

God doesn't always do a gut rehab

I believe God can make us completely over, but I also believe that this is not always necessary.

By [Ayanna Johnson Watkins](#)

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I love the show [Rehab Addict](#). Nicole Curtis, the show's host, is a contractor who specializes in restoring old homes—typically about 100 years old, sometimes significantly older. They are always in terrible, terrible shape.

The things she does to these houses are astounding. She somehow transforms terrifying hovels of lead paint, rusty sinks, sinking floors, and kitchen counters you'd be afraid to touch with your shoe into beautiful homes you'd feel proud to live in—instead of feeling horrified and litigious, which is how I feel looking at the “before” images.

But the key to the show is what Curtis does—or rather, what she does *not* do—to get the homes that way. I am something of an aficionado of as-seen-on-TV home renovations; I've sat through tons of home-repair shows. Lots of contractors can make something beautiful after demolishing an old home down to the studs. But Nicole is unique. I am convinced that when she looks at these decrepit houses, she sees something different than we ordinary mortals see.

“See those stains in the floor?” she says, for example. “Those are from years of cat pee, just soaking through the floorboards, never quite washed away.” This is all I need to hear before I'm looking for a new house to buy. Nicole goes looking for a giant floor sander, trusting that the smelly evidence of neglect is nothing that can't

be buffed out.

Over and over again, she astounds me with her acute vision. I see a crusty, science lab of a bathroom that needs caution tape and a sledgehammer. She goes in with a scrub brush and some Ajax. She can look at a sink or a tile floor and tell if it's original to the house, and if so, she'll do everything she can to keep it in place. She won't do demolition when repair is even remotely possible. When original parts are missing, she goes in search of something equally old and beautiful to fill in the gaps.

When she's done, her houses look...like someone finally remembered to love them.

When I think about the transformation God makes in us—when we give our hearts over to God, when we throw up our hands in exasperation at the messes we've made of our own lives, when we just *can't* anymore—out of habit I think about us being made new: new creations. Torn down to the studs and rebuilt from scratch. The image of our hearts of stone being exchanged for hearts of flesh—that's a transformation.

But there is something about the way Curtis looks at an old house that seems to have a little divine truth in it. I believe God can make us completely over, but I also believe that this is not always necessary. When we would vote for the gut rehab, God goes in for the restoration. God can see when the care we need is not a sledgehammer but a paint scraper, not a jackhammer but a toothbrush—when what's needed is to clear out the crud from the tiniest of crevices without damaging the one-of-a-kind finish.

David seems to be going back and forth between these notions himself. He describes himself as sinful from birth, born into sin. At the same time, he wants to be cleansed, washed with soap, restored. It's like there's a rawer, purer version of himself he's hoping to find again. He wants his bones to be repaired and working again. He wants his joy back. He wants to get back to what he was made for.

And he is speaking exclusively to the one who knows that version of him—"against you and you only have I sinned"—and can see what he really can be when he has the chance to be beautiful. Someone who knows what's underneath the layers, who can scrape them away with just the right amount of gentle care to leave the real David intact. Someone who knows the real him is still in there.

In the religious circles I run in, restoration is a term often used but under-appreciated. It makes a better story to say that Jesus turned my whole life around. *I used to be an addict; now I'm clean. I used to be a liar; now I can be trusted. I once was lost; now I am found.*

But I think we gain something when we take some time and honor divine restoration. There is something precious inside us. We've lost sight of it—can't remember what it even looked like, covered as it is by years of regret, shame, people-pleasing, unforgiveness, or selfishness. But our creator knows it's still in there, and that it's worth saving.

Then we can look at ourselves in the mirror and marvel that we are essentially the same person we were before. It's just that someone remembered to love us.