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WILD GOOSE CHASE: Rediscover the Adventure of Pursuing God

A Quick Focus

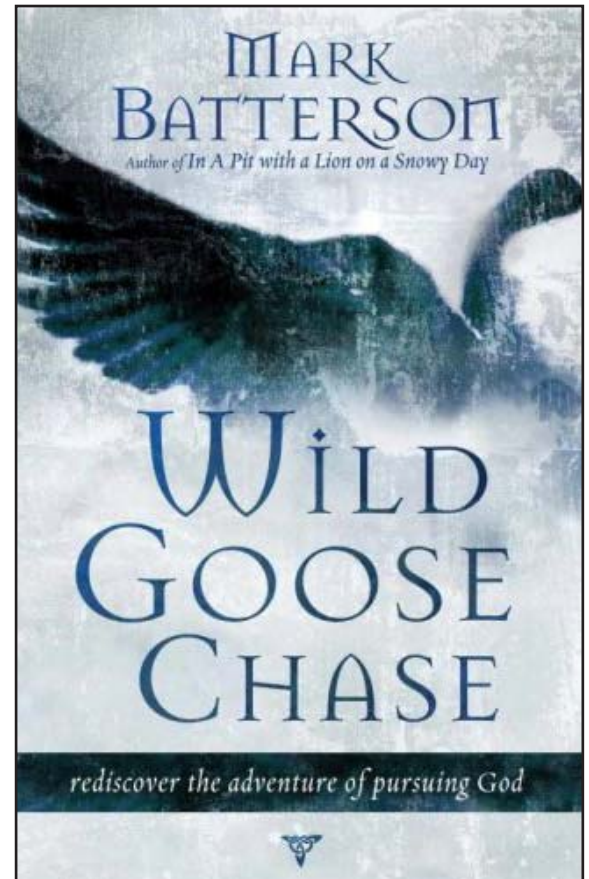
The Book's Purpose

- Explain how pursuing the Spirit's leading is much like chasing a wild goose
- Encourage believers to take risks so that they pursue life as an adventure of faith
- Show from biblical stories how God wants to write His story through our lives
- Identify six cages that keep people from pursuing the Wild Goose chase

The Book's Message

The Celtic term for the Holy Spirit was *An Geadh-Glas*, which translates "the Wild Goose." Just as a wild goose cannot be tamed and its movements cannot be predicted, so it is with the Holy Spirit. Pursuing His calling is much like engaging in an adventurous Wild Goose chase.

Churches are notorious for taming Christians and discouraging them from taking risks in their faith. Such "taming" of believers leads to a boring life and an impotent church. We all have a choice to make. We can choose to stay in our cages, or we can chase the Wild Goose and experience the wonderful adventure God has in mind for us.



by Mark Batterson
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Six Main Points

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INTRODUCTION

The Celtics had a name for the Holy Spirit which translated into English is “the Wild Goose.” At first, the term may sound sacrilegious. But perhaps there is no better term to describe one’s pursuit of the Spirit’s leading than a *Wild Goose chase*.

Clipped Wings

Could it be that these early Celtic believers were onto something that the institutional church today has missed? Could it be that churches today are guilty of caging Christians? Could it be that believers have clipped the Spirit’s wings and settled for something less than the full adventure God designed for each of us to experience?

We all struggle trying to discern the will of God for our lives. The problem is that we try to figure it out logically as we would a Sudoku puzzle. But God usually doesn’t act in logical, linear ways. In fact, pursuing the leadership of the Holy Spirit can be most unsettling because we often don’t have a clue where we’re headed. And as soon as we can accept this fact, we will enjoy the journey much more. The journey may not be safe or certain, but it is guaranteed to be far from boring.

Life in a Cage

There is a huge difference between viewing caged animals at the local zoo and walking along a beach with hundreds of barking seals. What’s more exciting—watching a bird in a cage or watching a pelican fly over your head and dive into the water to catch its breakfast? Animals in their natural habitat are untamed, uncivilized, and uncaged. Take the opposites of these three adjectives, and you’re at the zoo.

I sometimes wonder if congregations do to Christians what zoos do to animals. I don’t believe they do it intentionally. But I still think it is true. Churches tend to tame Christians in the name of Christ. We avoid risk and danger and struggle. The result is caged Christians.

In our inner being we all long for more. More excitement, more adventure, more challenge. Who ever came up with the idea that Jesus died on the cross to keep us safe? Certainly it is OK to ask for God’s protection. But when is the last time you asked God to make you dangerous?

“Since when did it become safe to follow Christ? Maybe it’s time to come out of the cage and live dangerously for the cause of Christ.”

Bored Christians

Most Christians are bored with their faith. I believe our guardian angels stand outside our cages trying to coax us out. That’s what Jesus was trying to do with the rich young ruler. We feel badly that Jesus demanded his selling off everything he had. But we forget the life of adventure that he would have received as a tradeoff. The rich man himself admitted that something was lacking in his life. Jesus offered him an apprenticeship with the Son of God. And the rich but sad young ruler refused.

On the other hand, think of the experiences of those 12, mostly uneducated men, who gave up everything to follow Christ. Our Lord guided them to places they never dreamed they would have visited. They learned from the Teacher of all teachers. They saw mouth-opening miracles, all because they accepted the invitation to get out of their cage.

We have a choice to make. We can play it safe and see how much we can accumulate. Or we can choose to chase the Wild Goose.



ESCAPING THE CAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY

No one knows exactly how he will die. But one thing is certain. I want to die doing what I love the most. Unfortunately, most people die long before they go to the grave. The process of dying begins when we have nothing to live for. In fact, we don’t start living until we discover something worth dying for.

Jesus was the most passionate person on Planet Earth. His final days here are appropriately called *the Passion*. Aren’t we exhorted to follow in His steps? Followers of Christ should be the most passionate people around.

The Responsibility Cage

One day Jesus was teaching about the requirements of discipleship. One man wanted to follow; but he wanted to first go bury his father. That sounds reasonable. But Jesus rebuked him and said to let the dead bury their own dead.

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Essentially, the man in this story was merely using a delay tactic. Attention to family matters is, by all means, a worthwhile virtue. But this man allowed one responsibility to get in the way of a higher responsibility.

Don't we tend to do the same thing? We allow our responsibilities to become excuses for not following Christ. In other words, our responsibilities can easily become an excuse for irresponsibility. The result is a life that prevents us from chasing the Wild Goose.

Nehemiah~A Man of Passion

Nehemiah, cupbearer to King Nebuchadnezzar, most likely had never been to Jerusalem. Yet his heart ached deeply when his kinsmen reported to him that the city continued to lie in ruins. He wept. He was determined to do something about it. When you ponder this story, it is laughable to think of a cupbearer undertaking such a daunting task. Is that not how our God loves to operate? A deep passion for the things of God is far greater than any human qualification.

Was rebuilding the walls Nehemiah's responsibility? When God gives you a passion for something, it becomes your responsibility to act. For example, Gary Haugen had a great career working for the Department of Justice (DOJ). But after seeing firsthand the genocide in Rwanda, God gave him a passion to alleviate human suffering. His DOJ job (his responsibility) became his cage. So he left his career and started the International Justice Mission, an amazing ministry that has done wonders in eliminating human slavery and oppression around the world.

Sometimes the craziest thing in the world will force you to leave your existing responsibility to pursue the most responsible thing to do. It may require lifestyle adjustments, career changes, or less money. But, again, when God gives you a passion, you've got to act.

"What Is It You Want?"

That was the question the king asked Nehemiah. He noticed Nehemiah's downcast spirit; he found out the problem; now he wanted to know exactly what the cupbearer wanted. And Nehemiah was able to respond because he had done a lot of praying.

God can use any means to conceive a passion in someone. It could happen on a mission trip or in a casual conversation. For Nehemiah it was simply a question he asked his relatives: "How are things in Jerusalem?"

The prayer theme runs throughout the book of Nehemiah (eight references). But there comes a point when you must stop praying and start acting. Make the appointment. Write the check. Move. Send in the application. One of the reasons that we haven't seen God part a river is that we still have our feet on dry ground. We're waiting on God to do something when He actually is waiting on us to move. We can't wait for God to show the miracle and then decide to get out of the cage. No, we get out of the cage, and that's when the miracles begin. Nehemiah got out of the cage of responsibility. That's when he witnessed the marvelous work of God.

Be the Best You Can Be

I believe one of the reasons Nehemiah was so successful is that he was faithful in his cupbearer duties. How many preachers got their start by preaching in nursing homes and homeless shelters? They took seriously each opportunity because they wanted to be prepared for every door that God might open.

Nehemiah was "stuck" in Babylon, far away from his homeland. But he became the best cupbearer he could possibly be. He was successful long before he left for Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. You may feel stuck where you are. But do the best you can possibly do. Do it energetically with an upbeat, positive attitude. You don't need a lot of wealth and power to do big things for God. Be faithful where you are, and God will bless. ***"You just need to do the best you can with what you have where you are. And if you are faithful in Babylon, God will bless you in Jerusalem."***

ESCAPING THE CAGE OF ROUTINE

When is the last time you thanked God for keeping Planet Earth in orbit? There's a good chance you never have because we take such things for granted. Why is it that we can trust God to do the big things but not trust Him with the day-by-day affairs of our lives? We take these things for granted because they are constant. And God is the ultimate Constant. Miracles happen every day. But we take them for granted because they become routine. Think of the miracle of the birth of a baby and the joy it brings. We tend to forget the miracle when changing diapers becomes our daily routine. It's so easy to let sacred things become routine. And when they do, we lose our joy for living. Has the Christian life become too routine for you? If so, it's time to get out of the routine cage and start chasing the Wild Goose.

Moses and Sheep Tending

I think tending sheep day in and day out could easily become a monotonous routine. Moses probably felt he had been put out to pasture with all hope lost of gaining any sense of significance in his life. But on one ordinary day God invaded the monotony by speaking to him from a burning bush. God showed up, and the place where Moses was standing became holy ground.

God can show up any place and any time of the day. He can break through your routines in rush-hour traffic when you're sitting in your office. And when He does, it's time to take off your shoes and worship.

The most dangerous question you can ask is, "God, what do you want me to do with my life?" (Actually, it is more dangerous not to ask that question.) But prepare yourself. When you ask it, God is bound to break your routines.

Changing Geography

In the story of the Transfiguration, the Bible tells us that Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain. Not just any mountain, but a high one. Most likely, they were exhausted before they reached the top. But as the saying goes ... when you get to the top of the mountain, the view is worth the labor.

What these three disciples experienced on the mountain changed forever the way they saw Jesus. He purposely took them away from their routine to a different location, to new scenery. The application for our lives is obvious. We need to get away from the regular routines of our busy schedule in order to get a fresh perspective on life.

If you're living in the cage of routine, let me suggest a sure cure-all. Go on a missions trip. On a missions trip you change your pace and you change your geography. By doing so, you position yourself for God to show up and do something significant in your life.

The Sabbath

If you want to get out of the cage of routine you need a change of pace and a change of place. Most of us agree that we need more margin in our lives. We find ourselves moving faster and working harder just to stay in the same place. ***"I know from experience that you can do the work of God at a pace that destroys the work of God in you."*** We all need to follow God's standard of taking a Sabbath.

Why did God institute the Sabbath? Can't we accomplish more if we work seven days? Did God need to rest or something on the seventh day? The Sabbath is God's way of reminding us that we aren't the ones keeping the earth in orbit. We need to learn that doing a few things with greatness is much preferred over doing a lot of things well. We would be wise to start developing a "to don't" list and start slowing down our pace.

The Sabbath is one way to catch your breath and build margin in your life. The Wild Goose chase is not a mad dash; it is a marathon; and we must pace ourselves accordingly. God told Moses to take off his shoes as a way of saying, "Slow down and be still."

Hurry Kills

If you don't slow your pace, you will miss ministry opportunities right at your fingertips. When you're hurried, those ministry opportunities seem more like interruptions. Hurry kills creativity and compassion. It allows you no room for Spirit-led spontaneity. It causes you to spend so much time in ministry that you don't have time to minister.

Have you noticed that most of Jesus' ministry was unplanned? In the gospel story of Bartimaeus, the disciples saw the blind man as a bother. Jesus saw him as a divine appointment for ministry. The story says, "Jesus stopped." Those two words speak volumes. Ministry is more the moment-by-moment following of the Spirit's promptings than establishing long-range visions. One of the most effective ways of getting out of the cage of routine is simply to slow the pace and do something different.

"It is so easy to get focused on what God wants to do through me that I totally neglect what God wants to do in me."

ESCAPING THE CAGE OF ASSUMPTIONS

Many of us are so left-brained we assume we have to come up with logical explanations for what is supernatural. That kind of thinking takes away the mystery and wonderment of life. God challenges these assumptions just as he challenges our routines.

A Fundamental Mistake

God made man and woman in His image. Since the Creation, we have tried to make God in our image. One of our greatest shortcomings is trying to size God down and think about Him in human terms only. This is a fundamental mistake.

Thomas Jefferson had no room for the miraculous in his system of thought. He literally took a pair of scissors and extracted every passage in the Bible that contained a miracle. We may not take scissors; but we do the same thing as Jefferson did. We ignore those verses we don't understand. We rationalize verses that seem too radical.

When we limit God to only those things that our cerebral cortex can understand, we end up caged in our own assumptions. The more assumptions we have, the smaller the cage shrinks.

Stargazing Abraham

Genesis 15:5 tells us that God took Abraham outdoors to look up into the nighttime sky. He told him that his offspring would outnumber the stars in the sky. What God did may be just as significant as what He said. He led Abraham outside for an object lesson that he would never forget. He would never see the stars in the sky the same way again. Every time he looked into the nighttime sky, he remembered the promises of God.

Why did God take him outside? Because holed up inside the tent, Abraham's vision was limited. He could not see the potential of God's promises. God wanted him to get a glimpse of just how big a God He was. Taking Him outside was His way of telling Abraham not to put ceilings on what He wanted to do through him.

We are very similar to Abraham. We assume what God can do and what He can't. These assumptions become eight-foot ceilings that seriously squelch our ability to fulfill our God-given potential. I believe that the smartest people in the world are those who know how much they don't know and who make the fewest assumptions. As true faith increases, assumptions decrease because we know that all things are possible with God.

“Faith is not logical. But it isn't illogical either. Faith is *theological*. It does not ignore reality; it just adds God into the equation.”

Getting Rid of Assumptions

What assumptions are holding you back? What eight-foot ceilings are robbing you of your potential? Do you think you are too old? Abraham was 100 years old. Moses didn't become a leader until he was 80. Noah was more than 500 when he built the ark. As long as you have breath, God is not finished with you. You are never too old to chase a wild goose.

Neither are you too young to chase a wild goose. Don't let your youthful age keep you in a cage. David was a kid when he killed Goliath. Mary was a teenager when she gave birth to Jesus. God specializes in using people who feel they are not ready.

The most defining moments of my life can be traced to those times when God challenged my assumptions. I was forced to make a choice. Hang on to the assumptions or hang on to God. It didn't make sense for me to give up a full scholarship to a prestigious university. But I did. It doesn't make sense to rent a movie theater for the long haul. But that's what National Community Church (where I pastor) is doing. It didn't make sense for a church to go into the coffeehouse business. But our coffeehouse has become well-known throughout the DC area.

To get more adventure in your life, you've got to escape the assumption cage and start believing. God uses those who have the fewest assumptions. Did Joshua assume the sun could not stand still? Did Elisha assume that an axhead couldn't float? Did Peter assume that people couldn't walk on water? Did Jesus assume that dead people couldn't be resurrected? God is able. Never forget that.

Learning to Wait

It would be nice if God delivered on His promises quickly. But usually that is not the case. After the stargazing experience, another 25 years passed before Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac. I have a feeling Abraham went through a lot of confusion and exhaustion while waiting on God to hold true to His word. I imagine Sarah probably felt an element of sadness every time she was around a little baby.

Waiting on God always pays off. The Lord blessed him not only with a son but with a nation. And the Wild Goose chase started just as all of

them do—with one step of faith. He had no clue where God was sending him. But that certainly didn't keep him in the cage.

God always calls us to unknown places. But that's where the adventures and rewards are the greatest. To reach your potential requires that you do things you've never done before and go places you've never been before. And you have to have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

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ESCAPING THE CAGE OF GUILT

Much of human behavior stems from conditioned reflexes. Many are small and insignificant, while others represent major personality traits. To progress toward spiritual maturity, we must acknowledge these reflexes and allow God to re-condition the ones that keep us out of step with Him.

For example, guilt is a holy and healthy reflex. But false guilt can wreak havoc on our lives. Most of us have an easier time accepting God's forgiveness than forgiving ourselves. The main struggle is not being able to forget our past. We think that our sinful past disqualifies us from God being able to use us. So we fret over sins we've already confessed. We won't chase any wild geese until we overcome the guilt of the past.

Peter and the Rooster's Crow

Think of the guilt Peter must have experienced after denying Jesus three times. Peter let Jesus down when He needed Peter the most. Speaking of conditioned reflexes, I wonder if every time he heard a rooster crow, he felt that twinge of guilt come upon him again.

I have a friend who served seven years in prison for crimes he admitted to (but I think he aged at least 14 years). His years serving time provided him opportunities to chase the Wild Goose. He led chapel services, shared his faith with fellow

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inmates, and earned his GED. He could have easily allowed his heart to harden; but he didn't. Instead, he has a profound appreciation for the grace of God. Could it be that the greater the depth of guilt, the greater appreciation one has for God's grace?

Reconditioning our Reflexes

How do you handle difficult people? How does God say to handle them? He says to love your enemies, do good to them, and turn the other cheek. In other words, we should do the opposite of what we have been naturally conditioned to do. There is no better way to recondition these reflexes than through prayer. If you start praying for the difficult people in your life, God will change the way you feel about them.

How did Jesus feel toward Peter after he deserted and denied Him? The conditioned response for most of us would be to hold a grudge. Not Jesus. He prayed for Peter according Luke 22:31-32. Praying for others not only helps you feel better toward them, it also puts you on the path to spiritual adventure.

I can testify personally that prayer reconditions our natural response. While seeking a zoning change that would allow us to build, we discovered that there was an influential group who decided to fight the change. Through the whole process, miraculously, I was able to smile and greet these opponents and pray for them. We won unanimous approval. And one of the opponents comes regularly to Ebenezer's (our coffeehouse).

Has someone hurt you? It doesn't matter how deep the hurt might be, you must forgive that person. Why? If for no other reason, Jesus commands us to. One tiny seed of bitterness can grow into a debilitating obsession. And what is ironic is that bitterness doesn't do a single thing to the other person. It only keeps you locked in a cage. If you have the courage to forgive, it will set you free and recondition your heart.

The Look in Jesus' Eye


No matter what your past may hold, I can promise you this: God has not given up on you. There are times when we fail so miserably that we feel totally undeserving of God's grace. And how we respond to those times will make or break us spiritually. We can confine ourselves to the cage or we can uncover new dimensions of the grace of God.

After Peter denied Christ and the rooster crowed, the Bible says that Jesus turned and looked straight into Peter's eyes. It wasn't a look of condemnation. Jesus knew that Peter was going to beat himself up badly and might even give up on himself. Jesus wanted to communicate with His eyes that He had not given up on Peter. Jesus' eyes communicated, "Peter, I forgave you before you even denied Me. You're still on My team."

God's Grace

There is no way we can ever understand God's grace. Take a look at all Peter's failures. We've already talked about the denials. What about cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant? Jesus immediately healed the ear, removing all evidence that Peter had gone ballistic.

Isn't that what Jesus has done for each of us? Through His death and resurrection He has destroyed all the evidence against us. And not only that—He gives us His righteousness. What a swap! We give Him our sins; He gives us His righteousness. ***"There is no greater moment and no greater feeling than all of our guilt meeting all of God's grace."***

Don't forget another manifestation of God's grace. Peter went fishing one day, probably thinking that his disciple career was over. But he met Jesus that day, and Jesus recommissioned him to effective ministry. When God reconditions your spiritual reflexes, He sets you free to embark on some Wild Goose chase that He has planned just for you. 

ESCAPING THE CAGE OF FAILURE

It was John Chancellor who said, ***"If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans."*** I can relate firsthand. My planned out dream was to plant a church in the Chicago area close to where I was raised. The church died before we ever had our first services. But had it not been for that failure, I would have missed out on the wonderful plans God had for me to pastor National Community Church. If handled properly, failure can open up new avenues of chasing the Wild Goose.

"Failure handled improperly can be devastating, but failure handled properly is the best thing that can happen to us."

God's Detours

Talk about bad luck. Read the apostle Paul's story of his journey to Rome. His ship wrecked in bad weather, and he had to swim to shore for dear life. Before the day was over, a poisonous snake jumped out and grabbed him on the hand. Shipwreck and snakebite all in one day! Definitely not a part of Paul's plans for the day. But had he not been shipwrecked, he would have never developed a positive relationship with the chief official of Malta.

Take a look at a map of Paul's missionary journeys and you will see a bunch of zigzags. Some of his destinations were planned; some were not. Sometimes he was running for dear life because he had been thrown out of town. I believe God often shuts a door to get us to where He wants us to be. These are divine detours. And many of them happen after we pick up and move on from a failure.

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ESCAPING THE CAGE OF FAILURE

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When a pink slip or divorce papers arrive, we find ourselves disoriented and our lives are turned upside down. But it is in these times that we fall on our faces before God and seek Him like never before. That is why some of the worst things that happen to us can actually end up being the best things that happen to us.

How Your Story Ends

Whether your failure becomes a comedy or a tragedy depends on how you respond to it. You can't control the circumstances, but you can control how you respond to them. While you may not like the chapter your book is in right now, remember, the final chapter has not been written.

For example, Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One was hurling insults at the Savior. The other stood up for Him and rebuked the other criminal. Who wants to end the book of his life by dying on a cross for crimes he committed? But for one of the men, his final chapter was a storybook ending. With a repentant heart, he reached out for Jesus. The result? Jesus turned the worst day of this man's life into his best day by giving him life eternal. How your story ends always depends on what you do with Jesus.

Who's Responsible for Your Future?

Did you know that God is more concerned about your future than you are? Our responsibility is to learn total dependence on Him. And sometimes it takes a shipwreck to teach us total dependence. When we become totally dependent and begin on the Wild Goose chase, our future becomes His responsibility.

When you chase the Wild Goose, it doesn't take long to become a believer in divine appointments. They happen with great regularity. ***"And as long as our motives stay pure and our spirits stay sensitive, He will make sure we meet the right people at the right time."*** When you believe this truth, your spirits will stay pumped even when the ship may be sinking.

Three Valuable Lessons

Just as I believe in divine appointments, I also believe in divine delays. And it is from these delays that I have learned three valuable lessons. First, I have learned that the longer the wait, the more I appreciate and the less I take for granted. Second, I have learned that just hanging in there might actually be the most spiritual thing I can do. Divine delays build spiritual endurance and character. Third, I have learned that a sense of humor can get me through almost anything. The holiest and happiest of people are those who laugh the most.

Your Choice

Whether you call them divine detours or divine appointments, you always have a choice. You can complain or you can make the most of them. You can resist or you can choose to enjoy the journey. If you look, you will find God in every circumstance. And He will work in that circumstance for your good. How do I know? Because I know God specializes in shipwrecks and snakebites.

"When you embark on your Wild Goose chase, you never know where you're going to end up. Jesus never promised safety or certainty or predictability ... He died to invite us into a life of spiritual adventure. And if you have the courage to come out of the cage and chase the Wild Goose, life will turn into another day, another adventure!"



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