

Three doctors told Eddie D'Souza, "In our medical experience, no one has ever come to us this early with a lump. You saved your own life." Eddie knows it wasn't him, but divine intervention.

STORY BY
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Looking back, Eddie can see God's hand in everything—especially the timing of events which coincided with life-changing *Alpha* courses he has been attending at his local church: Mary Immaculate in Eagle Vale. "Whatever the outcome, one thing for sure is that I have come close to my God and nothing is going to change that," says Eddie.

Eddie was standing in his office at the end of the day, talking on the phone to a work colleague. For some unknown reason, he stretched back his neck, and with his other hand, he reached up and felt a pea-sized lump at the base of his throat that didn't feel normal. He went straight to his GP who sent him for an ultrasound and scan. The results came back showing the original lump was benign, but they found a smaller lump (that he couldn't feel) that turned out to be thyroid cancer and later spread to his lymph nodes.

"When I was diagnosed with cancer, I broke down completely for two days. Here I am enjoying life and it couldn't be better, then in a day, everything changes. You think of your children, your future. I didn't know how to break it to my wife, my kids or my family back home," he says.

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Eddie is a man who thought he had it all. Born in India and brought up in the Catholic faith, he worked in Dubai for



10 years as a technology consultant. He came to Australia for a conference and could see a better future for his children, so he decided to immigrate and got the first job he saw on the internet—that was six years ago.

Even though he lived next door to the church and went every weekend, Eddie says his faith wasn't that strong. When his parish priest at Eagle Vale, Fr Slawek Plonka OMI, announced at Mass at the beginning of this year that an Alpha course was starting, Eddie's wife suggested he go. She thought he was being carried away by his job and the house, and that God was taking a back seat in his life. "But I'm not really the sort of man who goes on retreats", laughs Eddie, admitting to not signing up the first week. But, the second week, as he was walking past the Alpha sign-up sheet in the foyer, a prompting inside of him said, "What the heck, I'll do it."

During the first Alpha session, Eddie kept a fairly low profile. He enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of having a meal with other parishioners and getting to know them, but during the round-table discussions, he didn't contribute anything himself. It was only during the

video presentations that he began to realise that God was wanting to speak to him—wanting to be a part of his life.

"With each progressive session, I began to realise how blessed we are to have Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and how even more blessed we are to have the gift of the Spirit—and how important it is to build relationship with God through the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation."

When Season Two of Alpha started, Eddie was eager to sign up again—this time as a helper. Even though he saw the same videos twice, he wasn't bored—the message only got reinforced. Each week was a stepping stone to yet another level in his faith growing stronger. As he learned to believe in the will of God—and to surrender himself to this will—Eddie could see that he was beginning to live life the way God wanted him to live it.

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PHOTO: DANIEL HOPPER



never have done before. You need to fall down to rise up in a different way.

“The road I was heading down was putting materialistic values before God. But, the greatest treasure in this world is the purification of your own soul and not to chase this life. Alpha was a watershed moment in my life—a journey from absolute emptiness in my relationship with God, to making him the primary focus of my life,” he says.

“I am a living testament as to how Alpha has changed our parish community. In the past, I would not even talk about my faith to my wife, let alone share it with others. But, here I am now talking at five Masses about Alpha and getting people to sign up. Eddie laughs, ‘One day, I even told them at work that I had to leave early to help prepare for Alpha, and two of my colleagues said, ‘You’re doing Alpha? We’re also doing Alpha!’

“If anyone’s thinking about joining Alpha there’s a reason why you’re even thinking about it—because an inner voice is asking you to do it. It was that same inner voice that reached out to me. These 10 sessions will potentially change the rest of your life, the life of your family, and the life of the people around you—and you’re not changing your life just for this life on earth, but you’re preparing yourself for the next.” ■

Alpha runs in several parishes across the diocese. Contact Darren McDowell on 4222 2463 for more information.

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“My wife noticed a difference—how I would react to situations. My prayer life changed. I started wanting to say the rosary with my children every day. She noticed my involvement with other charitable movements that exist in the church.”

It was the day before the last session of Alpha Two that Eddie learned he was diagnosed with cancer. “God let me go for two Alphas to strengthen me because he knew I had to carry a cross—and that cross was cancer. It was the strength I drew from Alpha that prevented me from going into depression or trauma or mental stress.”

“When I first got the news, all I could do was ask the Lord to heal me—and I could only do that because of being in Alpha. But then I realised, ‘Why do I even worry about the Lord healing me? Why don’t I just surrender myself to the Lord and let him lead the way?’ And, when I did that, I had nothing to worry about. Absolutely nothing. Because, I knew that in my faith with the Lord, he will do what is best for me whatever the outcome—whether it means radiation, another surgery. He’s gonna do what is best for me, and

that has helped me deal with this like if I had a common cold. That is how I’m dealing with this.”

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The most amazing part of this journey has been that despite the medical roller coaster of doctor’s appointments, scans, biopsies and surgeries, Eddie has never missed a single Alpha night. Alpha would happen on a Thursday night and Eddie would go in for major surgery on the Friday morning and be back for Alpha the next Thursday. Even the uncertainty of more bad news—that the cancer may now be in other parts of his body—has not stopped Eddie from signing up for Season Three of Alpha—this time as a leader.

“And you know what? Some part of me thanks the Lord that I got this cancer, because if I didn’t get it, I don’t think I’d be strengthened in my faith to allow the Lord to lead me in a way that I would