

WILD GOOSE CHASE

Reclaim the Adventure
of Pursuing God



**SNEAK
PEEK**



**SAMPLE
ONLY**

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PROOF**

Mark Batterson

New York Times Best-Selling Author

Praise for
Mark Batterson

“Mark Batterson’s *Wild Goose Chase* detonates anemic Christianity masquerading as the ‘real thing’ and winsomely propels us to what can be and should be if we allow God’s Spirit to be all He can be in our lives. Let it stretch you to greater things!”

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“Mark Batterson is one of the church’s most forward thinkers. He compels us to look both behind and ahead to discover answers to the ‘whys’ in our lives. *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* helps us make sense of this beautiful mess we call life.”

—LINDY LOWRY, editor of *Outreach* magazine

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MULTNOMAH

WILD GOOSE CHASE

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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To my friend, mentor, and fellow Wild Goose chaser,

Dick Foth

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PROLOGUE



Choose Adventure

The director of a Christian camp, who has no political aspirations whatsoever, feels called to run for Congress. A small-business owner, minding his own business, feels led to sell it and becomes a leading voice in the generosity movement. The senior vice president of a real estate investment trust, the youngest member and only female to rise to that title, quits her nicely compensated job to do an adult gap year.

What do they all have in common aside from some crazy career changes? All of them picked up a copy of *Wild Goose Chase*, and this book changed the trajectory of their lives. For the record, I take no credit whatsoever. Yes, I wrote the book. But it's God who puts the right book in the right hands at the right time. That has been my perpetual and passionate prayer for every book I write, and God has answered those prayers in some strange and mysterious ways.

That camp director turned congressman, now a US senator,

shared his story with me over a cup of coffee. That small-business owner has become a trusted friend and confidant. And that senior vice president is now helping National Community Church build out a city block on Capitol Hill that will double as a church campus and mixed-use development.

Since *Wild Goose Chase* released in 2008, I've had the joy of hearing thousands of stories like these that stretch my faith. Each story is as unique as the person telling it, but there is a common thread. Each person was doing his level best to live a Spirit-led life. And when we obey the promptings of the Wild Goose, He has a way of strategically positioning us in the right place with the right people at the right time. We meet people whom we have no business being in the same room with. We go places we cannot go with our résumé. And we do things way beyond our natural ability. How? With the help of the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit, I'm below average.

With the Holy Spirit leading the charge, all things are possible!

If chasing the Wild Goose has taught me anything, it's this: *God is predictably unpredictable*. Go ahead and make plans. After all, failing to plan is planning to fail. But don't forget that God is the one ordering our footsteps. So here's some good news: *God wants us to get where God wants us to go more than we want to get where God wants us to go*. And, I might add, He's awfully good at getting us there!

Now, here's the catch.

We want to get where we want to go without delay, without detour. But it just doesn't work that way, does it? There is no such thing as success without sacrifice. And there is no return without risk. Any way you slice it, every Wild Goose chase is full of twists and

turns you cannot predict or control. My advice? Choose adventure and enjoy the journey!

Jen Collins could be classified as an overachiever. She played NCAA Division I basketball at Cornell University. She quickly climbed the corporate ladder to become the senior vice president at LaSalle Hotel Properties. On paper Jen was in a perfect situation professionally. Then she started reading *Wild Goose Chase*, and God stirred her spirit to take a year off from her career. But who does that, right? “My Ivy League–educated, Division I–athlete, career-driven self’s response was a fear-filled, vehement, certifiable NO!” Jen said. She actually put her copy of *Wild Goose Chase* in a drawer for safe-keeping! When she eventually picked up the book again, page 67 changed the trajectory of her life.

Where do you find your identity? What is the source of your security? Is it a title? a paycheck? a relationship? a degree? a name?

Jen’s honest answers to those questions were yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

Jen had a good job working with good people. But, as author Jim Collins so eloquently asserted at the beginning of his brilliant book *Good to Great*: “Good is the enemy of great.”* Jen made a defining decision to get off her good career-track train and take an adult gap year to see what greatness may be waiting for her on the other side.

At the outset Jen prayed over her calendar and committed that

* Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 1.

gap year to God. She stamped her passport seven times, accumulating some incredible experiences. Jen spent time with orphans in the slums of Uganda. In fact, she left part of her heart there! She hiked to the Tiger's Nest in Bhutan. She took part in the Resnick Aspen Action Forum and Bob Goff's Dream Big workshop. She went on an arts pilgrimage to Japan.

Here's a little formula: *Change of place + Change of pace = Change of perspective*

That's what Jen experienced during her Wild Goose chase. While at a ten-day silent meditation retreat, Jen learned to marvel at God's creation. "I became still enough to marvel at the existence of a firefly," said Jen, "and at the fact that God made flying bugs with lights on their butts!"

Am I recommending that everyone take an adult gap year? No. That isn't feasible or even advisable for most people. I am, however, recommending that you quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. And I'm reminding you that there is a difference between making a living and making a life. Don't just accumulate possessions. Accumulate experiences—the kind of experiences you encounter when you live a Spirit-led life!

What did Jen learn during this yearlong Wild Goose chase?

Journaling helps me get clear and hear God.

Conflict breeds intimacy.

I get boastful when I feel insecure.

The wisest people are the most curious ones.

There is power in the ask.

There are some life lessons that cannot be learned in the regular routine of life. Jen had to break out of the cage of routine. And the greatest gift was not international travel or exotic adventures. The greatest gift? Time! In Jen's words, "Time without the need to constantly check email. Time for conversations without restriction. Time to ask questions that move things to a deeper level. Time to dig through the layers. Time to be in different moods with people and have that be okay."

If I was writing *Wild Goose Chase* all over again, I might include a warning at the beginning: *May cause you to quit your job.* I would also include an exhortation: *Please pray before doing anything crazy!*

My honest intent was not crazy midlife or midcareer changes. But I've come to realize that the reason many of us get stuck in the six cages—the cage of responsibility, the cage of routine, the cage of assumptions, the cage of guilt, the cage of failure, and the cage of fear—is for one simple reason: *We want God to do something new while we keep doing the same old thing.*

The Wild Goose chase doesn't work that way. If you want God to do something new, you have to do something *different*. The Spirit of God will never lead you to do something outside the guardrails of His good, pleasing, and perfect will, as revealed in Scripture. But He will call you to do something daring. I'm not sure what that is for you. For some, it's as simple as making a phone call or filling out an application. For others, it might be the courage to get counseling. And, of course, it might involve a career change for some. No matter what it is, it will take faith. And faith is taking the first step before God reveals the second step.

What is that step? And why are you waiting? You definitely need to exercise due diligence, but you also need to realize that delayed obedience is disobedience. The good news? If we follow the Wild Goose, we're going to get where God wants us to go. And we're going to be transformed to the image of Christ in the process!

You are one decision away from a totally different life. It might be a difficult decision or a daring decision. But if you have the courage to make that decision, if you have the will to walk it out, you'll discover that the God who began a good work will carry it to completion.

As you begin this journey, please know that I'm praying for you. I'm praying that God will use one page, one paragraph, one sentence to change the trajectory of your life. And I'm praying that your life will go from good to great as you chase the Wild Goose!

Let the chase begin!

CHAPTER I



Yawning Angels

Living a Life of Spiritual Adventure

Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.

—HELEN KELLER

The Celtic Christians had a name for the Holy Spirit that has always intrigued me. They called Him *An Geadh-Glas*, or “the Wild Goose.” I love the imagery and implications. The name hints at the mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit. Much like a wild goose, the Spirit of God cannot be tracked or tamed. An element of danger and an air of unpredictability surround Him. And while the name may sound a little sacrilegious at first earshot, I cannot think of a better description of what it’s like to pursue the Spirit’s leading through life than *Wild Goose chase*. I think the Celtic Christians were on to something that institutionalized Christianity has missed out on. And I wonder if we have clipped the wings of the Wild Goose and settled

for something less—much less—than what God originally intended for us.

I understand that “wild goose chase” typically refers to a purposeless endeavor without a defined destination. But chasing the Wild Goose is different. The promptings of the Holy Spirit can sometimes *seem* pretty pointless, but rest assured, God is working His plan. And if you chase the Wild Goose, He will take you places you never could have imagined going by paths you never knew existed.

I don’t know a single Christ follower who hasn’t gotten stressed out over trying to figure out the will of God. We want to solve the mystery of the will of God the way we solve a Sudoku or crossword puzzle. But in my experience, intellectual analysis usually results in spiritual paralysis.

We try to make God fit within the confines of our cerebral cortex. We try to reduce the will of God to the logical limits of our left brain. But the will of God is neither logical nor linear. It is downright confusing and complicated.

A part of us feels as if something is spiritually wrong with us when we experience *circumstantial uncertainty*. But that is precisely what Jesus promised us when we are born of the Spirit and start following Him.¹ *Most of us will have no idea where we are going most of the time.* And I know that is unsettling. But circumstantial uncertainty also goes by another name: adventure.

I think it is only fair that I give a Wild Goose warning at the outset of this book: nothing is more unnerving or disorienting than passionately pursuing God. And the sooner we come to terms with that spiritual reality, the more we will enjoy the journey. I cannot, in good

conscience, promise safety or certainty. But I *can* promise that chasing the Wild Goose will be anything but boring!

ISLANDS OF EDEN

Not long ago I visited what must be the closest thing to the Garden of Eden left on earth. It almost felt wrong arriving in the Galápagos Islands via airplane. Washing ashore on a bamboo raft would have seemed more apropos.

We spent most of our time island hopping in a boat that didn't seem large enough for the twelve people on board or the twelve-foot ocean waves we encountered. And sure enough, we discovered that the boat had capsized not long before our visit. That tidbit of information would have been nice to know before we climbed aboard—but it definitely added an element of adventure.

The entire week was full of new experiences. I went snorkeling for the first time and saw some of God's amazing underwater creations. Where did He come up with those color schemes? In an unscripted and unforgettable moment, my son Parker and I went swimming with some playful sea lions. And I accomplished one of my life goals by jumping off a forty-foot cliff into a narrow river gorge at Las Grietas. What an adrenaline rush!

The trip consisted of one adventure after another. So the saying in Spanish that we saw on a Sprite can that week seemed fitting, and we adopted it as our mantra: *Otro día, otra aventura*. Translation: "Another day, another adventure."

I love those four words inspired by Sprite. They capture the essence of what we experienced day in and day out in the Galápagos.

I think those words resonate with one of the deepest longings in the human heart—the longing for adventure. And I’m not sure I could come up with a better description of what it’s like to pursue God.

Take the Holy Spirit out of the equation of my life, and it would spell b-o-r-i-n-g. Add Him into the equation of your life, and anything can happen. You never know who you’ll meet, where you’ll go, or what you’ll do. All bets are off.

If you would describe your relationship with God as anything less than adventurous, then maybe you think you’re following the Spirit but have actually settled for something less—something I call *inverted Christianity*. Instead of following the Spirit, we invite the Spirit to follow us. Instead of serving God’s purposes, we want Him to serve our purposes. And while this may seem like a subtle distinction, it makes an ocean of difference. The result of this inverted relationship with God is not just a self-absorbed spirituality that leaves us feeling empty, it’s also the difference between spiritual boredom and spiritual adventure.

CAGED CHRISTIANS

Situated five hundred miles off the coast of Ecuador, the Galápagos chain is one of the most primitive places on the planet. While many of the islands in the forty-nine-island archipelago are inhabited, most of them are absolutely undomesticated. When I was there, I felt as if I were as far from civilization as I could get. It was Edenic.

Somehow I felt a new affinity with Adam in the Galápagos environment. It helped me imagine what life must have been like before the Fall. Scripture tells us that one of the first jobs God gave Adam

was naming the animals.² And we read right past it. But it must have taken years of research and exploration to complete the project. I don't think God paraded the animals past Adam in a single-file line; I'm guessing God let Adam discover them in their natural habitats. Imagine how thrilling it must have been for Adam to catch his first glimpse of wildebeests stampeding, mountain goats climbing, or rhinos charging.

That's how I felt when I was in the Galápagos. And it was there that I discovered the difference between seeing a caged animal at a local zoo and getting within arm's length of a mammoth marine iguana or walking a beach with hundreds of barking sea lions or floating above manta rays as they glide along the ocean floor. It's one thing to see a caged bird. It's an altogether different experience to see a pelican that looks like a prehistoric pterodactyl circling fifty feet above your boat, dive-bombing full speed into the ocean, and coming up with breakfast in its oversize beak.

Few things compare to the thrill of seeing a wild animal in its natural habitat. There is something so inspiring about a wild animal doing what it was created to do. Uncivilized. Untamed. Uncaged.

So a few weeks after returning from the Galápagos, our family spent an afternoon at the National Zoo near our home in Washington DC. It's a fantastic zoo. But it just wasn't the same after the Galápagos. I'm ruined for zoos. It's not the same seeing a caged animal. It's too safe. It's too tame. It's too predictable.

At one point we were walking through the ape house, and I had this thought as I looked through the protective Plexiglas window at a four-hundred-pound caged gorilla: *I wonder if churches do to people what zoos do to animals.*

I love the church. I bleed the church. And I'm not saying that the way the church cages people is intentional. In fact, it may be well intentioned. But too often we take people out of their natural habitat and try to tame them in the name of Christ. We try to remove the risk. We try to remove the danger. We try to remove the struggle. And what we end up with is a caged Christian.

Deep down inside, all of us long for more. Sure, the tamed part of us grows accustomed to the safety of the cage. But the untamed part longs for some danger, some challenge, some adventure. And at some point in our spiritual journey, the safety and predictability of the cage no longer satisfies. We have a primal longing to be uncaged. And the cage opens when we recognize that Jesus didn't die on the cross to keep us safe. Jesus died to make us dangerous.

Praying for protection is fine. I pray for a hedge of protection around my three children all the time. You probably pray that kind of prayer too. But when was the last time you asked God to make you dangerous?

I would like to think that when I pronounce the benediction at the end of our church services, I am sending dangerous people back into their natural habitat to wreak havoc on the Enemy.

LIVING DANGEROUSLY

Every once in a while, I have random thoughts that seem to come out of nowhere. Here's a thought that fired across my synapses not long ago: *Do angels yawn?*

I know it seems like an inane theological question, but I seriously wonder if angels have the capacity to get bored. More impor-

tant, I wonder if some of us are living such safe lives that not only are *we* bored, but so are our guardian angels. If they could, would our guardian angels coax us out of our cage and beg us to give them something dangerous to do?

In the pages that follow you'll meet some dangerous people. Mind you, they're ordinary people. They have doubts and fears and problems just like you and me. But their courage to come out of the cage and live dangerously for the cause of Christ will inspire and challenge you to follow them as they follow the Spirit's leading.

I think of Ana Luisa, who used her award miles to fly to India and sacrificially serve some of the poorest of the poor at a medical clinic. I think of Mike, who started a dangerous ministry in a dangerous place—a porn show in Las Vegas. I think of Adam, whose sensitivity to the Wild Goose resulted in a life-changing encounter on a mission trip half a world away. And I think of Becky, who made a conscious decision to endanger her own life by becoming part of the crusade against human trafficking.

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.

SENSE OF ADVENTURE

The Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard believed that boredom is the root of all evil. I second the notion. Boredom isn't just boring; boredom is wrong. You cannot simultaneously live by faith and be bored. Faith and boredom are antithetical.

Against that backdrop, consider the gospel story of the rich young ruler. On paper the rich young ruler had it all: youth, wealth,

and power. But something was still missing. The rich young ruler was bored with his faith. And I think it is evidenced by the question he asked Jesus: “What do I still lack?”³

I’ll tell you exactly what he was lacking: spiritual adventure. His life was too easy, too predictable, and too comfortable. He kept all the commandments, but those commandments felt like a religious cage. I think there was a deep-seated longing within him for something more than simply not doing anything wrong.

Listen, not breaking the prohibitive commandments is right and good. But simply not breaking the prohibitive commandments isn’t spiritually satisfying. It leaves us feeling caged. And I honestly think that is where many of us find ourselves.

Over the past decade, I have had the privilege of serving as lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington DC. As with every church, our demography and geography are unique. Seventy percent of NCCers are single twentysomethings navigating the quarterlife crisis. And most of them live or work on Capitol Hill. So the observation I’m about to share is undoubtedly shaped by the life stage of our congregation and the psyche of our city. But I also think human nature is human nature. And here is what I’ve observed: *many, if not most, Christians are bored with their faith.*

We know our sins are forgiven and forgotten. We know we will spend eternity with God when we cross the boundary of the space-time continuum. And we are trying our best to live our lives within the guardrails of God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. But still we have a gnawing feeling that something is missing.

I think the rich young ruler is representative of a generation that longs to come out of the cage and live dangerously for the cause of

Christ. But too many among us end up settling for spiritual mediocrity instead of striving for spiritual maturity. Jesus speaks to that deep-seated longing for adventure by challenging us to come out of the cage. But coming out of the cage means giving up the very thing in which we find our security and identity outside of Christ.

In the case of the rich young ruler, his cage was financial security. Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”⁴

A part of us feels bad for the rich young ruler, right? How could Jesus demand so much? He asked him to give up everything he had! But we fail to appreciate the offer Jesus put on the table.

I live in the internship capital of the world. Every summer tens of thousands of young adults make the pilgrimage to DC to try and land the right internship with the right person because they know it can open the right door. It’s amazing how many members of Congress were once congressional pages and how many Supreme Court justices were once Supreme Court clerks.

I don’t care how much this rich young ruler had to give up—Jesus offered him so much more. This was the opportunity of a lifetime: an internship with none other than the Son of God. Come on, that’s got to look good on your résumé! You can’t put a price tag on that kind of experience. But the rich young ruler turned it down. He opted for the cage. And he made the mistake so many of us make: he chose an accessorized life over a life of adventure, over a life of chasing the Wild Goose.

Now juxtapose the rich young ruler with the twelve undomesticated disciples who accepted the unpaid internship. They heard the

parables with their own two ears. They drank the water Jesus turned into wine. They filleted the miraculous catch of fish. And they were there when Jesus turned the temple upside down, walked on water, and ascended into heaven.

In a day when the average person never traveled outside a thirty-five-mile radius of his home, Jesus sent His disciples to the four corners of the ancient world. These ordinary fishermen, who otherwise would have lived and died within sight of the Sea of Galilee, were sent to the ends of the earth as they knew it. What a Wild Goose chase! According to the third-century historian Eusebius, Peter sailed to Italy, John ended up in Asia, James the son of Zebedee traveled as far as Spain, and even doubting Thomas chased the Wild Goose all the way to India.

Just like the rich young ruler, we have a choice to make. The same offer is extended. We can stay in our cage, end up with everything, and realize it amounts to nothing. Or we can come out of our cage and chase the Wild Goose.

SIX CAGES

In the prequel to this book, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*, I retell the story of an ancient warrior named Benaiah to show how God wants us to chase the five-hundred-pound opportunities that come across our path. And I cite the aphorism “no guts, no glory.” When we lack the guts to step out in faith, we rob God of the glory that rightfully belongs to Him.⁵ In *Wild Goose Chase*, I want to take it a step further and show you how all of life becomes a grand adventure when we chase the trackless, matchless Goose of heaven. We’ll retrace

the steps of six Wild Goose chasers who come right out of the pages of Scripture. And my hope is that their footprints will guide us as we chase the Wild Goose. But before the chase begins, I do want to offer one simple reminder. This book is about more than you and me experiencing spiritual adventure. In fact, this book is not about you at all. It's a book about the Author and Perfecter of our faith,⁶ who wants to write His-story through your life. And if you read through Scripture, you'll discover that His favorite genre is action-adventure.

Sure, you can choose the safety and predictability of the cage, forfeiting the adventure God has destined for you. But you won't be the only one missing out or losing out. When you lack the courage to chase the Wild Goose, the opportunity costs are staggering. Who might not hear about the love of God if you don't seize the opportunity to tell them? Who might be stuck in poverty, stuck in ignorance, stuck in pain if you're not there to help free them? Where might the advance of God's kingdom in the world stall out because you weren't there on the front lines?

Jesus' disciples didn't just live an exciting life post-Pentecost; they turned the world upside down.⁷ And that's what you can be a part of too. *Wild Goose Chase* is an invitation to be part of something that is bigger than you and more important than you.

Are you in?

In the pages that follow I will identify six cages that keep us from roaming free with the Wild Goose and living the spiritual adventure God destined us to. I'm not sure which cages you may find yourself in. But the good news is this: you are only one Wild Goose chase away from the spiritual adventure God has destined for you.

The first cage is the *cage of responsibility*. Over the course of our

lifetime, God-ordained passions tend to get buried beneath day-to-day responsibilities. Less important responsibilities displace more important ones. And our responsibilities become spiritual excuses that keep us from the adventure God has destined for us. Without even knowing it, we begin to practice what I call *irresponsible responsibility*. The Wild Goose chase begins when we come to terms with our greatest responsibility: pursuing the passions God has put in our heart.

The second cage, the *cage of routine*, is almost as subtle as the first. At some point in our spiritual journey, most of us trade adventure for routine. There is nothing wrong with a good routine. In fact, the key to spiritual growth is developing healthy and holy routines known as spiritual disciplines. But once a routine becomes routine, we need to disrupt the routine. Otherwise, sacred routines become empty rituals that keep us caged.

The third cage is the *cage of assumptions*. Our assumptions keep many of us from chasing the Wild Goose. *I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm underqualified. I'm overqualified. It's too late. It's too soon.* And the list goes on. As we age, many of us stop believing and start assuming. We stop living out of right-brain imagination and start living out of left-brain memory. And we put eight-foot ceilings on what God can do.

The fourth cage is the *cage of guilt*. The Enemy's tactics haven't changed since the Garden of Eden. He tries to neutralize us spiritually by getting us to focus on what we've done wrong in the past. Satan uses guilt to turn us into reactionaries. Jesus came to recondition our spiritual reflexes with His grace and turn us into revolu-

tionaries for His cause. As long as you are focused on what you've done wrong in the past, you won't have energy left to dream kingdom dreams.

The fifth cage is the *cage of failure*. And, ironically, this is where many Wild Goose chases begin. Why? Because sometimes our plans have to fail in order for God's plans to succeed. Divine detours and divine delays are the ways God gets us where He wants us to go.

And the sixth and final cage is the *cage of fear*. We need to quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. Instead, we need to start playing offense with our lives. The world needs more daring people with daring plans. Why not you?

I want you to know that before you decided to read this book I started praying for you. I prayed that *Wild Goose Chase* would get into the right hands at the right time. So I hope this book is more than a casual read for you. It's a divine appointment waiting to happen. And I believe one chapter, one paragraph, or one sentence can change the trajectory of your life.

Let the chase begin.

YOUR CHASE

- ⊗ What's your reaction to the ancient Celtic description of God as the "Wild Goose"—untamed, unpredictable, flying free?
- ⊗ How have you been living "inverted Christianity," trying to get God to serve your purposes instead of you serving His purposes?

- ⊗ Right now, where are you on this spectrum?

Playing
it safe

Living dangerously
for God



- ⊗ How does the call to spiritual adventure strike you?
What is it inside you that resonates with that call?
- ⊗ Of the six cages described at the end of the chapter, which do you think might apply to you the most and why?

WILD GOOSE CHASE

Reclaim the Adventure
of Pursuing God



Mark Batterson

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