

Talk 6 – How Does God Guide Us?

Duration 20 Minutes

Alpha – Prisons: Transcripts



Key:

P – Personal story that Nicky Gumbel tells in his Alpha talk. These may be replaced with a live speaker's personal story or the speaker may tell the story about Nicky in the same way Nicky tells stories about others.

S – Story that Nicky tells about someone else (about a friend or a story he heard or read about).

Q/Q* – Quotes are key to the talk to emphasise a point and to enable guests to engage and relate the material. We acknowledge that some of the people quoted may not be well known in your local context, however, please be mindful of the value of what is said in the quoted material; not just the guests' knowledge of the person being quoted. If you choose to replace a quote, it should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources. In general, we encourage you not to omit or replace quotes unless absolutely necessary. Quotes marked in the margin with a * symbol are key quotes and should not be omitted from the talk.

Key Bible Passages are identified and you may wish to display these visually for your guests.

Red type identifies a part of the key teaching text that could be removed or altered for contextualisation.

Text left untouched is the standard key message content of the Alpha talk.

Talk summary:

- In life, we all face decisions, big or small. We are increasingly faced with a vast array of choices and making decisions can be hard. We all need guidance.
- We are not alone in this life – that there is a God who desires relationship with us and who also communicates with us.
- It's not always easy to hear God, and sometimes we think we know best, but God's plan is bigger than our mistakes and, in everything, God works for good.
- God has a good plan and a purpose for our lives and it is possible to discern God's will (his guidance) through various ways: Commanding Scripture (Bible), Compelling Spirit (Holy Spirit), Counsel of the Saints (Church/Christian community), Common Sense (Reason), Circumstantial Signs (Providence of God).
- If you walk in this relationship with God, reading (*Commanding Scripture*), listening (*Compelling Spirit*), talking (*Counsel of the Saints*), thinking (*Common Sense*), watching (*Circumstantial Signs*), your life will make a difference. you will have a far bigger impact than probably you will ever realise in this life.

NOTE: Parts of the talk may need to be contextualised for other contexts or cultures but make sure you maintain the key elements of humour and personal testimony. Notice how quotes, and stories are used throughout to add emphasis to the main points of the talk (theology and testimony).

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<p>Keep or adapt text in red to fit your context.</p> <p>Keep or adapt text in red to fit your context.</p>	<p>We're faced today with a dazzling array of choices. There's a superabundance of options. I read that in the average US supermarket there are 48,750 different items to choose from. In the old days – breakfast cereals: it was Cornflakes or Rice Krispies. Now there are hundreds of breakfast cereals.</p> <p>Marriage partners: in the old days, you married the girl or boy next door. Now, you can go on the internet and there are thousands of options! Jobs: in the old days you tended to do what your parents did. Now, there are so many different options and you don't just do one thing – you can change many times.</p> <p>And choice is a great thing. It's a blessing. But in some ways it doesn't make the decisions any easier.</p>
<p>P</p> <p>S</p>	<p>OPTION 1: <i>Tell about a time that you were lost and how you found your way out.</i></p> <p>OPTION 2: Tell us a story <i>Ask the guests if they have ever been lost. Ask a volunteer to explain what happened and how did they eventually find their way out? The more humorous the better and you may ask for more than one story if the guests would like to share.</i></p>
	<p>We all need some guidance in our lives. Whether it's when we are growing up or when a big decision needs to be made. Some of you may have had good guidance growing up, many of you will have had not so good, or even no guidance in your lives. It's easy to become lost or caught up in life if we don't have clear guidance or a clear support.</p> <p>We are all faced with decisions. Often these are quite small decisions: What do I wear today? Where shall I go? What am I going to have for dinner?</p>

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	<p>Often the thing about prison that people tend to like is the lack of decisions that have to be made. The stress of making decisions is taken away.</p> <p>But on the outside, decisions can mount up on top of each other. Throw in a few more complex decisions about relationships, or where you should live, what company to get you mobile phone contract with or where to send your kids to school. Add on top of this when things go wrong and more decisions have to be made; things can get really challenging.</p> <p>When you invite Jesus into your life you don't have to feel alone, and God promises to guide you and he has a plan and a purpose for your life.</p>
<p>Ephesians 2:10, NLT [Paraphrase]</p>	<p>'You are God's masterpiece. He created you anew in Christ Jesus, so that you can do the good things he planned for you long ago.'</p>
<p><i>Personalise the text in red.</i></p>	<p>Sometimes people worry about this, like the plan, purpose, calling: 'Isn't that just for like priests, nuns, missionaries?' No, it's for everyone. God has a calling on <i>your</i> life.</p> <p>Does it mean that you can miss God's plan – you did one thing wrong and you've missed the whole thing? Certainly I don't think that that's the case.</p> <p><i>I've made many mistakes in my life. Sometimes I've deliberately ignored the instructions. Other times, I've just got it wrong. I thought God was guiding me about something and I was wrong.</i> Guidance can be difficult. But God's purpose for you is bigger than your mistakes.</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>Nelson Mandela said this: 'Don't judge me by my successes; judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.'</p>

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Psalm 32:8	And what God says is: 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.'
Personalise the text in red.	<p>So how in practice do we hear that voice? How does God guide us?</p> <p>Well, God guides in many different ways. But what I've found is these five CS's have stood me in good stead as far as guidance is concerned. They're different ways in which God speaks to us and leads us. Sometimes it's just one of them. Sometimes, with a big decision it might be all five. So here's the first:</p>
	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Talk Point 1</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">COMMANDING SCRIPTURE</p>
	<p>Commanding Scripture. The Bible is God's guidebook for your life.</p>
Psalm 119:105	The psalmist says: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.'
Personalise the text in red.	<p>This is the main way in which I've found over the last forty years that God has spoken to me. And as we read this book – and I try to read it daily because I love to hear God's voice – he speaks about his love for us, his kindness, his mercy, his grace, how important you are to him.</p> <p>And it also tells us what his primary calling is on your life. And his primary concern is not about what you do, about who you marry or whether you get married or not, or about the children; the primary calling on your life is into a relationship with him. That's what gives ultimate meaning and purpose to your life: a love relationship with him.</p>

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	<p>And then a love relationship with other people. That's what we're called to: we're called to love our family, to love our friends, to love our neighbour. There are many different ways in which we can do that, but as you read you see all the different things that you can do. Little acts of kindness can make such a difference.</p>
<p>S</p>	<p>Fyodor was a wild young man. His life revolved around eating, drinking, talking, music, theatre and the company of women. He dreamt of fame. He was caught up in a political movement in Russia and he was arrested, tried and sentenced to be executed.</p> <p>On a bitterly cold morning, the prisoners were taken out to be shot. The prison guards raised their muskets to their shoulders and took aim. At the last moment, a white flag was raised to announce that the Tsar (or emperor) had commuted their sentence to life imprisonment in Siberia.</p> <p>On his arrival in Siberia on Christmas Eve 1849, at the age of twenty-eight, two women slipped him a New Testament. They suggested he should search the pages thoroughly. He did.</p> <p>While in prison, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the great Russian novelist, read the New Testament from cover to cover and learnt much of it by heart. He wrote, 'I believe that there is no one lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic and more perfect than Jesus. I say to myself with jealous love not only is there no one else like him, but there never could be anyone like him.' It was through the Bible that he had encountered Jesus Christ.¹</p>
	<p>So over the centuries, God has spoken through the Bible. And God has good things – that's what Paul says: he has good things for you to do. Or, as some translations say, good works. You're not saved by good works; you're saved by grace, Paul says, but you are saved for good works. God has a purpose for your life, good</p>

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thousands of people. Then again she sensed God speak to her in her heart. It wasn't a voice but she just felt she had to stop preaching and instead just spend time sitting with the poor. For eighteen years, she just spent time with the lowest of the low – sitting in slums, just being with the poor. Once again she felt like God say to her, 'Go to Mozambique' (an incredibly poor country in Africa). When she got there she was shocked at what she saw: children walking around in rags, nothing to eat, dirty. But she didn't have anything either, no money, nowhere to stay and so she sat out on the street corner with them. Whilst she was praying, she heard God say to her, 'Take these kids home,' but she didn't have a home to take them to. So Heidi just started welcoming these kids, many of them sick, most of them orphaned or disowned, until she had 320 to look after.

Heidi and her husband Roland set up an organisation called Iris Global, first starting in Africa and Asia and now has thirty-five bases in twenty nations. She started with nothing – just buying bread to feed the children when she could, yet this led to the UN getting involved in supporting her ministry and providing helicopters to help her reach the poor in remote places to help provide food and medical care. From God speaking to Heidi about going to Mozambique, they now feed over 10,000 children every day and care for children with no home.

And then sometimes he guides in more unusual ways: visions, pictures, impressions and prophecies from other people.

P

STORY:

Tell a personal story of a time when you felt God speaking to you about someone you were praying for – something seemingly mundane, but had a significant meaning for the other person. The story below (taken from Alpha with Nicky Gumbel) is an example to help you prepare.

I think of just a few days ago, the Sunday before last, I was praying

Replace with your own

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example of a time when God gave you a very simple word for someone.

for a Swedish man who'd come forward. And I was praying, 'Lord, speak to me. Is there something that...?' And then all I could see was two very bright headlights, and I felt God is saying something about 'shining in the darkness'. And he immediately kind of looked... And I said, 'Does that mean something to you?' He said, 'Yeah, with our family car, both the headlights are broken. And I've been feeling I need to shine in my family.' Just a very little thing, very mundane thing.

Talk Point 3

COUNSEL OF THE SAINTS

And then the **Counsel of the Saints**. 'Saints' not in the special way of very special people, but there's another sense in which 'saints' is used. In the New Testament, 'saints' just means ordinary Christians. So 'counsel of the saints' is like the church. We'll have a whole session when we look at the church, but this is about getting advice. We're not alone in this. God has put you in a community. You experience that in the small group here. And the Holy Spirit doesn't just speak to me; he speaks to you. The writer of Proverbs says:

Proverbs 12:15

'The wise person listens to advice.'

Proverbs 20:18

'Make plans by seeking advice.'

Personalise the text in red.

I'm so grateful for the advice of friends, the advice of my parents, and now my children. Ultimately, of course, we're responsible for our decisions, but it's such a blessing not to be on our own, be able to talk to people about the decisions that we're making.

How do you *know* that the prompting of the Spirit or the advice from a friend is really *God* speaking to us? Well, there are various

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	tests. And what we're encouraged in the New Testament is:
1 John 4:1	'... test the spirits to see whether they're from God...'
	<p>So one test is: is it in line with the Bible? If it's not, God's not going to contradict himself. Is it loving? God is love. He would not tell you to break the law or hurt other people.</p> <p>It says about prophecy, when we have a picture for someone, a word for someone: is it encouraging, strengthening, comforting?</p> <p>Another test is do you feel peace about the decision?</p>
Colossians 3:15	Paul says: 'Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.'
	<h2>Talk Point 4</h2> <p>COMMON SENSE</p>
	Fourth CS is Common Sense . God's promises of guidance don't save us the problem of thinking. Paul wrote this to Timothy:
2 Timothy 2:7	'Reflect on what I'm saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.'
	<p>He says, in other words: 'Use your mind, and as you're thinking, God will guide you.'</p> <p>There's stuff in the Bible that will tell us the general will of God. So we know from the Bible that singleness is a high calling, that marriage is the norm; but this book won't tell you who you should marry. It's no good saying: 'Lord, who should I marry? Oh, Ezekiel. I don't know many Ezekeiels!' It's common sense.</p>

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	<p>God has given <i>you</i> gifts, talents. He’s given you abilities, qualities, character, strength. He’s given you experiences of life. And he doesn’t want anything to be wasted. He wants your talents to be used so that you’re not frustrated but you’re fulfilled in what you do.</p>
	<h2>Talk Point 5</h2> <h3>CIRCUMSTANTIAL SIGNS</h3>
	<p>Fifth CS is <i>Circumstantial Signs</i>. God is sovereign. He rules and reigns in this universe, and he can work things out. Paul says this:</p>
Romans 8:28	<p>‘We know’ [he is speaking from his experience] ‘that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.’</p>
Personalise the text in red.	<p>In everything in your life, God is working for the good. That’s in all the bad stuff that’s been done to you, God can use that for good. But also the bad stuff I’ve done, the mistakes I’ve made in the past, even the bad stuff I’ve done that was wrong, Paul says he can even use that for good. He can use everything.</p> <p>Some people say ‘Why has God brought me into prison?’ The question could be asked: ‘Were you following God when you came in here?’ The answer is usually, ‘No.’ So God didn’t bring you here, but he can bring good out of it and help you use the time in a positive way. God can use everything – all the situations you get yourselves into, all the struggles, all the circumstances, God is at work in all of them – to turn a bad situation into something positive. He is guiding. And often you can only see that as you look back with hindsight.</p> <p>We have often heard prisoners who have met God in prison say: ‘Now I understand why I have come into prison... and they are</p>

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actually grateful that they are here.’

Sometimes we can't see why he's doing it, and we just have to trust. And I'd encourage you, what this verse tells us is: Don't look back with regret. Don't look around with worry. Look up and trust God that in everything in your life he is working together for your good.

If you walk in this relationship with God, reading (*Commanding Scripture*), listening (*Compelling Spirit*), talking (*Counsel of the Saints*), thinking (*Common Sense*), watching (*Circumstantial Signs*), your life will make a difference. In fact, you will have a far bigger impact than probably you will ever realise in this life.

Let's pray:

Lord, thank you for guiding us, help us to read your word, to listen to the promptings of your Holy Spirit, to find wise, godly advice from others, to use our common sense and to recognise the signs that you send us. Thank you that you are a speaking God, help us to hear you.

Amen

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that God has ever guided you?
2. What do you think the voice of God might sound like?
3. What do you think happens when you are not sure what God is saying?

The Alpha – Prisons Transcripts are adapted from *Alpha with Nicky Gumbel* filmed 2014–2015, which are based on *Questions of Life* by Nicky Gumbel.

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Scripture quotations taken from the Holy Bible,
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¹ From Nicky Gumbel, *Bible in One Year*, 'Day 297 'How God Speaks to you', bioy.org

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6) How Does God Guide Us?

Alpha – Prisons (adapted from *Alpha with Nicky Gumbel*)