

NICOLE O. SALMON

*Courage
and
Confidence*



**A Bold Guide to Unboxing
Who You Were Created to Be**

You don't have to be an athlete to know that good coaching makes all the difference in sports. In this life, we each have a unique race marked out for us, yet there are many hurdles to overcome. Nicole is the very best coach. She's vulnerable, humorously sharing her own stories of overcoming. It's incredible to consider all she accomplishes in this book: stirring you out of complacency, holding you accountable in love, motivating you to go further than you could imagine, and believing that you are a champion. While reading, I stopped many times and just lifted my hands—or closed my eyes in reflection. There was a lot of “Yes, Sis” happening, too!

We are created to flourish. If flourishing is what you seek, then savor these pages. Take time to reflect, to allow God's Spirit to guide you. And then go run your race fueled with God's power. Nicole has gifted us with words fitly spoken, inviting us to live up to the freedom Christ has achieved for us. Let's go, sisters!

DORENA WILLIAMSON, bestselling author and speaker

Courage and Confidence is an impactful work. . . . The intricate introduction of the concept of the created self versus the curated self describes the blueprint of God's intended plan for our purpose. . . . Reading this incredible activation piece has shifted a gear in this current season for me—a clarion call that this book is God's investment.

YOLANDA D. MERCER, author of *Born to Be Wild*

Courage and Confidence is a practical guide to help the everyday woman launch forward in her calling! It engages universal questions such as *Who am I?* and *Why am I here?* while also addressing *How do I get from where I am today to where I want to be?* Nicole's candor in storytelling, transparency of the truth, and ideological reframing helps us unbox the things we tend to hold on to for far too long. It's a contagious read—you just want to keep reading! You will laugh, you may even cry, but it will help you connect faith to your fear, hope to your despair, and victory to your vulnerability. Hold on to those outlined Scriptures, keep journaling through those prompts, and be prepared to unbox the best version of you!

PASTORS COLVIN AND MONIQUE CHAMBERS,

EKM Toronto Church

Nicole is the friend and coach you want in your corner, equipping you with the right tools and fighting alongside you to live according to your God-given purpose. Her personality and confidence shine on every page—she walks the walk of this message and is passionate about helping others live it out too. You'll return to this book again and again in seasons where you find yourself getting in your own way. So many of her words stopped me in my tracks, and I found myself thinking, *Oh, that's GOOD.*

JENN SCHULTZ, author of *She's Not Your Enemy*

In a world often clouded by self-doubt and limited thinking, *Courage and Confidence* stands out as a guiding light, illuminating the path toward boldly discovering your God-given purpose. This remarkable book seamlessly blends Nicole's extensive coaching experience with deep spiritual insights to guide readers on a transformative journey of self-discovery, growth, and faith.

As someone who has had the privilege of witnessing Nicole empower and uplift countless lives through her coaching and speaking, I can confidently say that this book is a testament to her burning passion to help others find their purpose and live a life unboxed to step into all that God has for them. She has masterfully condensed her years of wisdom and practical expertise into these pages, making it a treasure box for anyone looking to deepen their relationship with God and maintain a confident and purpose-filled life.

Courage and Confidence is a one-of-a-kind book that will leave a lasting impact on your life. It's not just a read; it's an experience that will help you unbox your potential and ignite your heart to step fully into becoming the person God has called you to be. Nicole's book is a beacon of hope for those who seek to conquer their insecurities, detox themselves of limited thinking, find their inner strength, and embrace their authenticity.

It's a must-read for anyone looking to step outside the box of the mundane life.

CHERYL NEMBHARD, author, speaker, TV host of *See, Hear, Love*, and podcast host of *On the Path with Cheryl Nembhard*

Anyone willing to start the conversation about daughters of God unapologetically stepping into their Kingdom assignment has caught my attention. But Nicole Salmon, inciting within readers a violent uprising against years of misconstrued beliefs, traumatic experiences, and deceptive inner dialogues, made *Courage and Confidence* an even more delightful read. Make picking up this book your declaration to not be less than you were purposed to be.

PASTOR SHARO RAMKHELAWAN, senior pastor of HopeNYC Church and founder of Preacher Girl TV

The difficult truth is we are often our own barrier when it comes to embracing our purpose. We may settle for living life as our curated self instead of the woman God created us to be. In *Courage and Confidence*, Nicole O. Salmon doesn't just write from her years of experience coaching women; she vulnerably shares how she learned to embrace her God-given purpose despite her own barriers. This book is real, encouraging, practical, and written with the gentle push you need to come out of hiding. It is a transparent, gospel-filled guide that has been crafted with the tender heart of a woman in mind. Nicole has earned her title as "The Purpose Coach," and whether you are actively living out your purpose or just starting to explore what your purpose is, I am confident she will help you unbox the woman you were always meant to be.

KIA STEPHENS, author, speaker, and founder of Entrusted Women

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with Tyndale House Publishers

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To you, dear reader,

for having the courage
and confidence to trust
what God is revealing to
you and to boldly chart
your own course.

Your destiny was worth
the crush, discipline, and
victories that were required
to write this book.

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Introduction

Unboxing Your Created Self

There is a score you must learn how to settle because it is one you will have to face with each new season of life. As insightful as you are, you still have moments when you ask yourself, *Who am I, and what has God created me to do?* Even in your greatest moments of clarity, you still desire reassurance. You are searching for the permission to allow yourself to trust what God is revealing to you and to chart your own course.

The score you must learn how to settle is between your *created* self and your *curated* self.

The created self is the nature God designed and shaped each of us in. It is an untainted reflection of His image, accented with all the unique elements of our individual

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temperaments, abilities, and gifts. It is contoured with truth and anchored in the written and spoken word of God. But you don't always feel anchored. As you negotiate aspects of your created self, you long to be confident, clear, consistent, and resolute about the woman you were created to be.

Picking up this book is your declaration. It is you settling the score that you will no longer deny, discount, disregard, diminish, or defer your created self to let the counterfeit known as your curated self take center stage. The curated self is the nature we adopt from social and familial influences, then adapt as needed. When we live from the curated self rather than living as an expression of our Creator, we become an expression of what we have designed, who life and circumstances have shaped us into being, all while shrouding our God-given design. If you truly want the image of God to win so you can experience the freeness and fruitfulness of a purpose-filled life, then you must be willing to yield completely to the unapologetic process of unboxing your created self.

Sunday sermons alone are no longer enough for you. Your appetite has been awakened. You desire to sink your teeth into content that is meaty, and you want to be challenged. You want more. You have a lot of questions, and everything about the season you are in feels unconventional. You've developed a slight disdain for what you once loved. What used to excite you is now draining you, and what you once felt called to now feels like an unsettling compromise. You have a deep longing for safe spaces where you can pour out your frustrations on

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empathetic ears and not be met with blank stares as though you have just shared something blasphemous or profane.

You've been sensing a level of righteous unrest, and it will not let you continue to be the same woman, in the same place, living out half your potential on a quarter of your anointing. It's time for a supernatural release. As a fellow sojourner, I have to be completely transparent with you: It's going to get uncomfortable. I love you too much to lie to you, and I am speaking to you with a heavenly boldness and an urgency that has no room for fluff. This book is coming for your heart like an arrow in the hands of a skilled archer because it's time for your harvest.

Through the guidance of Holy Spirit, I have thoughtfully included prayers, Scriptures, exercises, prophetic declarations, journal prompts, transparent and vulnerable personal stories, and a number of application features to encourage and aid you in looking inward and applying the unboxing prompts as you are reading. I encourage you to keep a designated journal for your unboxing reflections and insights.

Allow Holy Spirit to unbox you on these pages. Allow Him to meet you between the lines and give you the clarity, release, and room to show up fully and consistently in your life. Your family, friends, and colleagues as well as the saints and the ain'ts will probably think you have lost your home training when you start making the kinds of freeing faith moves I share in this book about unboxing and coming into alignment with your created self. If you were never given room to question, ponder, or carve a path of your own, unboxing your created

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self may lead you into moments of wondering if you've done something sinful, unbiblical, or just plain wrong. Taking the lid off your potential will do that to you.

Your shift toward a more purpose-led and purpose-aligned life may unsettle many around you, and you might start to feel like you've crossed a line. But you have actually been a squatter, occupying spaces that were meant to only be seasons and calling them your home.

Evict her, I hear in my spirit. I have been commissioned to deliver notice that it is your time to both go and grow.

In this book you will pick up the tools you need to unleash the courage to evict yourself from your curated comforts and stand confidently in your created identity. Let me help you

- reclaim your voice and become reacquainted with the voice of Holy Spirit so you can become more decisive and save more time;
- interrupt the cycle of second-guessing who you are so you can operate more confidently in your purpose and see your dreams realized;
- stop determining your progress by the obstacles you are facing so you can create more consistency in your life and see your goals through to completion; and
- replace old thought patterns and habits that produce inaction with a thought life that leads to overcoming guilt and condemnation and achieving more results.

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You cannot stay where you are any longer. Not one more day. Your true home—the version of yourself that has been divinely inspired and wired—cannot be filled by anyone but you. You have not missed your chance. And even though many of the things declared about you seem delayed, they are still yours for the taking if you are ready and willing to make a courageous move toward the life of purpose you were *created* for.



1

The Need to Unbox

Unboxing the Fall That Started It All

Identity apart from divinity
is always going to be hollow.

MARSHAWN EVANS DANIELS

You can recognize a woman who has been unboxed. This kind of woman is confident, decisive, and clear about her purpose. She knows how to confidently and gracefully say no to anything that will divert her from her calling. She is fully aware of her assets, and most importantly, she knows how to use them. She takes pleasure in mastering and staying in her lane. This woman shines whether she's in the role of a CEO or a barista. Her work does not define her understanding

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of her value. She is full and content. She is also patient and kind with herself, fully accepting of God's grace for her very human shortcomings. God is her King, and she knows this unequivocally. And while not everyone she encounters can pinpoint God as her divine source of courage, they can certainly sense it. After all, as a carrier of God's glory, she produces much fruit in her life.

This is a picture of our created self. It is the nature God designed and shaped us in. An untainted reflection of His image, accented with all the unique elements of our temperament, abilities, and gifts. It is contoured with truth and anchored in the written and spoken word of God.

The fall of humanity interrupted that construct and the expression of this created self. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they covered their nakedness and hid (Genesis 3:6-8). Before this, there was never any shame or questioning of their uncovered form. It was beautiful. It was good. The introduction of sin, however, brought with it an identity crisis. Adam and Eve's disobedience (sin) separated them from God, the source and standard of their goodness. The separation left them feeling vulnerable and exposed, and under this perceived pressure, they scrambled to try to regain that blissful *goodness* on their own. Adam and Eve proceed to make coverings for themselves by sewing together fig leaves from their surroundings. This clearly was not *good* enough to hide their newly developed fears and insecurities. We know this because when God comes looking for them, He finds them hiding.

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They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”

GENESIS 3:8-10

This Scripture stirs a few thoughts for me:

1. No hiding place is so distant or fortified that we cannot hear the Lord.
2. We can use the very things God gave us as hiding places.
3. When God calls us out of hiding, it causes us to address what drove us to that place, admit the effect it had on us, and confess that we are not where we are supposed to be.

God allowed Adam and Eve to have their own unboxing experience in the Garden.

The Godlike creatures who had always shared in fellowship with God and each other, just as they were, were experiencing the compounding consequences of sin. They went from the uninhibited freedom of living from their created

selves to feeling like they could not stand in the presence of God (or anyone else, for that matter) because on their own, they were no longer “good enough.”

The effect of the Fall on our identity may look different for us than it did for Adam and Eve, but the outcome is still the same: hiding.

This new, less glorious image of who we really are is what I call our curated self. It is a distorted mash-up of everything our parents and other authority figures got wrong, highlighted by many of the things they got right. Though desirous of God’s will, the curated self is enslaved to the rigor of trying to please its way into being accepted by others. This self is dented by misguided words and directives said with good intentions by people who have never been unboxed themselves but who thought they knew what was best for us. The curated self is brimming with misapplied abilities anxiously waiting to be reclaimed, mentored, and aligned with biblical truth.

Therein lies the challenge. Will you own your created identity, or will you forfeit to your curated self? If you truly want the image of God to win, then you must submit yourself to the process of unboxing. Here is why. This dilemma between our curated and created selves leads to the unsettling junction between dissatisfaction and contentment, between *This place is not good enough* and *I am fine where I am*. I have found myself there on many occasions, purchased real estate, and set up shop. I could feel the desperation and hear the quiet whimper of my suffocating created self.

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I had a body count of relationships that met my superficial needs but not my supernatural destiny. The men I dated weren't marriage material, and to make matters worse, we weren't spiritually aligned. Each relationship, the next worse than the last, was with a man I had to keep hidden from those who knew my created self so they wouldn't see—after a close-up look—that my good life was actually a hoax. I also had to keep my created self a secret from the men I dated, to hold on to my little piece of fool's gold. I couldn't want too much, share too deeply, or reveal the breadth of my capabilities. Sir, I actually know how to jump-start a car, strip a faulty wire and get it working again, and troubleshoot the most complex problems. I was capable of more, but being able to check the “taken” box was important to feeling good about myself, so I kept my little secret. It felt good and gross at the same time. It was years before I learned that if the shoe didn't fit, I could change it instead of pretending it wasn't hurting, mashing, and bruising me. My inaction, apathy, and poor choices buried my created self alive, and now my curated “good” would have to be good enough. At least so I thought. The problem is, conceding to a subpar version of your created self requires you to suppress your greatness for the perceived ease of a life that in reality detains you. Others might describe such a life as good, but you can't shake the feeling that you are betraying God and yourself.

I am stirred to another thought. A fond memory, actually. Being satisfied with a knock-off version of who we are reminds me of my experience of drifting down the lazy

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river at the water park I loved visiting as a kid. No paddling or breast strokes were required to enjoy this classic attraction. You simply lay on a giant inflatable donut and let the gentle current take you on a scenic tour around the park. The water was never more than chest deep on my four-foot frame, and no one was allowed to splash or make waves lest it disturb the bliss of the other people barely floating along. It was very relaxing under the warm sun. But I am an advanced-stroke-level swimmer, and I had come to swim! There was no room within the narrow current to do what I loved and did so well. The lazy river was always enjoyable, but my parents had not paid the hefty entrance fee for me to lie on a floaty and drift in circles all day. At some point I had to make my way to the main attraction: the beach-like replica called the wave pool.

Much like the lazy river, your life may be very enjoyable. Not much effort is required to keep things moving moderately along. And perhaps a life of drifting gives you peace, and your joy is complete. If this is true, then drift on. But friend, God did not pay the hefty price of sending His only Son to a gory and undeserved death for you and me to lie there and drift. Nothing spectacular that would make the world gaze in awe and see Jesus in us can come from a suppressed life when we were clearly fashioned to do so much more. Drifting is another way that we hide. I suppose Adam and Eve could have just as easily been in a marsh under a stack of pussy willows. We can get really creative when we want to camouflage our disobedience.

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Walking in the power of your created self will result in making waves and disturbing those around you who are perfectly content with their drifting. Perhaps they are fulfilling their highest calling. Perhaps that thing we call purpose rests peacefully within them as they obediently float by. But as early as I can remember, before my *goo-goos* became *ga-gas*, I had an unbridled desire to speak and creatively express myself. As I grew older, I didn't coincidentally become a preacher, a coach, and an author. The capacity for all those roles was always within me, splashing around and making it nearly impossible to drift.

I am certain you, too, have some early memories of self expression, times when you felt in your element. Those memories hold intel about your created self and have left breadcrumbs that led you to some of your current roles or aspirations. More importantly, they point to the natural abilities and spiritual gifts that give you the capability to approach certain experiences with ease, fulfillment, and distinction. Your created identity has always been giving you prompts. It is not always found in your big achievements but in the attributes you may be overlooking. You are still not convinced that who you are is not found in what you do but in the uniqueness of how you see and approach everything you do. As you look back and connect those early promptings to what you are sensing and learning about yourself now, you kinda-sorta-maybe-probably knew all along that drifting is not for you.

If you are in the company of drifters, they may have

convinced you that you should be satisfied, even happy, with how long you have been able to keep afloat. I know too well the strain of meeting all the outward markers of happiness while feeling hollow at the same time. It is a gaping hole that only you and God can see while others applaud you for doing a good job. “Happy” and hollow is what you feel when you have stayed in a great job for too long, have stopped at attaining a diploma when God told you to get the degree, and have chosen Mr. Good Enough because the loneliness of waiting for Mr. Good was unbearable. “Happy” and hollow is that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach or the heavy weight you feel on your chest when you are celebrated for an accomplishment that was never God’s desire for you. “Happy” and hollow is the torturous tug-of-war between living in your curated self rather than your created self. Before you know it, you start to call these types of compromises destiny when it really is drifting.

As if this woe wasn’t enough, there is also a deception older than time that “good enough” is easier than the painfully rewarding fulfillment of pursuing, pressing into, and producing greatness—the fulfillment of all the Godlike attributes you were *created* to employ. You could continue to ignore the restlessness of leading a misaligned life, but greatness suppressed only produces pressure. And while there is a popular saying that “pressure makes diamonds,” another wise adage recommends caution: “Pressure bursts pipes.”

The Unboxed Experience

This brings us to another predicament you may be facing: trying to contain what needs to be unboxed.

As we look to the Scriptures, we find Moses, who was born at a dangerous and inconvenient time in the history of the Israelites. Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all the baby boys born to the Israelites. Like a true nurturer, Moses' mother hid her new son out of necessity. It was only a matter of time before her efforts to protect him could no longer conceal him.

The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. **When she could hide him no longer**, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.

EXODUS 2:2-3, EMPHASIS ADDED

Moses' mother hid him among the reeds of the riverbank. Adam and Eve hid among the trees of the Garden. And you, my sister, where have you been hiding?

It may be premature, but I would like to give you your first unboxing task by asking you to write down all the places you have been hiding. What are your trees and reeds? Here

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are some intentional and unintentional coverings you may have made for yourself.

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| work | child(ren) |
| titles | spouse |
| possessions | singleness |
| family | friends |
| sickness | pride |
| tradition | humility |
| physical appearance | talent |
| wit | humor |
| unforgiveness | |

Write down the ones that are applicable to you, including any that are not on this list, on a separate sheet of paper. Place your list somewhere private but visible enough to keep you accountable to addressing and avoiding these coverings as you do the work required to live out your created identity.

I see you, woman of God. And please don't be mistaken. Those who haven't openly affirmed you see you too. You couldn't box up your confidence and hide it, even though you've tried. Like baby Moses, perhaps hiding for a season had its place, but you, too, have been growing. You have been challenging the status quo, asking the hard questions, pushing your personal limits, and who you were truly created to be can no longer be hidden.

In his introduction to the art exhibit "In Plain Sight," executive director of Berkeley Art Center Daniel Nevers

writes, “The paradox of the visible remaining unperceived is a function of our need to filter sensory information in order to navigate the world.”¹ So then, what we have seen, heard, and even lived must be unboxed so we can expose that which was missed and misunderstood as we’ve hurried about life as we’ve known it.

You could continue hiding among the trees of the Garden or the reeds of the riverbank, but picking up this book is your declaration. It is you settling the score that you will no longer deny, discount, disregard, diminish, or defer your created self to let the counterfeit known as your curated self take center stage. If you truly want the image of God to win so you can experience the freeness and fruitfulness of a purpose-filled life, then you must be willing to yield completely to the unapologetic process of unboxing your created self.

Let the Unboxing Begin

God wants you to be free from the burden of trying to be good enough. Unboxing is where you declutter your perspective of yourself and activate your courage and confidence in Christ. It is how you create the shift necessary to get unstuck and illuminate what needs to be evaluated, elevated, or eliminated.

Discerning What Needs to Be Evaluated

Should I keep doing this? Determining what should stay or go in your life requires the objectivity of Holy Spirit to examine,

unpack, and detangle the beliefs, relationships, and experiences that have shaped and nurtured your understanding of purpose and your created self. It is an ongoing process of separating the junk from the gems.

Pausing to undergo this type of personal inventory is self-rediscovery at its finest. Self-discovery 2.0. Deep diving, divulging, and debunking everything you've been taught or caught about your identity and purpose that is not true, biblical, or serving you well. Liberation from the holding patterns you may have curated or that were handed to you that keep you stuck, unsure, and questioning your created capabilities.

This is how you can live from a place of courage and confidence in the face of the cares, conversations, and social constructs of life that have the potential to blur, bury, and block your perception of who you are and what you are capable of through Jesus Christ. It is how you mitigate your inconsistencies and the tendency to vacillate between two versions of self.

Discerning What Needs to Be Elevated

This is where you become able to affirm *I need to keep doing this*. Elevating your internal and external assets involves bringing those assets to the forefront that brokenness, insecurity, or ignorance may have left behind. It requires the deliberate discipline of sitting with yourself long enough and regularly enough to be challenged and changed by Holy Spirit. This is a principal part of purpose-led living. Becoming radically clear is how we stabilize our thoughts and actions to

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align with who God has designed us to be so we can live more intentionally and obediently. You will need to habitually engage in the process of unboxing your created self and actively press toward the woman God not only created but also sent His Son to die for so that through His resurrection, you could be reconciled to Him and to your created self.

The apostle Paul wrote,

Not that I have already obtained it [this goal of being Christlike] or have already been made perfect, but I actively press on so that I may take hold of that [perfection] for which Christ Jesus took hold of me *and* made me His own. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [heavenly] prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature [pursuing spiritual perfection] should have this attitude. And if in any respect you have a different attitude, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us stay true to what we have already attained.²

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16, AMP

Discerning What Needs to Be Eliminated

Aka *I need to get rid of this*. This kind of unboxing is not bound to a set schedule. You already know what the prompting feels like. If you are not determining what you should

eliminate, you probably have already experienced yourself forgetting, forfeiting, and frustrating your purpose and asking the same old questions. Perhaps they are familiar: *Why am I here? What is my purpose? Can I do this? and Am I good enough?* Not unboxing is why so many fall over and over into the same unsatisfying slump and stay there—never activating or actualizing their potential and succumbing to depression, apathy, emptiness, confusion, a lack of motivation, and inaction.

Any interaction or information that leaves you feeling icky about yourself or causes your pre-Christ nature to rise up has to go.

Chapter Check-In

No hiding place is so distant or fortified that you cannot hear the Lord. I would like you to pause and consider how God has been speaking to you. What has He been saying about your identity?

Journal Prompt: God is calling me out of hiding, and I admit that these are the things that drove me there . . .

Remember: Picking up this book is your declaration. It is you settling the score that you will no longer deny, discount, disregard, diminish, or defer your created self to let the counterfeit known as your curated self take center stage.