

Stories of Healing

How God has worked in our Church Family

Week 9

Falling Away and Finding my Faith Again

Nicole Collins' Story

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Joel 2.25-26

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

1 Peter 5.10

Nicole grew up in two worlds, essentially. Her grandparents were believers and consistently brought her to a small church of Christ where she encountered the teachings of Jesus at a young age. Her parents on the other hand were not believers, and even consulted psychics. As she grew past her teen years and saw less of her grandparents, Nicole's faith began to slip away. She found herself spiraling into Paganism, Wicca, and even Satanism. "Satan had his grips on me, and he knew it."

There was a time though when she came back to church for a while. She gave her life to Christ in baptism as an adult. She had new joy, but her fledgling faith was quickly met with the challenges of the world. Nicole ended up in a toxic relationship with a man who claimed to be a Christian but acted nothing like a Christian. He pulled her away from the church, from Christ and subjected her all kinds of gross mistreatment. This shattered her faith, but she still hung on by a thread. Nicole struggled to rebuild her faith through a haze of personal doubts and sin. "The weight of the world" was pulling her down each time she tried to get up and move forward on her own.

She knew that she needed the help of the church. She searched for a church and found her way to the Cornerstone Church of Christ. She described being immediately welcomed and

integrated into the family over time. People reached out to her and showed her the love of Jesus. She didn't change overnight, but it was a struggle each time she darkened the door. Before she knew it though, people continued to follow up and show that they cared for her.

A handful of ladies from Cornerstone extended real friendship to Nicole and shared their walk with Jesus with her. They made the connection, and gave her the love and accountability she was seeking in a church family. One day after a lot of struggling, Nicole decided to come forward and recommit herself to the Lord—she responded to the invitation given at the end of service and received the prayers of the church.

On one occasion, Nicole was being taken to the hospital. After posting about the situation on facebook, several women from church beat her to the hospital to be with her and pray for her. Nicole has found great comfort in knowing that there are people who will be there for her and help her walk out her calling to follow Jesus.

Applications and Takeaways

- **Never underestimate the gravitational pull of the world.** Even though she was raised going to church, Nicole was exposed to a lot of worldly things too. It seems that these things continued weighing on her and pulling her down for a very long time and finally isolated her from her God. The thorns of the world are nothing to settle in with. *Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them (Matthew 13:7).*
- **Isolation often leads to a slow, downward spiral.** Nicole describes being isolated from her support system and church family on her fall from grace. Many of us have experienced the pain of having no one to go to. Isolating ourselves or allowing ourselves to be cut off from other believers can make us a sitting duck for Satan. *For the body does not consist of one member but of many (1 Corinthians 12.14).*
- **Comfort and faith aren't always compatible.** In her story, Nicole found herself far from the comfortable habits of church attendance and coming back to form new relationships was difficult. In the end, she chose faith over comfort. *He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus (Matthew 14.29).*
- **Accountable relationships are important.** Nicole describes seeking accountability in the church, and making connections as being a key factor in her restoration. She feared making new relationships, but was glad that she did. *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5.16).*
- **Love is God's primary healing agent.** When people are hurting and broken, the best thing we can do for them is love them with Jesus' love. Love seems to have been the biggest difference maker for Nicole in her re-dedication to be a disciple of Jesus. *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4.8).*

- **Anyone can come back from the brink.** This is an amazing story. It's amazing that someone like Nicole who formerly practiced pagan worship could turn back to Jesus and now proclaims his love to everyone. These stories should inspire us to never count anyone out, especially ourselves. *And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.* (Luke 15.31-32).

1. What stands out about this story to you?

2. What are some subtle ways Satan can begin to influence us to cause us to fall away?

3. Why is it important for us to have accountable relationships with other believers?

4. How can comfort/habit sometimes get in the way of faith?

5. How do healthy relationships that are Christ-centered have a healing effect?

6. How can we take inspiration from Nicole's journey back to Jesus?