

Rich Allen

Hello, my name is Rich and I'm one of the biggest believers in Alpha that you will find. My story may be a little different than others because I have now done Alpha 5 times and am looking forward to doing it again this September.

I am Catholic and always have been baptized as a baby and doing all the sacraments. As a teenager I stopped going to church, only went on the holidays. When I moved to California from New Jersey at the age of 17 I was mad at the world. I was going to be a senior in high school and did want to leave friends and family. It took a while for me to adjust and after 47 years I am still adjusting. The best thing that happened was I met this amazing girl who became my wife of almost 43 years now. I'm blessed with two children and four grandchildren now. During my time of raising a family I didn't go to church except again for the holidays. But Jesus was always important to me and our children were raised with God in our house and were baptized as babies. Both our children chose to do their Sacraments as adults by their choice which made me proud being I missed the moment for them to do them when younger.

One day my best friend challenged me to go to church with him. I couldn't back down from a challenge so I did, I know this is not a good reason to go to church but it worked. I couldn't believe what I was missing. I noticed a change in my life for the better, happier and more present in the moment.

This same friend was asked to do Alpha by his family, he wanted to know if I would like to go but I declined. That was a mistake on my part. I saw a complete change in him as he went through Alpha. I wanted some of that and we signed up for the next session.

I am here to tell you that Alpha changed me also. That first Alpha opened my eyes to so much and brought me closer to Jesus and made my faith stronger. I was sad when it was over and couldn't wait to do it again.

The second time I did Alpha was in my opinion life changing. There was one session that I will not tell you which one but I believe the Holy spirit touched me. I cried, I was shaking, I was scared of what I was feeling until I felt the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders. I was relieved of the guilt, my feelings of having to carry everyone's burden was gone. It opened my mind and heart. I felt loved and was at peace. I wanted to share that love and peace.

This made me sign up for a third time. This time as a volunteer to be a helper. So here I am going to church, going to Alpha, volunteering at the church carnival and then doing the men's retreat. All things I could never see me doing. I loved every minute of it. All that led up to my 4th time in Alpha, this time as host. I wanted to give back and help others find what I found. A relationship with Jesus. I felt I had a purpose besides being a husband, father and grandfather. My relationship with Jesus helped me be better at all of those things.

In all these sessions of Alpha I realized that everything that has happened in my life has been guided by God. My move to California, if I don't make that move I don't meet my wife, I don't meet my wife I wouldn't have my children or grandchildren. Jesus was with me when I went through hard times with my business. At one point I was unemployed and right before things got really tough I found a job that I was not looking for. I had a severe car accident that probably should have killed me but I walked away knowing that God was not ready for me yet. I still had a job to do here on Earth. Alpha opened my eyes to all these things and more.

I moved to Placentia and was still going to church in Rancho Santa Margarita and doing Alpha once a week, well this was a lot of time away and travel. I stopped going to church for a while which was a mistake. My wife and family saw a change in me and encouraged me to go back to church many times. I have since lost my mom, sister and best friend from childhood a couple years ago and always found comfort and peace in the church but still was not going to church regularly. I'm not going to lie, I had a tough time with all the losses but I never felt alone. I knew Jesus was with me along with those that I lost.

This past Ash Wednesday we as a family came to Saint Joseph's. Father Martin touched a nerve with me and I was back. That day another session of Alpha was announced and my eyes lit up. I already did it 4 times but sure enough I signed up for a 5th time.

I believe the Holy Spirit found me again. I can't describe the warmth I felt in my body when it happened but I know it was real. Alpha has helped me deal with my lost loved ones. I was able to talk to God and feel his warmth, love and peace. Talking to people in our group and other groups was amazing. I met great people right here at our church.

For the next Alpha coming up I am volunteering to be a host of a group if they will have me. I want to give back and again help and hope others can find the joy that I have found.

On a side note, my son in law came to last Alpha with me. I already loved him for who he is but I saw him change as he went through Alpha and I couldn't be more proud of him.

So I say to you all, if you are searching for something or need a little push to Jesus, come to Alpha and let's see if you can be touched by the Holy Spirit. Alpha affects everyone differently but you have nothing to lose. The benefits are a better relationship with Jesus, your family and friends. Most of all peace for yourself.

Come join us for what I hope is life changing for you. Alpha can touch you if you are open to receive Jesus' love. It's informal and the food is great.