

Seven years ago I had an encounter with the Lord that forever changed the meaning and direction of my life. It happened on an Alpha Course at St. John the Divine. My wife, Margaret, and I had been attending for several years. I had gone to church growing up and thought of myself as a Christian, but I saw God as a distant creator and the majority of world religions as different means to the same fundamental truth. I had been operating this way for over thirty years, thinking I had it all figured out.

In January 2003, I was at a transition point in my life, between jobs with a new daughter, who was then four months old. Margaret thought it would be good for me to do the Alpha Course as I had the time and had expressed interest in exploring Christianity further after going through St. John's Bible Basics class led by Tom Knudson several years before. I attended Tom's class out of curiosity before I went to an actual service at the Church. It led me to read the Bible cover to cover, exclaiming to my wife when I finished that it was "probably the greatest moral treatise ever written." Sometimes we can be so right and yet miss the whole point! The good news was that God was already at work in me, although I was oblivious to it. Providentially, I agreed to go through Alpha.

As I went through the course, I couldn't get my mind around all of the historical evidence supporting Christ as the Son of God, especially the dramatic course of human history after his death on the cross. My curiosity was piqued and over the next 10 weeks I read everything I could get my hands on, including the New Testament twice. To say that a fire had been lit in me would be an understatement. Most importantly, I started to become aware of how much God loved me and wanted to have a close personal relationship. Although I had always believed in a god, I knew I was not walking in a relationship with God. All of this culminated on April 30, 2003, as I was driving alone to my dad's house in East Texas. I was praying the whole time and made a commitment to make Christ the Lord of my life. I felt an overwhelming sense of the God's presence and was filled with the Holy Spirit in an undeniable way that I will never forget. I knew this was an endpoint for a journey I had been on for my first 34 years and, more importantly, the beginning of a new life that would extend through the rest of my life on earth and in heaven. It was without question the most profound experience in my life. I reached for God's hand and he took it, elevating me to a new place, a new location in his Son, Jesus.

So what happened next? As Margaret can attest, I didn't suddenly become a perfect person. I still stumble along every day in my walk, but I did become much more acutely aware of how far short I was compared to Christ's example. This led to a dramatic change in my priorities for me and my family. First and foremost, we have tried our best to put God at the center of our family and marriage. It's a lifelong process, but the results were immediate and have grown exponentially for us and our children. The other fundamental change was how we spend our time and resources. Going to church and worship took on new personal meaning, as well as the relationships we have made within St. John the Divine. The communion of saints within the Body of Christ is an amazing gift from God, which we have experienced living both in Houston and abroad. Margaret has always volunteered extensively, but I became more involved in Alpha and St. John's. We also started to tithe, not out of a sense of obligation, but gratefully and sacrificially.

God loves a cheerful giver and we have experienced His blessings on this front as well. The best part about this personal relationship is we are walking on a journey that does not end. Both Margaret and I look forward to what's ahead for us and our kids, as well as all of our brother and sisters in Christ.