

# RESET

# JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Praise for  
*Reset*

“In every generation God raises up voices that speak with boldness and clarity the freedom found only in Jesus. Nick Hall is one of those voices. *Reset* stirred my own heart again to believe God for an awakening in our nation. When a generation can see Jesus for who he truly is, their lives will be reset and never the same.”

—BANNING LIEBSCHER, founder and pastor of Jesus Culture and author of *Rooted: The Hidden Places Where God Develops You*

“Nick Hall has prayed big prayers and seen God answer in big ways. His story and the stories presented in *Reset* will give you the faith to truly believe Jesus changes everything. You are one prayer away from a reset life.”

—MARK BATTERSON, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Circle Maker* and lead pastor of National Community Church

“I love the message Nick shares in this book because we all have times we need to reset—to commit ourselves to the only One who can change us from the inside out. So whether you’ve been saved for one day or have had a relationship with Jesus for decades, *Reset* will give you the courage to go even further into intimacy with our King.”

—KARI JOBE, singer/songwriter

“Nick Hall is dreaming of a generation reset, and I love working with people who dream big! I am so excited about the message of *Reset*, as I have seen first-hand that Jesus changes everything! Read this book and let the movement begin in us.”

—CHRISTINE CAINE, evangelist, author, and founder of the A21 Campaign

“Nick Hall has a heart that is passionate for God. He desperately wants people to come to know Jesus Christ and experience a reset in their lives. And that’s what this book is all about.”

—STEVE DOUGLASS, president of Cru

“God is using Nick Hall to call our generation to reset our lives in every way. His vision is large, his passion is contagious, and his energy is endless. Nick Hall believes that now is the time for a reset in America. I am believing God with him!”

—DR. RONNIE FLOYD, president of the Southern Baptist Convention  
and senior pastor at Cross Church

“I remember thinking the first time I played a PULSE college event with Nick Hall, *You can’t miss that he is passionate about reaching this generation with the message of Jesus Christ*. I have no doubt *Reset* will leave an undeniable mark for the gospel.”

—TOBYMAC, seven-time Grammy winner

“Nick Hall has powerfully put into words an invitation to a journey that is fun to read, overwhelmingly convicting, and accessible. The only thing more persuasive than the simple message of this book is Nick himself. He is a leader of deep conviction, Spirit-filled wisdom, an all-in attitude toward Jesus, and a lovable persona—all of this is captured vividly in the pages of *Reset*.”

—YORK MOORE, national evangelist for InterVarsity Christian  
Fellowship USA

“Jesus is with you in the pain, the struggle, and the unbearable, holding you close and offering you a way out. In Nick Hall’s timely book, *Reset*, you’ll find the courage to crawl out of despair and into the arms of Jesus, and you’ll find practical advice to live daily in his grace.”

—MICHAEL W. SMITH, singer/songwriter

“Welcome to the land of beginning again. *Reset* tells the stories of starting over and invites us to our second chance.”

—LEITH ANDERSON, president of the National Association  
of Evangelicals and author of *Faith in the Voting Booth*

# NICK HALL

FOREWORD BY  
JOSH MCDOWELL AND LUIS PALAU



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EVERYTHING



MULTNOMAH

## RESET

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*To my bride and best friend, Tiffany,  
and to the generation that will change the world.  
Buckle up. This is going to be fun.*

My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,  
of your saving acts all day long—  
though I know not how to relate them all.  
I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign LORD;  
I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.  
Since my youth, God, you have taught me,  
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.  
Even when I am old and gray,  
do not forsake me, my God,  
till I declare your power to the next generation,  
your mighty acts to all who are to come.

PSALM 71:15–18, NIV

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## Foreword

In the 1970s, a movement known as Jesus People swept the nation as tens of thousands of hippies and drug addicts turned in their needles for Bibles, their skepticism for devotion, and their partying for praise. It was an amazing time in North American history as young people turned to faith in God en masse, causing even *Time* magazine to take note. “The Jesus Generation” was front-cover news, and an entire age group was positively changed. We have prayed for another such movement today.

The apostle Paul once told his protégé Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV). If we are to see a move of God today, it will only come about as new leaders rise up and embody those words of the apostle Paul. People like you. People like Nick Hall.

As you read Nick’s story in *Reset*, you can be confident that this is not simply the story of a gifted young man from North Dakota. It is also the story of God himself who is changing lives. Through PULSE and the message of *Reset*, Nick has shared the gospel across the country before live audiences of millions of students, and to date more than five hundred thousand of those young women and young men have publicly responded to Jesus. God is moving in this generation! We see it across the globe and right here in the United States.

Our prayer for you, as you make your way through this book, is that your

## Foreword

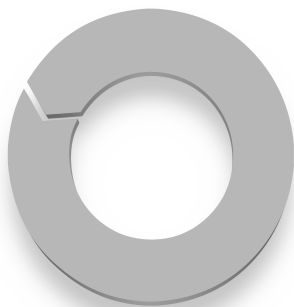
life would be the *next one changed*. Each one of us has given our life for the very message embodied in these pages, which is that Jesus really does change everything. Whatever you need reset in your life can be changed here and now, today, through the life-saving message of Jesus Christ.

Joyfully and gratefully,

Josh McDowell

Luis Palau

# **PART I**



# **The Setup**

## Living the Dream

**A**re you the guy from North Dakota doing the big youth events?” It was Billy Graham talking. As in, *the* Billy Graham. And he was talking to *me*. I thought I might pass out like a fangirl at a Justin Bieber concert. I was sitting in the living room of a living legend, and he—Dr. Graham—was making mention of PULSE, the ministry I had started. This had to be a dream, or a continuation of one, anyway.

The dream started becoming reality for me just before my freshman year of college, and by the time I was a junior, it was consuming my life. I’d been part of a few campus clubs by then and had met other students who were trying their best to live for Jesus and wanted to have an impact at our school. In addition, I would often have conversations with friends after class and learn that whenever they surveyed the climate of our campus, they were just as disheartened as I was. It seemed students were drunk all the time, or high, or both. They were harming themselves and destroying their lives. A few of them even committed suicide. Depression and despair were rampant; something had to give.

A few of those buddies and I decided to start meeting together every week to pray for our campus. We had no idea how our group was supposed

to address the problems we were witnessing, but we believed that if we prayed and were willing to do what God said, he just might use us.

During the same season, my English prof assigned our class a project: write a fifteen-page business proposal and prepare a fifteen-minute presentation for the class on some change we wanted to see on campus. She divided the twenty-four or so students into groups of four and left it up to the groups to determine their project.

My school, North Dakota State University, was a pretty big party school. One of those designated party areas was the tailgating lot near the football stadium, but because there were more drinkers than the limited real estate could accommodate on game days, there had been a push for a bigger lot. My group for that English project decided this was its cause. The passionate plea? “Make Room for Our Beer!” I suppose the fight for justice takes on a variety of forms.

Another group would appeal for more parking on campus and still another for an on-campus golf course. And while these causes were fine by me, I came away from that class feeling unsatisfied. God had already given me a vision for seeing the campus changed by Jesus, and I wondered if forcing myself to formalize a specific strategy might help me actualize that goal. Instead of heading home after class, I waited for my professor to free up.

When I asked her if it would be okay for me to do the assignment on my own instead of in the context of a group, she looked perplexed. “It would be a lot more work to do it that way,” she said, making sure I had counted the cost. “But if you’re convinced that’s what you want to do, then have at it. I’ll give you the same presentation slot—fifteen minutes—but I’ll need the same-length proposal from you . . . fifteen pages. Agreed?”

I sat down at my keyboard that night wondering what I’d gotten myself into. “God, I could use some help here,” I prayed. “For starters, how do I even write a proposal?”

There was only one other person in that English class who I knew was involved in a campus ministry, but I'd take any help I could get. I pulled her aside after class one day and explained what I was going to do my presentation on. I asked her to pray for me between now and then. After all, I was going to be presenting a proposal to my classmates about reaching them. I could just hear myself: "Today, I want to talk to you about a big problem on our campus . . . you need Jesus!" Yeah, this was going to go over really well.

As it turned out, I survived the presentation. Later, when I read through the email comments I received from my classmates (we all had to send in feedback to each group regarding its presentation), I felt a huge sense of relief. The responses blew me away. One said he hadn't been to church in forever but that the presentation made him want to go the following weekend. Another said she believed in the cause and wanted to help out. On and on the positive feedback went, and my heart stirred with each review. (Okay, there was one dissenter who wrote, "Religion is personal. Mind your own business, you bigot." But hey, one out of twenty ain't bad. Plus, there's that verse that says to "count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me."<sup>1</sup> So, evidently, now I was blessed.)

On the heels of that presentation, I took that proposal, titled "Pulse," to the campus copy shop and told the workers to print as many copies as twenty bucks would buy, the amount of money I happened to have on me that day. I gave those copies to all of my friends leading ministries for the three schools in our area and said, "God has laid on my heart this goal for Christ to be at the pulse of our generation. Would you read this and pray about it? And then let's talk."

From there, word spread. Students came up to me, "Nick, this is so exciting!" or, "Nick, God's totally up to something here!" or, "Wow, Nick, your proposal is awesome, but your graphics? *No bueno*."

## The Setup

In my mind, I'd think, *Hey, this was an English paper, not a graphic-design project. Cut me some slack!* But before I could say any of that, one guy said, "I have some ideas. Can I take a run at the design?"

Another student said he was a marketing major and had ideas about how to get a campaign like this one off the ground.

Another had thoughts about how to involve campus ministries.

Another was good at fund-raising.

Another was interested in PR.

What could I lose in letting them at it? Within a month of the presentation, the campus was buzzing. I walked into the student union one day and found a group of kids huddled up, praying. I approached them and said, "What's up?" to which they responded, "Nick! We were just praying about what God is doing around here and about this 'Pulse' thing . . . have you heard about it?" I had to laugh. Yeah! I *had* heard about it.

The guys I'd been praying with week after week and I started mobilizing all sorts of teams toward a goal of hosting a regional event the following spring that would reach as many of the twenty-two thousand college students at the three area colleges as we possibly could. Based on our research, we figured that about one thousand of those kids were involved in some kind of church or campus ministry. If every one of those students reached one person for Jesus that year, the impact would only yield two thousand of the twenty-two. Plus, the stats told us that only 10 percent of Christians of any age share their faith. We were staring at a giant math problem. We needed not simple addition but radical multiplication—hence, the need for a big effort, some Mountain Dew, and a whole lot of prayer.

We prayed, and God moved. We began praying for God to show us those who were already living for Jesus and where the greatest concentration of those students existed. Were they premed students? Interior design students? Involved in Greek life? Basketball players? We leaned in as God led, and then we

made a beeline for those particular kids and their departments. We needed their help in pulling off something that had never been done in our lifetime—students leading other students en masse to the foot of the cross.

Those early adopters became the first leaders for our prayer groups, which we held every day of the week. When we saw that some students couldn't make the morning prayer times, we launched another seven groups in the evenings. We'd walk up to kids on campus and ask them if they were involved in a prayer group yet, and if they said they couldn't make any of the times when groups were meeting, we'd say, "Well, when can you come?" If they said, "The only time I'm free is Wednesdays from one until two," then we'd say, "We just started a prayer group during that slot! See you Wednesday at one o'clock."

Then we'd run off to go find a leader for the prayer meeting we just launched.

Once we'd rallied a fair number of supporters, all of whom were praying toward the same end, we launched the "G300 Initiative," based on the story of Gideon from the Bible. Gideon was a mighty warrior as well as a devoted follower of God. He wanted to defend his town for God and rallied twenty-two thousand men to his side toward that aim. But God was not pleased. "It's too many men!" God told Gideon. "They will be tempted to think they won the war by their own strength!" God told Gideon to cut his crew.

Gideon trimmed his troops down to ten thousand fighters, but still God said no. "Keep going," God told him. "Your army is still way too fat." This back-and-forth went on, until Gideon had only three hundred men at his side. "Now," God told him, "now we're talking, my friend."<sup>2</sup>

Gideon and his three hundred fighters went on to win the war, and everyone everywhere knew the victory belonged to the Lord. We wanted this same glory for God, and so we called on three hundred people to help. "We all do crazy things to get money for coffee or clothes or dates," I explained, "but have we really sacrificed for God?" I asked three hundred students to each donate



one hundred dollars toward reaching their friends for Jesus. “We can each take our money and go do something noble with it,” I said, “but if we all put our money on the same table, we can make some noise.”

Over the following three months, we raised thirty-three thousand dollars plus change. This dream was getting real.

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That fall—September and October of 2005—we hosted a vision event, where those three hundred students rallied and said, “Yeah, we’re in. Let’s go for it.” Next, we held a kickoff event where PULSE was officially launched. Twelve hundred students gathered for that kickoff. From there, we went into high gear toward our big springtime event, and by the time the dust had settled, we had seen eight thousand students encounter Jesus and twelve hundred surrender their lives to him.

And while those big numbers are mind-blowing to look back on, the best part of the experience was seeing our friends and classmates waking up to the reality of Jesus. Around this time, country singer Carrie Underwood exploded onto the national scene with her single, “Jesus, Take the Wheel.” It seemed that God was moving everywhere we looked. The whole “Jesus, take the wheel” idea? That’s powerful theology. In essence, this is what our friends were saying: “Somebody, please help me stay out of the ditch.”

Of course, Jesus would do that and so much more. But we all have to start somewhere—and for many of my peers, that somewhere was the ditch. The message my friends and I were compelled to share back then is the same one I share with you: Jesus is offering you a reset, a do-over, regardless of where you are right now. You could be in the lowest valley, or you could be scraping the sky from a mountainous high. Wherever you are, Jesus is ready to take you farther and deeper. Whether your mistakes are weighty or seemingly insignificant, he says, “Come on. Come with me. I am exactly what you are searching

for. Join me as I change the world.” Jesus wants to free you and me both from safe and small expectations. He wants to set us free to live out our full potential so that we can know “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19, NIV).

We watched Jesus do that time and again, never once getting tired of seeing him change a hell-bent life. The students we reached in those early days were longing for the high, the love, the significance, the purpose, the “So what?” of this earthly life. They would meet Jesus and realize that in him, those needs were met. Jesus would prove to be the pinnacle of everything they’d ever known. He would prove to them that the more they knew him, the more they would want to know him. He would prove to them that the more they allowed him to reset their lives, the more they would love their freshly reset life. In many ways, our role reminds me of a captain for the Coast Guard, trolling dangerous waters, looking for people whose lives screamed, “Help!”

When people are adrift at sea, bobbing around in concert to the totally unpredictable winds, all they can focus on is survival—no one has fun clinging to life. But when that rescue boat shows up and the people are lifted from those waters, they can breathe easy once again. They can power ahead in a given direction, sure of their ability to override the wind.

The Bible says that a person who refuses to trust God for wisdom and life is like a wave that is tossed to and fro at sea, never able to steady itself, never able to think clearly. “If any of you lacks wisdom,” James 1 says, “you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do” (verses 5–8, NIV). If those without God lack wisdom, then those who turn to Jesus are actually anchored in truth and enabled with a newfound purpose. *How many Instagram likes do I have? Was I invited to the party? What grade did I get on the test? Do I have enough*

*money? Am I sick or healthy? Does she like me or not?* When we're living as people who are anchored in Jesus, these concerns and a thousand others lose their punch. We don't define ourselves the same way anymore.

So, you. What does this have to do with you? The message I've been sharing for the last decade hasn't changed a single bit—not because I'm lazy, but because it's eternally the same. When Billy Graham and friends launched Youth for Christ in the 1940s, they had the slogan “Geared to the Times, Anchored to the Rock.” The truth that was true then is still true today. Jesus is for you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is ready to pull you from the wind-whipped waves. Whatever aspect of your life is in need of a reset, he says, “I got this. You can trust me there.”

In your self-image, accept his reset.

In your purity, accept his reset.

In your relationships, accept his reset.

In your faith, say, “Jesus, I'm in.”

If you're hungry for more, as I've always been, then come to the table. Jesus has been cooking, and I promise it's better than whatever excuse for food is in your fridge. Whatever you are facing, these past years have taught me that he can handle it. Jesus is offering a reset. *Jesus*—the One who changes everything.

## More to Life

Her name was Michelle, and the razor blade she handed me was suspended from a chain of tarnished steel. Hidden from view, it was worn around her neck every day for five years to remind herself she was worthless. She looked sixteen, maybe seventeen years old. Healthy. Stylish. Normal, in the sense that she could have played forward on her school's soccer team. She didn't look like the kind of kid who was struggling in life—certainly not enough to repeatedly harm herself. As she talked, my heart ached for her.

This was six years into PULSE's existence, only a few years into the ministry God handed to me while I was still in college. I had been speaking on university campuses and in any big-city arena or stadium that would have me, and through a series of connections, I was subsequently invited to tour with a group of bands to forty-seven cities around the country as part of Winter Jam, a gathering that drew about ten thousand students, including teenagers, youth groups, and twenty-somethings each night. The format was straightforward. Bands would open the event, and toward the close of the evening I would take the stage and give a message about Jesus. After the talk, those in the crowd would be given the opportunity to respond. Following the invitation, I made a habit of hanging out at the PULSE table, which on the evening I met Michelle was

positioned on the stadium's concourse level in an East Coast city. Each night, I would talk with guys and girls who had questions about Jesus, or pray with those who needed prayer, or hand out *Next* books (portions of God's Word that I try to carry with me wherever I go). Mostly, I just listened. The majority of people who approached me following an event wanted nothing more than a safe, open ear from a guy who cared. I'll admit, I do believe in these kids.

### **"MICHELLE, I LOVE YOU"**

My message that night was the same as it is every night, about the hope and life offered by Jesus. I decided some years back that if I'm going to speak, then my words are going to be about Jesus. That night, I shared from 1 John 1 and spoke about the darkness that we fall into, the pull we feel toward sin, and the culture surrounding us that doesn't have our best interests at heart. I explained how we believe we can find fulfillment in things that will never fulfill . . . and about how a reset is available to us through Jesus. If we needed to reset our priorities, I explained to the ten thousand or so people gathered there that night, then Jesus could help us do that. If we needed to reset our faith, he could help us do that too. If it was our purity or our finances or our family situation or our self-concept or our wayward heart—if anything at all needed to be made new in our lives—Jesus stood ready to set that thing right.

Jesus offers a reset to anyone from anywhere, for anything. All we need to do is turn to him.

When Michelle approached me, she was guarded, as though she wasn't thrilled to be talking to me. "I didn't want to be here tonight," she said. "I hate Christians! They've always judged me and been totally rude. But my friends were coming for the bands, and they asked me if I wanted to come. I've always hated God, if there even is a God . . . because if there is a God, he would never love someone like me."

As she talked, I thought about how healthy and functional she seemed on the outside and how that facade didn't at all match her aura of despair. This girl was angry, certainly at God, and on some level at me.

"You got up to speak tonight," she continued, "and I didn't want to listen to anything you had to say. I couldn't have cared less what you were talking about. I knew none of it applied to me."

Michelle then made eye contact for the first time. Was she warming up to me? "But something happened while you were talking," she continued. "I started hearing this voice saying, 'Michelle, I love you . . . Michelle, I love you . . . Michelle, I love you.'"

Her posture changed as she became quiet and leaned in so only I could hear, "Nick, I think . . . I think it may have been God."

At the end of my talk, when I had invited people to stand up in front of their seat if they wanted to reset some part of their life, Michelle had been compelled to rise to her feet. "I prayed the prayer you told us to pray if we wanted to give our lives to Jesus," she said, "and I meant those words, Nick. I want to start looking to him."

Michelle then punched her fist into the air between us, and reflexively I shifted, thinking she might connect a right hook with my face. Moments before, she had been so revved up that it wouldn't have surprised me. Fortunately her fist stopped, and as it hung there clenched and trembling, she said, "I've worn this for the past five years, and every morning when I put it on, it reminds me that I am worthless. But I'm not going to wear it anymore. I don't want to see myself the way the world sees me one minute longer. I want to start seeing myself the way God sees me. Will you take this?"

My mind spun as I grabbed the blade from her hand. Someone actually wore this? So close to a throat that it could slit?

It was a powerful, larger-than-life moment for Michelle—and for me as well. She had encountered the living God and been changed as a result. Skeptics

might say that moving from self-hatred to self-love isn't some simple switch you flip—a one-time decision you make. They'd be completely right, and I told Michelle as much. "You're probably not going to wake up tomorrow and want to join the cast of *Glee*. But you've taken an important step, and now God wants to journey with you every day. And I can tell you from firsthand experience that you're never going to regret this new path."

As Michelle's friends mobbed her, hugging her neck and wiping away her tears, she flashed me a smile. The words conveyed in her bright countenance said, "I knew there had to be more to this life. And I finally found it."

### GLIMPSES OF TRANSCENDENCE

That sense that there is more to this life is something we taste and see throughout our lives. One of my earliest glimpses of it happened when I was just a little boy craving time with my dad. From time to time, my dad (Bruce is his name, but I've always called him "Boom") would pack up the family Suburban and shuttle me five hours north, past the Canadian border, to do some walleye fishing, just the two of us. We'd stop at the corner gas station before heading out of town, where he'd indulge my junk-food compulsion, saying with an easy grin, "Don't tell Mom." The pocketknife he gifted me with during one of those trips I still have, and each time I happen upon it, I'm reminded that our fishing trips were never about the fish but about spending time with my hero.

We always stayed in a cheap motel or lodge, but in my memory those sites were five-star resorts, given the undivided attention I enjoyed from my dad. I can't tell you exactly what we talked about during our days on the road, but two decades later I'm still in touch with those feelings of pride and elation and that sensation of being raised up emotionally by someone I admired so much. To this day, I keep notes from Boom on my desk.

And then there was the time when my mom and I were hanging out on the dock of a lake we frequently visited as a family. We were sitting there talking and laughing when the entire lake turned over. For real: *the whole thing flipped end over end*. Evidently it happens twice a year, this process of a lake's surface waters cooling and thus becoming denser, which causes those waters to sink. The sinking effect makes the bottom layer of water literally turn over and become the top. When it happened in front of us, the result was thousands of fish jumping right out of the water, as though all of creation were putting on a show just for us. It was breathtaking. And a little terrifying. We looked at each other with a mirrored expression: "What the heck was that?" As a young fisherman, I remember being so disappointed that I didn't have my net.

Transcendent moment for sure, that indescribable feeling of rising above.

As a teenager, after I had my driver's license, I would drive down long-forsaken country roads, past the "big city" lights of Fargo, to the middle of nowhere, where the stars would light up the sky. Or I'd float out to the middle of the lake on a raft and watch the northern lights paint the sky as shooting stars raced by. That sense of being a small speck of humanity surrounded by an awesome world—it's enough to undo a person with the magnificence of it all.

It wasn't nature alone that sparked the sense of transcendence for me. When I was seven years old, for instance, my uncle somehow arranged for me to sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" during the seventh-inning stretch at a Minnesota Twins baseball game, back when center-fielder sensation Kirby Puckett was still king of the roster and the Twins were in the chase for the title. To be part of the energy, the excitement, the expansiveness of a major league game and to sing before forty thousand excited fans . . . it was larger than life, topped only by the opportunity I was given years later to watch Michael Jordan play during his final year with the Washington Wizards.

Then there were those rites of passage—the first time I held a girl's hand,



that first kiss, the process of falling in love. At my college's freshman orientation, I walked into the auditorium looking for the sign with the name "Red Hots," the group I'd been assigned to for the first semester. As music blared from surrounding speakers, I grabbed an open seat next to a girl I'd later learn was named Molly. Molly was too polite to tell me that I'd inadvertently taken the seat of her roommate, who was on a quick bathroom break. When said roommate appeared and eased into the chair beside me, a prompting flooded my mind along the lines of *That could be your wife*.

I glanced nonchalantly at Molly's roommate—a gorgeous, sunny-faced brunette—and then in my spirit said back to God, "If that's you, God, I'm good with that plan."

Molly's roommate was Tiffany, now my wife of eight fantastic years. It was a *really* good plan.

Regardless of the specifics, we've all had these moments when reality is suspended and we're lifted above the fray. Our breath is taken away, maybe, or our eyes water at something deeply moving. Our perspective shifts, our stomach turns, we get goose bumps and shake our heads in disbelief, and we're left utterly and astoundingly undone. It's the glance. The smile. The yes when you ask her out. It's climbing the floating mountains in *Avatar*. It's Augustus telling Hazel Grace in *The Fault in Our Stars* that it would be a privilege to have his heart broken by her. It's the lift before the chorus of Coldplay's "Fix You," that melody that makes everyone unite with arms raised high while Chris Martin raises his fist over the masses of raving fans screaming out the lyrics. It's that thing that's hard to define but easy to spot, that thing called transcendence that elicits from us ecstasy and raw emotion. It's that glimpse that reminds us we're all after something more.

"We were meant to live for so much more,"<sup>3</sup> Switchfoot sings, echoing U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." We know there is something more.

## SEEING THE QUEST FOR WHAT IT IS

I was about to enter my freshman year of college when I realized that the hunger for that certain “rising above reality” that we all share is at its core spiritual. It was as if God opened my eyes and allowed me at last to see that the concerts and movie scenes, the connections and first kisses, the night sky and the lake flipping itself—none of these things were simply random, but rather glimpses into the reality we were made to experience forever. We were created for transcendence. We were born to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We were made to worship. We were made for intimacy. We were hard-wired to live in a state of awe. This all scratches at the idea philosophers and theologians through the ages have described as our “God-shaped hole.”

My new reality was accompanied by a simple command. “Tell them,” I felt God was saying. “Tell them that behind it all is me, that I created them to know me.”

During the next few years, as almost all of my friends hopped around from one major to the next, from one set of interests to the next, from one relationship to the next, I was a heat-seeking missile on the hunt for anyone who didn’t know Jesus. Looking back, I can see that God had been building up to this turn of events. When I was only three or four years old, keeping in line with my highly inquisitive nature, I wandered into my mom and dad’s bedroom one morning, where my mom was putting on makeup and doing her hair, and asked her where people go when they die. I hadn’t started the conversation there, I should tell you. First, I needed to know why my sister, Jennie, giggled so much and liked the color pink, when my little brother would arrive (Mom was pregnant then), if I could stay up late that night, and whether she and Dad would come watch me play once I made the roster for the Minnesota Twins. But then—*then* I wanted to know what happened when people die.

Her answers, as I recall, went something like, “Because she’s a girl. A couple

of months. No. Absolutely. And . . . (sigh).” It wasn’t an exasperated sigh, but more of a “so I guess we’re going to have this conversation now” sigh, an acknowledgment that her hopes for getting my sister and me out the door and into the car so Mom could check off her list of errands were now officially and radically dashed.

After the sigh, my patient and loving mother did her level best to explain to me the mysteries of life and death and life after death, in terms a little boy could understand. And as her words joined into sentences and those sentences filled several paragraphs, Jesus came into my heart—right then, right there, real time. Upon hearing my mom’s description of it, I knew I needed Jesus, and so that day at my parents’ bedside, I knelt down and handed over the plans to my life. And even though I was only a kid, that moment changed my life.

From that day forward, I was so gripped by this new reality that I made a habit of asking almost everyone I met if they knew Jesus. Mom would be having a conversation with some lady at Target, and I’d jump in with, “Do you know the Lord?” My family would be out for dinner, and I’d pester our server with the same innocent question. By the time I was eleven, I was mailing handwritten letters to Michael Jordan and other national figures I admired in an effort to gauge their spiritual temperature too. I was hunting for some old paperwork recently and found a copy my mom had saved of one of those notes. My grammar and spelling may have left a little to be desired, but the motivation behind the words was pure. It read,

Dear Michael Jordan,

I am writing to you because you are my favorite basketball player. My name is Nick Hall and I think you are the best basketball player in the world. I like you so much that sometimes people I know complain about me talking about you too much! I have a lot of your posters and with my money I bought your rookie card in Fleer. I have 37 of your

cards in basketball. I have a question for you are you a Christian and do you believe that Jesus died on the cross for everyone who asks him into there life. Well, I hope you are a Christian then I will be able to see you in heaven someday. I hope you get the MVP again this year and I hope the Bulls win another championship.

Your best fan,

Nick Hall

That one was from February of 1993, the year the Bulls rounded out the first of their two three-peats. I'm not sure if MJ ever received my letters or if he has ever surrendered his heart to God, but if not, it wasn't for lack of effort on my part.

During those same years, whenever my buddies and I were playing sports and riding our bikes around the neighborhood, I'd look for every opportunity to ask them questions like, "If you take a hit on the football field and die, do you know where you are going after that?" and, "If you get flattened while you're riding your bike by a car barreling down the street, are you sure you'll go to heaven when you die?" With openers like that, I wasn't exactly the life of the party. But nobody could fault me on the grounds of timidity; I wanted everyone I knew to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

It wasn't until I reached middle school that I realized my do-you-know-Jesus approach wasn't normal . . . or cool. I tried to ease up for a while and learn to talk about other things. But by ninth grade there was such a stirring in my heart that I had to start speaking up again. My youth pastor invited me to attend a national youth conference in Fort Collins, Colorado, where five thousand or so other kids would gather. During one of our days together, we could choose between participating in a community-service project—helping out at a nursing home, I think it was—or else we could go door-to-door in the neighborhood and share Jesus with anything that blinked.

Out of the five thousand conference attendees, approximately 4,950 kids went to the nursing home, while the remaining fifty took to the streets. I was one of the fifty, and after four hours of knocking on doors, sharing how Jesus had changed my life, and praying with complete strangers, I was flying like a kite. I look back now and see how God was preparing me for all that was to come. We may not see his preparation for what it is at the time, but with God, nothing happens by chance.

Years later I was given a partial scholarship to play basketball at Northwestern in Saint Paul, Minnesota, the fulfillment of a lifelong sports dream I'd had. As a (relatively short) kid, I prayed every morning and night that I'd be tall enough to play in the NBA someday, despite the genetic cards I'd been dealt. My prayer went something like, "God I need a miracle! Help me be over six feet tall." My dad is five feet nine inches, and Mom topped out at five foot two, but I'd read somewhere that hanging from monkey bars could stretch a person and make him taller, in addition to eating spinach and guzzling whole milk. Maybe there was hope for me beyond my five-eight stature. I was determined to find out.

On campus my freshman year, I began to experience internal stirrings and sleepless nights (and not solely due to all the ramen noodles and Easy Mac). Beyond my "freshman fifteen" weight fluctuation, God was up to something in my heart in a way I'd never experienced before. I would wake in the middle of the night, crying out for explanations. But typically, aside from the Latin-sounding gibberish my sleep-talking roommate, Derrick, would be muttering, there was only radio silence in return. I needed more input than that.

Many nights, I'd drag myself out of bed and head to the small chapel on campus to plead with God without waking my roommates. "I want to know you," I prayed, over and over again. "I want your cross to mean something to me."

In the midst of those sleepless, prayer-filled nights, God began to soften

my heart and open my eyes to his radical love and unconditional grace. My life was divided between my plans and his, my dreams and his. Was I willing to surrender? Pride, lust, a porn habit I battled during high school, and more—there was a lot of normal teenage junk in my life that God was asking me to lay down so that he could raise up in me something new. I remember being terrified to give God the all-access pass, but deep down I knew he was calling me to be all-in and that he was better than anything I was clinging to.

## SAYING YES TO GOD

Somewhere along the way, I'd been told that people who were serious about hearing from God fasted and prayed. People in the Bible, ancient monks and desert fathers, serious pastors—they all fasted and prayed. I figured if it was good enough for them, then it was good enough for me. I'd done the praying thing hundreds of times, but fasting was a new frontier—unless legitimate fasting hours were getting racked up while I slept. Still, desperate times call for desperate measures—and I desperately needed to hear from God. I decided to give it a try. That was on a Thursday, during the early days of my freshman year. Basketball season was to start on the following Monday, which meant I was giving God four days to do some explaining as it related to my purpose in life. For those four days I would ingest only water—water, and hopefully a word from the Lord.

A few hours into my debut fast, I was pretty sure I was going to die. I was starving. They say the human body can make it three weeks or longer without food, but in my limited experience, they are wrong. Within three hours, I was reevaluating my strategy and petitioning all of heaven for a quicker response while simultaneously questioning whether the Cheetos fragments on the floor of my car could somehow be my manna from heaven.

That weekend I wound up going back home to Fargo, where I found

myself at my old high school for a basketball game. As soon as I entered the gym, I regretted the trip. Popcorn is my kryptonite, and high school sports popcorn holds a special place in my heart (and stomach). As I tried to move quickly through the lobby, I ran into a guy I'd met before named Alan, who was now a freshman at a state school in town. Neither of us had a real reason to be at that game, but the conversation we ended up having proved to be a divine appointment for me.

As we talked about school and our eventual plans, the topic of faith came up. Alan shared that he'd been judged by the church before and had some serious questions. He was feeling what most of us feel when it comes to God: confused. And he didn't know where to turn. There in the lobby of the school gym—right beside the popcorn stand, of course—I kept saying to Alan, “God loves you so much, and he has a huge plan for your life” . . . “God loves you, Alan” . . . “God can handle your dreams and questions” . . . “Jesus is *crazy* about you, Alan.”

In the midst of my encouraging Alan, I heard myself interject, “I’m not going to play basketball this year.” The words came out of my mouth and were jolting to both Alan and me. Alan met my eyes and said, “Huh?” to which I said, “Huh?” in return. And yet somehow I knew exactly what had transpired. Alan asked, “What are you talking about, Nick? Aren’t you on scholarship to play?” I told him that I had been fasting and praying, asking God for direction for my life. And that right there, right in that moment, God had given me the answer I sought.

“I’m supposed to devote my life—all of it—to sharing Jesus,” I told Alan with a grin. “I’m not going to play basketball this year. Why would I spend all that time and energy on hoops when the whole reason I’m here is to tell people about Jesus?” I laughed then, the sort of relieved chuckle that reflexively surfaces when you realize you finally found what you’d been looking for.

On the heels of that exchange with Alan, I had a whole slew of questions

for God. What did all of this mean? Where was I supposed to go? And once I got to wherever I was going, what was I supposed to do once I arrived? I wasn't trying to be the next Billy Graham or anything—although I would go on to read his biography four consecutive times. I just wanted to do what God had asked me to do. I would sit with those questions day after day, even as a phrase kept returning to my mind, something of a motto for my place in the world: “My life exists to put Christ at the pulse of a generation.” I would plaster it on my notebooks, on the screen saver of my laptop, and, most importantly, on my living, beating heart. *Christ at the pulse* and nothing else. I would shorten the phrase further to the single word *pulse*, and in one fell swoop a pasty-white kid from North Dakota would be the possessor of a divinely captivating dream. Pulse . . . my commitment and passion. Pulse . . . my ministry and goal. Pulse . . . my hope for a generation. Pulse . . . God's call on my life.

Two years later—in 2004—I would write the paper detailing the dream for how to reach my generation with the message of Jesus' love. That paper would gain some recognition, spawning a campus-wide, student-led initiative to reach every college student in our city. Within five years, more than fifty thousand students would be impacted with that message, and more than ten thousand of them would respond positively to the gospel, making it one of the largest student-led evangelism movements in all of United States history. A few months later, PULSE opened a national office in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in order to take the message of hope and redemption coast to coast . . . and well beyond.

But before all of that: *popcorn*. Now that God had spoken to me there in that gym, I could finally break my fast.



NICK HALL



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