

A Josiah Revival

What if people remembered 2020 not as the year COVID-19 afflicted the world, but as the year people worldwide fell in love with Scripture again? Nick Hall is striving to make that happen through the Year of the Bible campaign, an international movement designed to draw the world's attention back to the Word of God.

Hall is the founder of Pulse, a nonprofit ministry organization headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The organization focuses on prayer, evangelism and discipleship, and over 15 years, it has become one of the largest and fastest-growing youth outreach organizations in the world. Hall says the organization sees roughly 200,000 young people come to Jesus every year as a result of its programs and events.

But this year, Hall sees Pulse's mission differently. Pulse started the Year of the Bible campaign—which now has support from more than 3,500 churches and organizations worldwide—to urge people to return to the Bible during a perilous season.

“In the midst of political rhetoric and fear of coronavirus, it feels so real that we are living in or near the end times when Jesus will return,” Hall says. “As the rest of the world clamors and is terrified, I pray that we would be a people who are anchored in hope and truth—that our faith would not be based on feelings, on emotions or even on miracles, but it would be based on the solid rock of [God's] Word.”

Hall told *Charisma* about his own journey of learning to love the Word of God and how the Year of the Bible plans to bring the Word to life for millions worldwide.

Falling in Love

Hall says the campaign is important not because people are

unaware of the Bible, but because people often take it for granted.

“I was with some young creative friends in California recently, and they said, ‘You guys have really taken on like the least cool thing in the church’—referring to the Bible,” Hall says. “I laughed, but I also felt sad. I do think that, sadly, in our church and in the world today that we’ve made a lot of things cool and interesting and fun, and God’s Word has taken the backseat. Yet as we thought about 2020 and the work we do, [we had] this fresh vision and urgency to call a generation back to the book, to fall in love with God’s voice for ourselves.”

Hall says it’s a particularly personal campaign, given his own Christian journey. He confesses that though he has been a believer for most of his life, he says his relationship with the Bible was more defined by what he could get out of it than by loving the Word itself.

“I knew the Bible and I could quote the Bible, but I didn’t love it for myself,” Hall says. “It was kind of like an inconvenient third cousin or something. So many people in our day have been taught and grown up in churches where they’ve been taught how to love good speaking and how to love good worship, but they have not been taught how to love God’s Word for themselves.”

Hall says his turning point came when he realized that for as much as he talked about God, he didn’t read the Bible very often. He says he would read devotionals based on biblical principles or YouVersion reading plans that would suggest “two verses [per day] and then a bunch of thoughts from some author I liked.” When he seriously studied the Bible, it was because he was writing a message and looking for particular verses to back up his points. Even the way he was taught to preach reinforced this; he says he was taught to focus on practical tips, paraphrase biblical passages and keep actual verse-

reading to a minimum.

“That started a realization: ‘God, do I actually love Your Word? Do I love Your voice?’ Or am I more in love with good feelings and emotions?” Hall says. “Then I started to look back at the seasons in my life when [I had seriously studied] God’s Word and saw how much better my life was—just how I felt and how well things went and how stable it seemed. That made me say, ‘God, forgive me.’”

But Hall says reorienting his desires to love God’s Word didn’t come easily or overnight. He points to audio Bibles, Bible explainer podcasts or the Bible Project’s YouTube videos as resources that helped spark his love for the pure Word again. The Year of the Bible campaign is focused on creating similar resources to help others connect to the Word too. Hall contrasts these resources against devotional content—which he says represents the majority of church content.

“Devotional content teaches biblical ideas and concepts, but it is not helping you fall in love with the Bible,” Hall says. “It’s mostly helping you get a relevant idea for your life. There’s nothing wrong with that. But one thing impresses me about a person; the other thing impresses me about God.”

Hall says this doesn’t mean devotional content lacks value. But we need to value the primary source over secondary sources.

“I just think it’s a slow drift that’s happened in all of our lifetime,” Hall says. “I don’t think it happened by anybody maliciously saying, ‘Let’s not have God speaking’ or ‘Let’s silence Him.’ I’m not even saying God can’t speak through people—He obviously does. I believe the Holy Spirit is active and working and giving revelation, giving inspiration. But I also know that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It’s great to have the fire. But man, if you’re just going to war with the fire and you left your sword at home, that’s

going to be an interesting fight you're stepping into."

Besides, as Hall is quick to point out, the Holy Spirit is most effective in the life of the believer whose foundation is built on the Word. And he's not alone. Hall says the campaign has been adopted by thousands of ministries, churches and individuals in 137 nations, rallying around a single purpose: "What if a generation fell in love with His voice in a way that changed every year of their lives from here forward?"

"I am praying for the Word on fire in the lives of a generation," Hall says. "The Holy Spirit can draw from this Word, because I've hidden it in my heart, because I've meditated upon it. Sadly, right now, all of us have given leadership to the most biblically illiterate generation in our country's history. Eighty percent of people sitting in churches today are not regularly reading their Bible. This is an in-house problem, and we have all overseen it. I'm praying for a Bible revival—a Josiah revival—in our day.

Stir a Generation

On March 4, Pulse held a Leaders Gathering at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., to discuss plans to promote the Year of the Bible at various events and gatherings throughout 2020. Just weeks later, those plans are all up in the air, as a global pandemic has ground large-scale meetings and most travel to a halt. But while the strategy may be changing, the mission has not.

At the time of publication, Pulse still intends to hold Together 2020, its biggest event of the year, at the Lincoln Memorial on June 20. In an official statement, the ministry acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding planning any events due to COVID-19 outbreaks, but said it intended to press on with faith: "We are tracking with the CDC and will follow any recommendations or mandates as they develop. Our hope and prayer is that we will be able to gather together ... and for

now we are continuing to plan toward Together 2020. In the meantime, would you join us in prayer for communities around the world as we face the coronavirus? Because of our hope in Jesus, we don't need to be afraid! Instead, let us show compassion and concern for those who are sick, struggling and frightened."

Yet in some ways, the outbreak may prove to be a boon to the movement. Crises have a way of tearing away all the distractions that prevent people from seeing what truly matters—in this case, God's Word. Weeks before COVID-19 dominated headlines, Hall told *Charisma* about the Year of the Bible's digital-focused campaign—which sounds downright prescient now, in a world where most people are stuck inside for the foreseeable future.

"We want the masses to just declare their Year of the Bible using social media hashtags and selfies," Hall says. "We are just trying to get people to declare it and get others with them in the Bible. We're trying to get people to engage in the Bible and read it for themselves. We're trying to get people to create—we're talking new music, new poetry, new literature. These ideas are birthed from being plugged into the [ultimate] power source."

Hall hope restoring a love for the Bible will ultimately help to restore biblical values in a dark world.

"The spillover effect is a benefit for all of us," Hall says. "The statistics show that when people read the Bible, they're more generous. When people read the Bible, they prioritize their family more. When people read the Bible, they share their faith more. When people read the Bible, they pray more. ... The No. 1 change agent for the Christian is that discipline of getting in the Word."

Hall says anyone interested in learning more about the campaign can visit (and for specific updates about Together

2020). But more than the campaign or himself, Hall says he hopes *Charisma* readers are inspired to put down this story and pick up the Word of God.

“I’ve spent a lot of my life trying to get people to come to an event, get resources or even buy my book,” Hall says. “I think it’s a great book. ... But for this season in my life, I don’t want to talk about my book at all. I want people reading God’s book. He’s got a good one. And until you’ve read and fallen in love with that one, let’s just forget all the other stuff. Everything else is just noise—and His Word lasts forever. So I’m praying for all of us—me included—to love God’s Word more this year than ever before. You can start your Year of the Bible today.” {eo}

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