

Disappointments

The following comments were made by one person who had eagerly signed up for the Alpha Course but then found it a disappointing experience. Sadly several others on the same course had also been disappointed (though others were greatly blessed). It is to be hoped that lessons have been learned. Here are some of the reasons cited.

1. From the start the course was over egged. Both Alpha and its underlying theology were presented as a kind of "miracle water" that could cure all known diseases. What was more if the first bottle of coloured water purchased did not change your life for ever, then be ready to buy a second bottle because that was certain to do the trick. The heavy sell did not fit well with rural conservatism and the prevailing Christian spirituality.
2. Almost from the start the promised tight timetable collapsed. The promised deadline of 9.30pm proved a fallacy and this created various difficulties, especially for those who had to start work early the following day. On one occasion the programme lasted almost four hours!
3. Invariably the drinks and meal took up between 90 minutes and two hours. Having the meal makes sense but there needs to be tight discipline. Seconds and thirds were being offered when we should have been into the talk. One serving point for around 24 people often with three or more options dragged the social side out even more. Some were left sitting around waiting while those served later felt rushed.
4. The vicar was both host and speaker. Although other church leaders were present. It began to feel as if what was on offer was the vicar's personal agenda.
5. I felt totally unprepared for the experience of the Away Day. We came from small conservative and intimate rural congregations. Suddenly we were in a very large (several hundred) gathering that was both emotional and demonstrative in its content. It seemed very alien.
6. People who were finding the course helpful, or who had found previous courses helpful were encouraged to come to the front and share their story. This was then applauded. But for those of us who had started out with such hopes and were finding the weeks passing and it wasn't working for us, we began to feel like second class citizens and failures. After all there was the course and there were the people. Clearly the course was being presented as effective so the failing must be me! Perhaps God is not interested in me or he might be offended by my questions!
7. Discussions were badly led. There seemed to be no direction at all and we often wandered right off topic. It is good to have the opportunity of discussing the talk in an open way but the total lack of structure made it feel a waste of time.
8. The final session could have been an opportunity to reflect on the course. We could have been given time to share what we had found helpful and what we had found less helpful, but that opportunity was lost. There was no debriefing or feedback form. So I am left with negative feelings and what is worse others in the village have voiced similar feelings.
9. Perhaps I had too high expectations - or had it been over-sold. If the only remedy for this is to go through the whole experience again then I think I would rather not.

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www.ruralevangelism.net