Batterson, M. (2008). Wild Goose Chase: Reclaim the Adventure of Pursuing God. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books. “Celtic Christians had a name for the Holy Spirit—An Geadh-Glas, or ‘the Wild Goose.’ The name hints at mystery. Much like a wild goose, the Spirit of God cannot be tracked or tamed. An element of danger, an air of unpredictability surround Him. And while the name may sound a little sacrilegious, I cannot think of a better description of what it’s like to follow the Spirit through life. I think the Celtic Christians were on to something… 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.”

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Batterson’s book, Wild Goose Chase provides a useful framework for living by the Spirit. The book is also available on CD, and various other supporting resources are available from the book’s website. It would be a good resource for a sermon series or small group study.

Batterson starts by introducing a name that the Celtic Christians had for the Holy Spirit, “An Geadh-Glas, or ‘the Wild Goose.’” (p1). This name is laden with imagery; it suggests 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” (p1).

While the term “Wild Goose Chase” normally refers to a pointless exercise, 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 know existed” (p2). We sometimes feel like something is spiritually wrong when we are uncertain of our circumstances, but that is exactly what Jesus said life in the Spirit would be like (John 3:8), that “Most of us will have no idea where we are going most of the time” (p2).

Batterson identifies six barriers or cages to living by the Spirit: responsibility, routine, assumptions, guilt, failure and fear.
CAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The biggest responsibility that we have is to chase after God and the passions that He has placed in us, for His purposes. However, so often our lives become choked up with day-to-day responsibilities, and we settle for far less than the Wild Goose chase, “instead of making a life, all we do is make a living. And our deep-seated passions get buried beneath our day-to-day responsibilities” (p72). When we allow paying the bills or cleaning the house to become excuses for not chasing after God, we are practicing irresponsible responsibility.

CAGE OF ROUTINE

As things become routine we stop valuing them, they sink into the background (p43-44). This happens in our relationship with God as much as in the rest of our lives. We need routines in the form of spiritual disciplines. They start out as helpful practices, but as we become overly familiarised with them, their value declines. We need to disrupt the routine, “Because sacred routines become empty rituals when we do them out of left-brain memory instead of right-brain imagination” (p58). The problem with routines arises when “we learn how and forget why, we start going through the motions spiritually” (p58). We cease to see the God-opportunities around us (p55).

CAGE OF ASSUMPTIONS

Abraham Lincoln cut all the miracles out of the Bible, because he could not accept that they were true because of his assumptions about the way the world works. While we might not cut sections out of the bible with scissors, we do the same thing effectively when we pick and choose the bits we can accept. “Our lives are limited to those things that we can comprehend with our cerebral cortex. We end up in a cage of our own assumptions. And the more assumptions we make, the smaller our cage becomes” (p72). Defining moments in life come when our assumptions are challenged and we have to choose to hang on to our assumptions or hang on to God (p81).

CAGE OF FAILURE

No ones life runs perfectly; we all make mistakes, we all fail. Failure can become a cage that stops us pursuing God’s adventure. “But there’s life after failure. The door of the cage swings open, and the Wild Goose calls you to a life of new adventures” (p119). How we handle the difficult situations in our lives, those moments of profound failure, will determine whether we have a happy or sad ending. “We can’t control what happens to us. But we can control our response” (p123). Romans 8:28-9 promises that for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, that God will work everything, including our failures, together for the good of making us like Christ. Failure can be part of God’s plan for our good (p125).

CAGE OF FEAR

The church does not lack education or resources. Most of us “are educated beyond the level of our obedience” (p144). The thing that is missing is “Good old-fashioned guts! We need people who are more afraid of missing opportunities than making mistakes. People who are more afraid of lifelong regrets than temporary failure. People who dare to dream the unthinkable and attempt the impossible” (p144-5). We seem to think that life should get easier the longer we follow Christ. To a certain extent this is true, what used to trouble us should become easier. However, “spiritual growth [also] prepares us for more dangerous missions. As we grow, God gives us more difficult things to do” (p150).

The path of the Wild Goose is rarely the path of least resistance, indeed “your Wild Goose chase will probably take you down the road less travelled. You will have to climb a cliff or pick a fight with the Enemy. But you will discover this simple truth: the hard way is the best way” (p151). God is looking for the kind of people who will count the cost, assess the risk and then “after all the consequences are considered, [do] the right thing regardless of the consequences” (p157).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about Wild Goose Chase can be found at the following websites:
- Book website: http://chasethegoose.com/ (includes video clips which could be used in sermons)
- Mark Batterson’s blog: http://markbatterson.com
- Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Wild-Goose-Chase-Adventure-Pursuing/dp/1590527194/
- Book Depository: http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/book/9781590527191/Wild-Goose-Chase