

Nicole Millage's Story

Hi, my name is Nicole Millage and this is the story about how Hope Awaits Ministries began. In September of 2009, I moved to North Bay to attend Nipissing University. I enrolled in the Business Administration degree with Teaching. My overall plan was to be a Kindergarten Teacher once I was done school. You know how some say that God laughs when we make plans. Well I'm sure he laughed at me when I made my lifelong plans for becoming a teacher.

In January of my first year of University I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, and that's when my story really began. For the next year in my life I grew in my faith and learned more and more about the heart of God. In my second year of University I took a computer class where they taught us how to make our own website. So for our final project we had to make up a business and create a website for it. Throughout that year I had been randomly thinking of ways in which I could help the homeless in North Bay. When I found out what I had to do for this project I decided to make a website for a homeless shelter that offered housing, meals, and courses to those in need.

Fast forward a year. Now I'm in my third year at University and I'm taking a Small Business and Entrepreneurship class. This class is all about starting your own business; so for our final project in this class we had to write a business plan for our own small business. Needless to say, my business plan was for a homeless shelter that offered housing, meals, and courses to those in need. So now I had a website, and a business plan already made for the exact same business.

In the summer of my third year, so last summer, the idea to help those in need continued to be something that was on my heart. One night I was praying earnestly to God asking Him what I should do with the rest of my life, and where he wanted me to go. While I was praying I got this feeling, deep within me that I had to follow through on



the ideas that God had put in my heart to help those in need. I don't know how to describe the feeling that I had, it was like a feeling of complete peace, and that the Holy Spirit inside of me was filled with joy at this new plan. Now it would be nice to say that it was at that moment that I decided that I was not going to go to teachers college, and that I was actually going to follow through on this. But I was terrified of what it would mean to not be a teacher and actually open my own business. I knew that there weren't a lot of jobs out there for teachers, but I also figured that it would be so much easier to find a teaching job than to create my own job. I was also scared that it wasn't going to work. What if I gave up teaching, and put all this work into starting my own business and it failed? Then what? So then I thought, it would be really smart of me to go to teachers college still, just so I have a backup plan in case this doesn't work out. Later that summer I read the book 'Crazy Love' by Francis Chan, and in it he says "Worry implies that we don't quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what's happening in our lives." By being worried about the business failing and wanting a backup plan was me not fully trusting in God and his plan for my life. Then I knew that I could not simply go to teacher's college as a backup plan. I either had to be completely in, or out; there was no middle ground. A part of me knew at that point that I had to be 100% committed to God's plan; but the side of me that worries, and that was scared told me that I didn't have to make a decision yet. I could wait until it was time to submit my application for teacher's college to decide what to do.

Now I was in my fourth and possibly final year of University. This year I was on the executive team of the Christian Fellowship group on my campus. My role on the team was the Outreach Director, and one of the things that I was in charge of was organizing Community Dinner's for people in need in North Bay. Basically, I had to plan a meal, get volunteers, get all the food, and cook and serve a meal to over 100 people. I love how God put me in the right position that would allow me to experience serving and loving those in need. In January of this past year, I had already let the deadline for submitting my application to teacher's college pass by. So now I knew that I was going to work in the business world. Unfortunately I was still my same scared self and thought that maybe God would want me to go somewhere else. So I started thinking of all of the

Christian non-profit's that I could work for instead. While I was doing that I was also asking God to give me a clear sign as to what he wanted me to do. Even though deep down I knew, I wasn't admitting it to myself. After a while I realized that God had already given me a sign long before I asked him for one. He had put this desire in my heart three years ago, and it never changed or left. God told me what I had to do, and as much as I didn't want to admit it, I knew what I had to do. At the same time that this was all happening one of the bible studies that I was attending was studying the book of Jonah. As most of you probably know, God told Jonah to go to Ninevah to tell the people there of God's judgement against them. But Jonah was scared, and instead of listening to God he got on a boat to run away. And long story short, God sent a fish to eat him and bring him to Ninevah. As we were studying this I couldn't help but to relate to how Jonah must have felt. Being scared of what was going to happen, and not fully trusting in God's plan. But because I knew about this story I decided that I better start listening to God, because I didn't want to get eaten by a fish. Not being eaten by a fish was definitely not my only reason why I had to listen to God. I knew that God's plans are always better than my plans, and that if I listen to his guidance my life would be better than I would ever imagine it to be. I knew that if I didn't obey I would one day have to stand in judgement and give an account for what I didn't do. And I also knew that if I didn't obey that I would miss out on the opportunity of a lifetime. So I fully submitted my life to God and decided to follow wherever he would lead me, no matter what.

Once I knew that I was going to dedicate my life to starting up a business to help those in need, I had to determine what exactly their needs are, and how I could help. So I talked with some of the already existing businesses that help those in need in North Bay about it. Some of them gave me positive, helpful feedback, while others were not as helpful. Nevertheless, I continued to meet with people to try to get a better understanding of how exactly I could help. I knew that one of the ladies at my church has a heart for the homeless and has been volunteering at different organizations that help those in need. So I set up a meeting with her to talk about what God has put on my heart and what she thinks about it. When we met I told her that I wanted to help

those in need, and asked her how she thinks I could help. What she outlined was the exact plan that God had put on my heart three years ago. Now I knew not only what I had to do, but what I should offer to people who are in need. I need to offer first and foremost the Good News about Jesus Christ. But simply telling people about Jesus is not always enough; you have to show them the Love of God through your own actions. That's why my business is also going to be a place where people can come and socialize. Many of the people that will be using my services are not treated with respect and love, and that is what I want to show them. I want it to be a place where people love them and care about their needs, both physically and spiritually. I want to meet all of the needs that they might have. I want to offer them healthy, nutritious, good meals. I want to offer them housing and clothing. I want to offer them various courses that will help them gain life skills which could end up getting them a job. I want to offer them jobs working for me. Instead of just volunteers, I want to have people work for me in order to pay for a permanent room at my facility. This way they will have a previous employer when searching for a job. In Luke chapter 10 Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan and just as the Good Samaritan took care of a stranger, Jesus tells us to go and do likewise. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and I want to show the people of North Bay the amazing amount of love that God has for each of them. A bible verse that has really helped me through this is Proverbs 3:5-6 which says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." So even though I don't understand why he asked me to do this, or even how I'm going to do this, I know that all I have to do is trust in Him and rely on Him and He will guide me through it all.

In Matthew 7:13-14 it says "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to the path of destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Jesus tells us that following him isn't going to be easy. I know that my path is not going to be easy, but I can tell you one thing for sure, it's going to be worth it.