

TAKE IT FROM HERE

THE THERAPY OF REINVENTION

Nicole Sidebottom

By D.G. Wynn

NO ONE WANTS TO BE TREATED LIKE A PROJECT. YET WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP—CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HANDS. HIS LOVE FOR US MAKES THE EVOLUTION OF OUR BEING BOTH BEARABLE AND BEAUTIFUL. NICOLE SIDEBOTTOM, A 2008 GRADUATE OF THE COMMUNITY COUNSELING PROGRAM AT DENVER SEMINARY, HAS EXPERIENCED THE THERAPY OF REINVENTION IN THE LORD'S HANDS ON A NUMBER OF KEY OCCASIONS, AND SHE IS ALL THE MORE BEAUTIFUL AS A RESULT.

From her earliest moments, Nicole lived with the challenge of a congenital disability, characterized by weakness and lack of muscle and affecting the major joints in her arms and legs. She says, "I basically grew up at Children's Hospital in Denver, but my family instilled in me an I-can-do-anything-I-want attitude as I grew up. In fact, I didn't even realize I was different until first grade."



Through elementary school and junior high, her awareness of her limitations grew. As a result, she became introverted, insecure, and withdrawn in high school. "I wanted to blend in so no one would notice me," she says. "I just wanted to be like everyone else. I didn't want to smile too much, appear too happy, or stick out." But the Lord had plans for Nicole. He gave her an indomitable spirit, which He began to rekindle in college. "When I went to Colorado Christian University, I let my personality blossom, and I started to shed those old fears and insecurities." That was just the beginning.

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After her undergraduate degree, she enrolled in the Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) at the University of Denver (DU). Nicole thrives in one-on-one situations of care and counseling, but

she quickly discovered that the GSSW wasn't a good fit. After her first quarter in the program, she withdrew. As she left DU's campus, she felt a bit lost, both figuratively and literally, as the construction in Denver routed her past Denver Seminary's campus on her way home.

Out of the blue, she pulled into the campus parking lot, walked into the student center, and ran into a woman she had seen earlier

that day—in the GSSW program at DU. The woman said, "Nicole, what are you doing here?" Nicole confessed that she had just withdrawn from the GSSW program. The woman said, "So did I!" They had coffee and a wonderfully affirming conversation, prompting Nicole to walk across the quad and straight into the admissions office. The following January, she started classes in the Community Counseling Program. "The woman I met didn't wind up coming to the Seminary," says Nicole, "but the Lord used that conversation to get me here."

YOUTHFUL AND WISE

"I went into seminary very young. I was just 23, and I remember thinking that academics were going to be my focus and that I was going to consciously put relationships on the backburner," says Nicole. "It only took me one semester to realize that I wouldn't make it without relationships."

The Lord used Nicole's Group Experience class to continue unleashing the person He'd been forming her whole life. The group leaders and participants helped heal deep wounds in her heart left over from childhood. According to Nicole, "It



set the tone for the rest of my time at seminary. I realized that I needed relationships not just to get through seminary, but also to respond to what God wanted to do in me. College allowed me to become me, but seminary pushed me to become who God wanted me to be.

“I couldn’t just dip my toe in the waters of spiritual and personal growth. Seminary threw me into the deep end and forced me to ask, What does it look like to be a young, disabled woman in ministry? I felt like I had three strikes against me with my age, my gender, and my disability.” But the Lord, in His infinite love and grace, gave her companions from her classes at Denver Seminary to walk with her as she fought to follow the unique path the Lord had given her.

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COMPANIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

During her first semester at Denver Seminary, Nicole was introduced to a group of friends who were missional at their core, a value she shared. They were intentionally discovering how to do life together. “I had already been wrestling with the concept of calling,” says Nicole, “and I realized that God had gifted me in unique ways. This community encouraged me to live out those gifts.”

She bonded with this group of friends, and the Lord used them as catalysts for the freedom He was bringing to Nicole. “As a result of belonging to this group, I grew in self-acceptance,” she says. “I was able to be raw, and I didn’t need to wear a mask around them.” The opportunity

to be authentic in her pain and grow in these relationships added personal depth and connection to what she was learning in her counseling classes.

Then several of her friends from this group went on a mission trip to Kenya during the early part of Nicole’s time at seminary. They had a layover in London long enough to wander around the city and into Holy Trinity Brompton church, where a program called the Alpha Course was founded. Her friends came home speaking more about Alpha than they did about Kenya. The group had been wondering for months how to make disciples and share God’s love. Now the answer was clear: they would lead their own Alpha course.

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions that freely explore the claims of Jesus and the basics of the Christian faith over a 10-week course. Each member of the group, Nicole included, took turns facilitating the curriculum for the larger group attending.

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“Our first Alpha course was held at Breckenridge Brewery, and we were stunned by the breakthroughs we saw happening,” she says. The enthusiasm generated from that first course led to four or five more led by this same group of



friends. Nicole's positive opinion of Alpha grew as she watched it operate as a gateway for some to learn about Christ and as a bridge back into community life for those who had been hurt by the church. "God used Alpha to help me be about what I've always wanted to be about."

MOVING FORWARD

Almost a decade after beginning seminary and getting involved with Alpha, Nicole is now the regional director of Alpha, as well as a practicing therapist. These two endeavors share a common thread of helping people wrestling with deep issues and those moments of reinvention where God is offering an opportunity for significant change.

Her work as a counselor focuses largely on post-divorce care, social anxiety, and phobias. The clientele, primarily women, long to be honest about what needs healing, change, and restoration. Those who come to Alpha are in a similar spiritual state. "I love swimming in those waters with people," Nicole says. "Both groups are asking questions about identity and value, and those are paths I know how to walk."

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"We don't build relationships with people because they are projects. We do it so we can show God's interest in them." His love becomes tangible through our expressions of it. As a result, He transforms—or reinvents—everyone in the process.

Nicole Sidebottom

MA COMMUNITY COUNSELING

Nicole Sidebottom is a licensed professional counselor specializing in post-divorce care, anxiety, and phobias. She also serves as the regional director for the Alpha Course in Colorado.

