

Over 1.5 million people have taken the Alpha course in the U.S. and Canada... Here are two stories:

Marta

I grew up as the only daughter in a large, rigidly religious family. At a young age, I started acting out against my parents, particularly against religion. I couldn't trust a God who seemed so legalistic, nor could I trust in human believers who seemed hypocritical.

Eventually, I rejected my parent's faith, and my parents disowned me. I moved to my own apartment, working my way through my senior year of high school by waitressing.

I received a scholarship to a New York Art School. On my own, I decided life was a struggle that one had to fight through to succeed and win. This attitude made me few friends, so I mostly relied on boyfriends for companionship.

After graduating, I was swept up in the dot.com bubble and by working hard, soon became a creative director and was happily engaged to the latest man in my life.

9/11 hit and my life changed. While I was fortunate not to lose anyone I loved, my company went out of business, and my fiancé and I broke off our engagement as a result of the tension.

Unemployed, I began waitressing again.

Because I had few friends and was estranged from my family, I really began to cling to the other waitresses I worked with. In particular, I became close to one girl who seemed very self possessed.

As our friendship grew, I began to tell her a little about myself and my family. Since she was a Christian, I also confessed to her that I had "issues" with organized religion. My friend suggested that I take the Alpha course where she was a table leader.



Although I started the course late, I was immediately drawn into it. My table leaders were so supportive of me, and the people at my table have become a surrogate family to me.

Christianity is not the religion I grew up in, and I had hostility to religion to begin with, so I had a lot of questions, but I learned a lot.

I think the most important thing I learned on the Alpha course is that God is not legalistic. But He is caring and loving beyond what we can imagine. The people at Alpha taught me that.

John

Growing up, I was forced to go to church. Every Sunday, there was a family fight and the outcome was always the same. While I dreaded those mandatory church services, I inevitably made friends in Sunday school. Over the years, church became less of a religious experience and more of a social club.

When I went away to college, I turned to church as a way to meet people. I found some comfort in the familiar liturgy but mostly I kept my eyes open for people I wanted to meet or date.

After college, I confidently threw myself into the chaos of the real world with high hopes of being an actor. However, things didn't go as planned and a year later I was depressed and broke. As a result of trying to make ends meet and having my confidence dashed at auditions, I had few friends and frankly, not much of a life at all.

That's when an old college acting buddy told me about the Alpha course. He had dropped into a course in his town and couldn't stop raving about the people he met. He had even started going to church again. I decided to give it a try.

I was nervous the first week but was placed at a table with other young people, many of whom were going through the same stuff I was. As we talked about life, and God, I realized I had a lot of thinking to do. Maybe this God and Jesus thing was more than just a bad family tradition.

I'm still figuring it out. But now God is a daily part of my life. And the friends from my Alpha table have become some of the closest friends I've ever had.