 - 00;09;25;28

Johan

So the first is about youth Alpha specifically. The first time we did it, nobody knew much of what it was about. So on Sunday morning, you know, like a month before we were gonna launch Youth Alpha, I'm like, okay, guys, this is what we're going to do in about a month. And you know, so I talked it up and just explained it to the best of my ability.

00;09;26;01 - 00;09;52;01

Johan

And when we the very first time we did it, we didn't even ask people. I mean, like, we welcomed people to invite their friends, but we were like, no one's going to invite their friends until they know what they're inviting them to. Right? So we didn't expect too many people to bring friends like, for that first round, but then after people had gone through it once, we're like, hey, you know what this is about?

00;09;52;03 - 00;10;00;07

Johan

So please invite invite your friends, right? Because we would like it to be more than just for, you know, kids raised in church.

00;10;00;09 - 00;10;06;19

Alicia

Yeah. So you're saying it was first kids raised in church, and then it was like more people from other places?

00;10;06;19 - 00;10;39;09

Johan

Yeah. We've never had a lot of people from outside the church because I think people especially, you know, high schoolers, it's like, they're shy about, even letting people know they're Christian sometimes. Right. So it feels like a big risk, I think, for people to invite people to come to this quasi Christian thing, even though truly, at least we try very hard, as you know, to have no pressure at all.

00;10;39;12 - 00;10;43;08

Johan

But, you know, that's hard to communicate.

00;10;43;11 - 00;11;05;01

Alicia

Yeah, but I think you we're doing a very good job. Ready. And I think definitely, telling people that you don't have to invite your friends and like, praying for people to invite their friends and have goodness in it. It's very good. Anything else you'd like to add?

00;11;05;03 - 00;11;07;12

Johan

I think you're a great alpha leader.

00;11;07;14 - 00;11;17;06

Alicia

Thank you. It's a nice. I think your all your entire process of making this was amazing. And I think thanks to you, this is running perfectly.

00;11;17;09 - 00;11;24;21

Johan

All right. I think it's going well, too. I like it, I like it, and tonight. Oh, my gosh, wasn't the prayer time cool?

00;11;24;21 - 00;11;32;24

Alicia

Yeah, it was very nice, I enjoyed it. She loved it. All right. That's all of my questions right now.

00;11;32;29 - 00;11;42;10

Johan

Okay. If there's anything else further, as you're getting back, you know, you're editing or whatever you need to redo or whatever, let me know.

00;11;42;13 - 00;11;44;19

Alicia

Okay. Thank you so much again. You.