

Alpha Testimony by Seminarian Stephen Blaxton

“I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon” said Pope Francis when asked by a reporter “who is Jorge Marie Bergoglio?” If this is who the pope says he is, I definitely am one too. Not just a sinner though, but a *beloved* sinner. Thankfully, in 1 Timothy 1:15 St. Paul says, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” What great news that is. I’m a sinner and Jesus -- the second person of the Trinity, God incarnate, the Word made flesh -- suffered, died, and was raised to show his love for me by taking away the eternal consequences of my sins and adopting me as a child of God that I might have the same inheritance as Jesus himself: eternal life and the ability to reign with Jesus at the right hand of the Father for all eternity. That’s a heck of a deal. Jesus gets all my sins and guilt and I get his perfect righteousness before the Father. Exploring, understanding, accepting, and experiencing this great exchange, this chance at eternal salvation, this message of eternal hope in Jesus is what Alpha is all about.

I had the privilege of attending the Alpha course at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Plymouth, MI in the fall of 2015, it was an incredible experience. It’s a natural inclination of mine to be interested in the deep questions of life like: “why I am here?”, “does God exist?”, and “is there more to life than this?” Alpha is organized around these questions. The course provided an opportunity for me to think about, discuss, and find meaningful, satisfying answers to the fundamental questions of life. The course also helped me think about the fundamental questions of Christianity: “who is Jesus and why did he die?”, “why/how should I pray?”, “how can I believe in science and Christianity at the same time?”, “how can I be sure about my faith?” Ultimately [spoiler alert] the answer is Jesus, has always been Jesus, and will always be Jesus. The problem is that simply knowing the answers intellectually to these big questions can only get you so far.

Jesus never wanted me to just know about him but to be in relationship with him. It’s not just any kind of relationship either, it’s an exclusive, unconditional, life-altering commitment. This kind of relationship, this kind of commitment, can’t take place unless there’s love. Through the retreat and group discussions, Alpha provided me the opportunity to encounter Christ personally and deepen my relationship with him.

Encountering Christ on a personal level through the power of the Holy Spirit has changed my life. Alpha gave me the opportunity to think about, discuss, learn, and encounter who Jesus is, why he’s important, and how to speak with him. Plus, I got to make some new friends. Alpha gave me the chance to hear the core of the gospel and discuss with others, in an open and safe environment, how it relates to my deepest longings. Jesus touched my life through Alpha and has touched thousands of others too.

I know that I’m a sinner, but I also know God loves me more than anything and that with him I’m going to live forever. Through Alpha I experienced once again this life-changing mystery of God’s love. It’s the love I’ve experienced through Jesus’ mercy and healing that motivates me to be even more closely configured to Christ in the priesthood.

All Jesus needed from me was the willingness to listen, admit I need him, and believe in him. It’s been a fulfilling, transforming, and exciting ride ever since.