

SAMPLE



CHASE THE GOOSE

RECLAIMING THE ADVENTURE
OF LIVING A SPIRIT-LED LIFE

by Mark Batterson

threads
by LifeWay

CHASE THE GOOSE



Reclaiming the
Adventure of Living
a Spirit-Led Life

About the Study

Safe and predictable. Those are two words that characterize the faith of many, but what if God wants something more for those who love Him? Inspired by the Celtic name for the Holy Spirit—*An Geadh-Glas*, or the Wild Goose—author Mark Batterson explores the idea of reclaiming the adventurous spiritual life God intended for His followers. Maybe life with Christ should be a little more like a wild goose chase . . . mysterious, unpredictable, and even dangerous.

Through this study, young adults can take hold of the passions God has put in all of our hearts, while learning about the very nature of God Himself in the process. True Goose-chasers will learn how to leave behind the cages of responsibility, routine, guilt, failure, assumptions, and fear that have held us back in the past. Chasing the Goose isn't safe. It isn't comfortable. But it also isn't boring. Give in to the chase, and join the journey of never knowing where you'll end up, who you'll meet, or what you can do as you follow the Holy Spirit into the spiritual adventure God has planned for all Christ-followers.

About the Leader Kit

Threads Leader Kits are designed to equip leaders with the tools they need to guide participants through a multi-sensory and challenging study experience. Each *Leader Kit* contains a copy of the *Chase the Goose Member Book*, an Enhanced CD with discussion guides, music, articles, and audio clips, and a DVD with three film shorts that further the themes of *Chase the Goose* and three teaching segments with author Mark Batterson. All multi-media elements are intended to foster the kind of relationships and conversations that last long after each session.

Leader Kit includes

Enhanced CD

Planning a successful discussion-driven Bible study begins with the leader articles and other elements found on the Enhanced CD. The leader guide (PDF) includes group discussion questions and step-by-step facilitation guidance for each gathering. Promotional tools to spread the word about your meeting times and a retreat guide centered around this study have already been done for you. You'll also find e-mailable elements to share with the rest of the group such as articles to help them dig deeper into the biblical text, a playlist of modern music, and audio stories of some real-life Goose-chasers in Washington, D.C.—all carefully crafted to get your group thinking about the theme.

Listen to and pass along this music and these audio files* to add to your *Chase the Goose* experience:

Track 1: "Live" by Nichole Nordeman

Audio Track 1: Chasing the Goose in D.C.: Part I

Track 2: "The Time Has Come" by Hillsong United

Audio Track 2: Chasing the Goose in D.C.: Part II

Track 3: "Revolutionaries" by Bethany Dillon

Audio Track 3: Chasing the Goose in D.C.: Part III

Track 4: "Let It Go" by Tenth Avenue North

Audio Track 4: Chasing the Goose in D.C.: Part IV

Track 5: "But for You Who Fear My Name" by The Welcome Wagon

Audio Track 5: Chasing the Goose in D.C.: Part V

Track 6: "Daylight" by Jeremy Casella

*Group members can find the full playlist of *Chase the Goose* at threadsmedia.com/chasethegoose or on iTunes®.

DVD

This DVD features three discussion-sparking film shorts and three teaching videos designed to help participants encounter Goose-chasing principles as they attempt to escape the cages of life.

Session 1: "Polaroids"

Session 2: "Lab Rats"

Session 3: "Breaking Out of Assumptions"

Session 4: "Breaking Out of Guilt"

Session 5: "Breaking Out of Failure"

Session 6: "Fear Protection"

This DVD also includes bonus features, promotional tools for this study, and a preview of other great studies available from Threads. You can also download all the media elements at threadsmedia.com/chasethegoose.

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We believe the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. The 2000 statement of The Baptist Faith and Message is our doctrinal guideline.

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MEET *the* AUTHOR



MARK BATTERSON serves as lead pastor of National Community Church (*theaterchurch.com*) in Washington, D.C. NCC was recognized as one of the most innovative and most influential churches in America by *Outreach* magazine in 2008. One church with nine services in five locations, NCC is focused on reaching emerging generations. Approximately 70 percent of NCCers are single 20-somethings.

The vision of NCC is to meet in movie theaters at Metro™ stops throughout the D.C. area. NCC also owns and operates the largest coffeehouse on Capitol Hill. In 2008, Ebenezers was recognized as the best coffeehouse in the metro D.C. area by AOL CityGuide.

Mark has two master's degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, Illinois. He is the author of a bestselling book, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* and the corresponding Bible study *Chase the Lion*. His latest release is *Wild Goose Chase*. And he is a daily blogger at *markbatterson.com*.

Mark is married to Lora and they live on Capitol Hill with their three children: Parker, Summer, and Josiah.

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ARE YOU READY?



ESCAPE

MOST OF US HAVE NO IDEA WHERE WE'RE GOING MOST OF THE TIME.

PERFECT.

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 and an air of unpredictability surround Him. And while the name may sound a little sacrilegious, I can't think of a better description of what it's like to follow the Holy Spirit through life. The truth is: Most of us have no idea where we're going most of the time. I know that's unsettling, but circumstantial uncertainty goes by another name—*adventure*.

Have we clipped the wings of the Wild Goose and settled for something less than God intended? Are we missing out on what God created us to experience?

I realize the old adage "wild goose chase" typically refers to a purposeless endeavor without a defined destination. But chasing the Wild Goose is different. While the promptings of the Wild Goose may seem pointless at the time, God is constantly working His plan behind the scenes. If you chase the Wild Goose, you'll find yourself in places you could never have imagined along paths you never knew existed.

Have you ever gotten stressed out trying to determine the will of God for your life? We try to determine God's will like we try to solve puzzles, but often the will of God is neither linear nor logical. In Isaiah 55:8-9, God declares:

"FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, AND YOUR WAYS ARE NOT MY WAYS . . . FOR AS HEAVEN IS HIGHER THAN EARTH, SO MY WAYS ARE HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS, AND MY THOUGHTS THAN YOUR THOUGHTS."

I think it's only fair that we post a "Wild Goose Warning" at the beginning of this study: *Nothing is more unnerving or disorienting than passionately pursuing God.* In good conscience, I can't promise you safety or certainty, but I can promise that chasing the Wild Goose will be anything but boring. The sooner we come to terms with that spiritual reality, the more we will enjoy the journey.

CAGED CHRISTIANS

A few years ago, I visited the Galápagos Islands, where I experienced nature like I'd never experienced it before. I saw wild animals in their natural habitat—marine iguanas and 200-year-old Tortugas—and I went snorkeling with manta rays and swimming with sea lions. Two weeks later, I visited the National Zoo with my kids. We saw hundreds of interesting animals, but it just wasn't the same. The National Zoo is a great zoo, but it's a radically different experience to see a wild animal in a cage. It was too tame, too safe, and too civilized.

MANY PEOPLE LIVE AN INVERTED FORM OF CHRISTIANITY, TRYING TO GET GOD TO SERVE THEIR PURPOSES INSTEAD OF THEM TRYING TO SERVE HIS PURPOSES. IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU LIVE THAT WAY?

As we walked through the ape house, I wondered, *Have churches done to people what zoos do to animals? Have churches tried to tame Christians in the name of Christ?* I think so. We try to remove

the risk, struggle, and danger from following Jesus, and we end up with caged Christians. Yes, it's a safe and comfortable environment, but I think deep down inside of us there's a longing for something more. That's what the Wild Goose chase is all about—chasing after the Wild Goose in order to live our lives the way God originally intended.

In this study, we will identify six cages that keep us from living the spiritual adventure God designed for us.

1. THE CAGE OF RESPONSIBILITY. Our God-ordained passions can get buried beneath day-to-day responsibilities. The Wild Goose chase begins when we start practicing responsible irresponsibility and come to terms with our greatest responsibility—pursuing the passions God has planted in our hearts. In this session, we go to work with a guy named Nehemiah, who walked away from some pretty important job responsibilities in order to embrace more important responsibilities.

WHAT IS YOUR GUT REACTION TO THE CELTIC DESCRIPTION OF THE WILD GOOSE AS UNTAMED AND UNPREDICTABLE?

2. THE CAGE OF ROUTINE. At some point in our journey, most of us trade adventure for routine. Some routines, like spiritual disciplines, can be good and actually help us become the people God intended. But if sacred practices become routine, they need to be disrupted and reworked. Otherwise, they become empty rituals, and we find ourselves trapped. In this session, we journey to the wilderness of Sinai with Moses, who was willing to throw down his staff, walk away from his sheep, and start shepherding God's people.

3. THE CAGE OF ASSUMPTIONS. As we age, many of us stop believing and start assuming. In this session, we join Abraham for a little stargazing to catch a glimpse of what is possible when you consider God in the equation of life.

4. 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. As long as we are trapped by the guilt of what we've done wrong, we're blinded to the dreams God has in mind for us. In this session, we follow Peter from the upper room to the courtyard of the high priest to the shore of Galilee and learn how Jesus can recondition our minds and hearts.

5. THE CAGE OF FAILURE. Sometimes our plans have to fail in order for God's plans to succeed. Divine detours and delays are often the paths God uses to get us where He wants us to go. This is the place where the Wild Goose chase will begin for many of us. In this session, we join Paul and other shipwreck survivors on the island of Malta to understand how our failure might turn into someone else's miracle.

6. 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 because the world needs more people with more daring plans. In this session, we scale the wall with Jonathan, look the opposition in the eye, and dare to do dangerous things.

OF THE SIX CAGES DESCRIBED, WHICH ONE DO YOU THINK MOST APPLIES TO YOUR LIFE? WHY?



THE CAGE OF **RESPONSIBILITY**



OVER THE COURSE OF OUR LIFETIMES, WE ASSUME A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITIES. If we aren't careful, the lesser responsibilities overtake the most important ones. If that happens, eventually we will realize we have formed a cage around ourselves with bars made out of stuff we "have to do." To break free from this cage, we must move from being irresponsibly responsible to responsibly irresponsible.

In August 2008, I went to Scotland with a few members of National Community Church to speak at a conference. While there, we stayed on the Royal Mile and found ourselves just a few blocks from Edinburgh Castle. As you enter the main gate of the castle, you see a plaque devoted to William Wallace. That plaque brought back memories of one of my all-time favorite movie scenes and quotes. William Wallace invested his life fighting for the freedom of his people. Just prior to being tortured to death, Wallace faced the choice of renouncing his beliefs or dying for them. His answer? "Every man dies, not every man really lives." And he faced death with the knowledge that "I have lived life to the fullest." That's how I want to live my life.



William Wallace was a Scottish knight and freedom-fighter known for leading a resistance during the Wars of Scottish Independence in the late 1200s and early 1300s. You can watch William Wallace give up personal responsibilities in order to fight and ultimately lose his life for Scottish Independence in the 1995 Oscar-winning movie, *Braveheart*.



According to *census.gov*, the life expectancy of an American born after 2005 is approximately 78 years.

PREMATURE DEATH

This may be a morbid way to begin this study, but it's always best to start with the end in mind. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a states, "There is an occasion for everything, and a time for every activity under heaven: a time to give birth and a time to die." Ecclesiastes 7:2 elaborates the point saying, "... death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart" (NIV). Given that death is an absolute certainty, I have to wonder: *What words would you want written on your tombstone? What life highlights would you like to see memorialized in your obituary?*

Complete one or more of the following statements:

- I left the world a better place because ...
- I changed someone's life by ...
- God will say "well done good and faithful servant" because I ...
- When I'm gone, people will remember that I ...

All of us were born, and all of us will die. We have a birth certificate and our family will one day be given our death certificate. But sadly, most people die long before the date on their death certificate. Premature death happens in lots of ways. For some people, pain, brokenness, or loss robs them of life. The enemy of their soul comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and their life is taken away. For others, disappointment and failure eat away the life inside them.

But for many of us, it happens in much more subtle ways. We find ourselves locked inside the cage of responsibility. Our day-to-day responsibilities numb us to the possibilities around us and the passions within us. And it happens slowly. Most of us don't even know how or when it started, but at some point, if we're honest, we stop living and start dying. It's almost like we are buried alive by our pain or disappointment or failure or debt ... or responsibility.

Do you feel buried alive under anything right now? If so, what?

There's nothing wrong with responsibility. I have responsibilities as a husband, father, and pastor, and I need to embrace those responsibilities. We need to fulfill our responsibilities. We need to take out the trash, save for retirement, and pay our bills. But while we're doing those things, we can find ourselves buried alive by our day-to-day responsibilities and can totally miss out on the opportunities for spiritual adventure all around us. What I'm talking about is epitomized by one encounter in the Gospels.

In Matthew 8, Jesus invited a young man to follow Him, but the young man responded negatively (and responsibly):

“Lord . . . first let me go bury my father.” And Jesus said, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:21-22).

Now Bible scholars have a few different takes on what happened that day. It's possible the young man was putting off following Jesus until his father died. Maybe his father was sick and the young man was just waiting until that moment. Or maybe he didn't want to follow Jesus because he wanted to ensure he received his father's inheritance. Or perhaps he was afraid of abdicating his responsibilities in the family business while his father was still living.

Why do you think the man asked to bury his father? Can you sympathize with him?

Regardless, I feel a little sorry for him, don't you? I mean, what's so wrong with his request? It seems reasonable and responsible for this young man to look out for his family and bury his father. But when we're tempted to sympathize with someone other than Jesus, when something doesn't make sense, or when we sense a little dis-equilibrium, we need to take a closer look at the story. We need to drill down a little and try to figure out what's really happening and why we're feeling the way we're feeling.

Here's my take. I think this young man was doing what many of us do. He turned responsibility into an excuse. And Jesus saw through the smokescreen. The young man was allowing an arguably legitimate responsibility—burying his father—to get in the way of embracing his greatest responsibility and experiencing his greatest opportunity—following Christ.



To wrestle with other difficult statements in Scripture, check out *The Tough Sayings of Jesus* and *The Tough Sayings of Jesus II*, also from Threads (threadsmedia.com).



Burial of the dead is extremely important in Judaism. In fact, the process is so important that one is even excused from other religious duties to accomplish it. Consider this statement from the Talmud, a Jewish text second in importance only to the Hebrew Scriptures: "He who is confronted by a dead relative is freed from reciting the Shema, from the Eighteen Benedictions, and from all the commandments stated in the Torah."¹

We do the same thing. We turn our responsibilities into excuses. We allow less important responsibilities to replace more important ones, and we find ourselves practicing irresponsible responsibility. One of the challenges of following Christ is to flip this tendency on its head and become responsibly irresponsible.

Do you consider yourself to be more irresponsibly responsible or responsibly irresponsible? What's the difference between the two?

Describe a time in your life when you used responsibility as an excuse to keep you from doing what God was calling you to do.

List 10 responsibilities you currently have in your job, church, circle of friends, family, finances, etc. Which of those are you willing to give up to pursue something God might lead you to do?

So how do we become responsibly irresponsible? I think we can learn some lessons from the life of Nehemiah. Here's a little back-story. In 586 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judea and took many of the Jewish people back to Babylon as captives. In 538 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first remnant, about 43,000 Jews, back to Jerusalem. In 458 B.C., Ezra returned with a remnant of about 18,000, and Nehemiah showed up around 445 B.C.

The bottom line is this: Nehemiah found the wall of Jerusalem in total disrepair. This was significant because walls were the first and last lines of defense for ancient cities. Basically, the city of Jerusalem was defenseless. God conceived a passion in the spirit of Nehemiah, a cupbearer in Babylon, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall.

Against all odds, he rebuilt the wall of the city in 52 days and went on to serve as governor of Jerusalem for more than a decade.

Nehemiah's life is a great model for us as we seek to break free from the cage of responsibility and practice responsible irresponsibility.

PAY ATTENTION TO PASSIONS

In order to break free from the cage of responsibility, we need to pay attention to the passions of our hearts. In Nehemiah 1:2, Nehemiah asked his brothers how things were going in Jerusalem. Although Nehemiah served in the king's palace, his heart remained in Jerusalem and the vision God gave him was tied to the passions of his heart. God has given each of us unique gifts, passions, and opportunities, and we should pay attention to those things because our calling is often found in them.

Chasing the Wild Goose starts with a single desire. Somehow this cupbearer got it in his mind and in his spirit that perhaps God might be calling him to do something about the problem in Jerusalem. But Nehemiah wasn't actually qualified to do anything about it. As far as we know, he had never even been to Jerusalem, and we don't know if he had the education or the experience that would qualify him to go and do anything close to the magnitude of a major building project.

In fact, his brother, Hanani, had a far better résumé for such a task. Why not him? Or why not the remnant back in Jerusalem? Why a cupbearer in Babylon? It doesn't make sense to me, but I know this—God conceives passions within us that sometimes seem crazy and that sometimes seem irresponsible. But it's the people who are willing to act on those God-breathed passions who truly make a difference.

Is there anything that you feel God may be calling you to do but you feel unqualified to do it? Why are you passionate about that thing?

Can you identify your God-ordained passion? I think most people don't get what they want because they really don't know what they want. Because they don't, they never set any goals, never identify what their



Nehemiah lived at the same time as the spiritual leader Ezra. For more historical context, read the Book of Nehemiah alongside 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra. Ezra returned to Jerusalem 13 years before Nehemiah to rebuild the temple and restore the law. But these men understood it was just as important to rebuild the spiritual strength in the hearts of the people of God as it was to rebuild the physical wall around their city.



The cupbearer was an important official who served wine to the king. There was an ever-present danger of assassination by poisoning, so the cupbearer carried great responsibility. Such a person was intimately acquainted with the king he was entrusted to guard.



Check out *Repurposed: The Memoirs of Nehemiah* by Mike Hurt at threadsmedia.com for a Bible study centering on the principles from Nehemiah's life we can incorporate into the 21st-century church.

passions are, and never define a dream. Passion is an emotional issue, both for you and for God. In fact, I would suggest that if you don't have a God-ordained passion, you are out of touch with the emotion and heart of God. So how do you identify those passions? How do you know they are from God? And how do you act on them?

As we continue to read Nehemiah 1, we discover that, upon hearing the news about Jerusalem, Nehemiah "sat down and wept" and "mourned for a number of days" (Nehemiah 1:4).

I once had a professor who asked some great questions. It's one of the few things I remember from graduate school, but I'll never forget when he said, "If you want to identify a passion, ask yourself these questions: What makes you cry or pound your fist on the table? What makes you sad? What makes you mad?"

I would throw one more into the mix: What makes you smile? God-ordained passions are found somewhere in the mixture of those emotions, and so you need to pay close attention to them.

What makes you cry?

What makes you mad?

What makes you smile?

Can you find examples in Scripture to demonstrate that God has the same reactions as you to the items you listed?



To dig a little deeper into the context of the Book of Nehemiah, read the articles called "The Purpose and Life-Situation of Nehemiah," "The King's 'Cupbearer,'" and "Nehemiah's Adversaries." They're found in the *Chase the Goose* leader kit, and your group leader will e-mail them to you this week.

Can you identify the intersection of your greatest passion and the world's deepest need? If so, where is it?

Here's the thing: You never know how a God-ordained passion is going to develop in your spirit. It may be from a book you read, a mission trip, the newspaper, or a Google search. It could even be from a loss, like a death or a divorce. An experience like that can break you, but it can also conceive a passion within you. Regardless, you need to expose yourself to what's going on around the world—the good things and the bad things. You need to cry, you need to get mad, you need to find joy, and through it all, you need to allow God to get a hold of your heart. Often, that process means escaping from the context you live in—this cage of responsibility you've built for yourself.

Write down three issues you want to learn more about.

Sometimes we're afraid to ask questions because we realize knowing the answer will make us accountable to take action. Given that, write down one question that you need to know the answer to.

For Nehemiah, it all started with a conversation about the state of Jerusalem. But here's the thing—for a lot of us, such a conversation would have gone in one ear and out the other, and we would have simply said, "That's too bad." But for Nehemiah, it wasn't that simple. He was sensitive enough to allow God to conceive something within him. I don't know exactly how it happened, but let me just remind you that passions like this aren't about you discovering; they're really about God revealing.

The pressure isn't on you to figure it out all by yourself. If you're seeking to glorify God, if you want to live on mission, if you want Christ to be at the center of your life, if you are dwelling on the Word of God, if you are praying, if you are worshiping, if you are sensitive to the Spirit of God, He will reveal those things. He is going to conceive passion within your spirit.



48 Days to the Work You Love by Dan Miller is a helpful guide in asking questions about passion and finding out where that passion fits into your career. Find out more at 48days.com.



Concerning Psalm 37:4, Charles Spurgeon wrote: “Men who delight in God desire or ask for nothing but what will please God; hence it is safe to give them *carte blanche*. Their will is subdued to God’s will, and now they may have what they will.”²



The Hebrew word we translate as “delight” is *anag*, and its meaning carries with it the idea of being soft and pliable as we take delight in God.



There are eight references made to prayer in the Book of Nehemiah. Can you find them?

I love Psalm 37:4 because it gets to the heart of what I’m saying: “Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart’s desires.” The word *give* actually means “to conceive.” I suppose if you wanted a technological analogy, it might mean to download. When you delight yourself in the Lord, He begins to download new desires within you. He places passions in you that might seem unexplainable at first. And though you don’t really have a handle on it, you feel like God is doing something deep inside you.

But here’s a word of caution: I think figuring out what you want—even what God wants for you—can turn into a very selfish endeavor. So you’d better make sure what you want is what God wants. How do you do that? I wish I had a formula; I don’t. But again, I’m confident that if your life is saturated in the Word of God, and if you’re sensitive to the Spirit of God, He’s going to lead you into those things He wants you to be passionate about. That’s the “delighting yourself in God” part. If you delight yourself in God, He’s going to give you the desires of your heart. As you grow in a relationship with God, those God-ordained passions are going to grow deep inside of you.

PRAY AND PREPARE

So Nehemiah “mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4). He confessed his sins, his family’s sins, and the sins of Israel. He recalled history and prayerfully considered the ways God had worked in Israel’s past (Nehemiah 1:5-10). Nehemiah’s vision was birthed and bathed in prayer.

Nehemiah was willing to wait on God’s timing. He received the news of the wall in the Hebrew month of Kislev, which was most likely November or December. He did not leave for Jerusalem until the Hebrew month of Nisan, or April. He waited patiently and prayerfully for four to five months until the time was right. Sometimes, the hardest part of passion is the waiting. We get mad or sad or glad and we want to immediately go out and start doing something about it. But sometimes we have to wait.

Three days after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he went out to survey the wall. At that point, he hadn’t told “anyone what my God had laid on my heart to do for Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:12). Nehemiah did not communicate his vision or go public until he gathered the facts, received direction from God, and formulated a plan. In Nehemiah 2:16, he said:

“The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, for I had not yet told the Jews, priests, nobles, officials, or the rest of those who would be doing the work.”

Nehemiah moved slowly and wisely through the hard work of hearing from God and personally preparing for the vision before going public.

Personal preparation often begins years before we start actively pursuing or living in our God-ordained passion and calling. Nehemiah obviously worked well for many years as the cupbearer. As cupbearer, he was trusted by the king. And when it was time to go public, his relationship with the king paid huge dividends.

To prepare ourselves during the waiting period, we should focus on developing godly character and being faithful in the little things. Nehemiah had a passion to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But he wasn't an architect or a mason. He wasn't a great leader of people. He was a cupbearer, the trusted official who tasted food and drink for the king to make sure it wasn't poisoned. But in the meantime, he decided to continue to be the best cupbearer he could be.

Likewise, you may find yourself far from the passion God has given you, but you can choose to be the best cupbearer you can be. After all, if you are faithful in Babylon, God will bless you in Jerusalem.

**What is the “Babylon” you need to be faithful in right now?
What does that look like, practically?**

Here's one example. Some time ago, I was in Ethiopia speaking at Beza International Church. As Pastor Zeb Mengistu prepared the congregation for the offering, he jokingly said that if someone wanted to write a seven-digit check, they could make it out to “Beza International Church.” He was just joking with his congregation, but when he said it, something quickened in my spirit. I thought, *The day will come when NCC and I will write a seven-digit check to this church.* I can't totally explain it, but something was conceived in my spirit. I don't know when, I don't know how, but the day will come when National Community Church will invest a million dollars.



This idea of waiting on God runs throughout Scripture. Noah worked on the Ark for 100 years. Abraham lived for 25 years between the calling of God and the birth of Isaac. David worked several odd jobs for many years between being anointed king of Israel and assuming the throne. The lame man at the pool of Bethesda waited 38 years to be healed. Can you think of other examples?



Visit Beza International Church
online at beza.publishpath.com.

How does that start? Well, it starts with us giving \$25,000 toward the AIDS outreach to the Entoto Outreach Project. It starts with us sending mission teams to serve the church and the community and make a difference. It starts with us being obedient in the little things. If we are obedient in the little things, then those big desires God conceives in our hearts will become reality. I believe that.

What is one small thing you can do this week to start being a solution?

Choose one of the following prayers and pray it this week:

- God stretch me.
- God use me.
- God break my heart.

What little things do you need to be doing now to prepare yourself for the bigger things God wants you to do down the road?

SPRING INTO ACTION

To pursue his vision, Nehemiah was required to leave his position in the court of King Artaxerxes and to relocate to Jerusalem. To pursue his greater responsibility, he had to become responsibly irresponsible by leaving his job and the security of what he knew. He had to say no to one thing in order to say yes to something else.

When God puts a passion in your heart, you need to take responsibility for it even if it means becoming irresponsible somewhere else. I think that's the gap. That's where so often the kingdom doesn't really advance because we choose responsibility over spiritual adventure, and we never act on the passion God has put in our hearts. Whether the passion is to address human trafficking in a third-world country, provide inner-city education, or make movies with redemptive messages, you need to take responsibility for it. You need to own it. You need to see the problem and then become a part of the solution.

It was irresponsible for Nehemiah to give up his position. He had a great job. He was the cupbearer to the king. He was a trusted and influential member of the royal administration, and it probably looked



The king not only gave Nehemiah permission to leave his post to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem, he also granted Nehemiah safe travel and sent army officers and cavalry for protection. In addition, he donated timber from the royal forest for construction (Nehemiah 2:7-9).

like he was throwing away a great position. Some might even say he was throwing away what looked like a God-ordained position. But Nehemiah knew something so many of us have to learn the hard way—if you succeed at the wrong thing, you fail. All of us know successful failures don't we? They're people who are really successful and really unhappy. Successful failures are people who succeed at things that don't really matter and lack fulfillment at the end of the day. My heart breaks for those people.

Stephen Covey said you can climb the ladder of success and then realize it's leaning against the wrong wall.³ I think Nehemiah could've climbed all the way up the ladder of success, and at the top, if it wasn't leaning on the wall of Jerusalem, felt like a total failure because he hadn't pursued what God had called him to do.

**What wall is your success ladder currently leaning against?
What wall should it be leaning against?**

The Wild Goose will show up in wild places at wild times, and He will take you places you never imagined going by paths you never knew existed—if you are open to Him conceiving those God-ordained passions in your heart. But once that passion is conceived in your heart, you need to do something about it.

According to cognitive neuroscientists, we process information in a couple of different ways. Some things we process from the bottom-up, from primal parts of the human brain. This is the process by which the amygdala has an emotional response to situations. The second type of neurological processing is top-down. The prefrontal cortex and the more developed parts of the human brain begin to get involved in the process. Both bottom-up and top-down processes are amazing. Top-down processing is a wonderful thing, but it's possible to over-think. Anyone with a background in athletics knows what I'm talking about. It's choking when you're trying to kick a game-winning field goal or sink the final free throw. If you over-think, you're in trouble because it's probably not going to work out.

When you're given a God-ordained passion, you need to talk about it, you need to think about it, and you need to pray about it. Jesus said you need to count the cost, and that's top-down processing. But we need to be very careful because a lot of us are trying to over-talk, over-think, and



Becoming responsibly irresponsible means we have to cheat somewhere, and we need to be careful we don't cheat or become irresponsible with the wrong things. Check out *Choosing to Cheat* by Andy Stanley to read more about how and who to cheat responsibly.



Dr. Stephen Covey has been recognized as one of *Time* magazine's 25 most influential Americans. His core message is that every person can truly control their destiny with profound, yet straightforward, guidance. Find out more at stephencovey.com.



Andy Stanley writes about the leadership principles from the account of Nehemiah in *Visioneering*. Consider picking up a copy to help you develop a vision for what God has in store for you.



At your small group meeting time this week, watch the short film “Polaroids.” Can you see yourself in the situation presented?



National Community Church is recognized as one of the most innovative churches in the country. Its vision is to meet in movie theaters at Metro™ stops throughout the metro D.C. area. Check it out at theaterchurch.com.

(dare I say) over-pray, when God wants us to act.

Let me be blunt: Sometimes we need to stop praying and start doing.

What are some general things that we don't need to pray about?

What are some things you personally need to stop praying about and start doing?

In the last verse of Mark's Gospel, Mark 16:20, we read:

“And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the accompanying signs.”

I think most of us want signs to precede any action we take: *God give me a sign, then I'll step out in faith.* But generally that's not how God works. The result is that we spend our lives waiting for God while God is waiting for us. And we wonder why God isn't making the move and God is wondering why we aren't making the move.

I remember when our church consisted of about 25 people and we were meeting in a Washington, D.C., public school. I was leading worship. It was bad. We didn't have a drummer and I have no rhythm. We prayed for a drummer. We prayed for a drummer *forever*. One morning, I felt like God spoke to me and told me to go buy a drum set. I said, “We don't have a drummer.” But I went out and bought a \$400 drum set. I didn't have a lot of faith, but on Sunday, three days after that step of faith, a guy from the United States Marine Drum and Bugle Corps showed up and became our first drummer. Is that coincidence? I don't think so.

Or how about this—several years ago, Ebenezers Coffeehouse was just a crazy idea. Today, it is the largest coffeehouse in D.C. and a huge outreach and ministry of our church. It all began at a school auction for my kids. I found a three-inch thick binder from the Capitol Hill Restoration Society with all the Capitol Hill zoning regulations.

Needless to say, no one else bid on it. But I had been researching regulations and zoning and trying to figure out if we could build a coffeehouse at 201 F Street. By faith, for \$65 bucks, I bought that zoning manual. And I still have it because it was a step of faith and God honored it.

When you step out, God will begin to work. So enough talking already—*do something*. Buy a book, make an appointment, enroll in a class, or write a check. I don't know what it may be for you, but you need to do something, and you need to do it now.

The wall of Jerusalem didn't rebuild itself. Nehemiah had to step out and get busy. And as soon as he started stepping forward, he faced opposition. When you begin living a life of responsible irresponsibility, you will receive criticism, face opposition, and encounter obstacles.

Skim Nehemiah 4–6. What were some of the obstacles and criticism that were thrown into Nehemiah's path?

How did he respond and what lessons can you learn from him?

When the critics Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem requested a meeting with Nehemiah, he responded with one of my favorite quotes in Scripture: "I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3).

How can you tell the difference between godly criticism and negative criticism?

IMAGINE . . .

Nehemiah and his team completed the wall in 52 days, culminating in several celebrations—the reading of the law, the festival of booths, and a public confession of sin. Nehemiah's bold decision to act responsibly



If you are ever in Washington, D.C., swing by Ebenezers Coffeehouse, located one block from Union Station. Or check it out online at ebenezerscoffeehouse.com.



The leader of the critics was a guy named Sanballat. If the name itself isn't bad enough, its meaning is even worse. His name means "sin gives life."

irresponsible resulted in revival.

Imagine a church full of people pursuing God's ordained passions. A church like that would change a city. Imagine a campus ministry full of people pursuing God-ordained passions. A ministry like that would change a university. If all of us came out of the cage of responsibility and actually took responsibility for the things that make us mad or sad or glad, we would turn our neighborhoods and nations upside down. We would actually *be* the kingdom of God.

In his inaugural address, President Kennedy challenged the American people, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." The Peace Corp program emerged from that challenge. In the past year, the number of volunteers in their 50s and older has risen by 50 percent. One of these Peace Corps baby boomers is 64-year-old Loyci Stockey, who said, "I never forgot his message, and I tucked it away in the back of my head to act on someday. Today is my someday."⁴ That's a powerful statement.

Today is your someday, but you need to act. That first act may seem small and insignificant, but remember Rome wasn't built in a day and it took 52 days to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. It's not going to happen overnight, but you've got to start somewhere. You need to count the cost, step out in faith, and do something small. I'm not saying you should ignore all the responsibilities you have. But at some point, you've got to consider whether or not you're being responsible about the right things.

So what is the Wild Goose saying? What is God conceiving in your spirit? And are you willing to step out? The bottom line is that your greatest responsibility is pursuing God-ordained passions. If you overthink it, it'll never happen.

What is it that makes you mad or sad or glad? If you're struggling to answer that question, then follow Nehemiah's lead and spend a few days praying and seeking God, examining the walls, and getting a sense of what God is calling you to. It might not happen overnight. Don't get frustrated if you can't figure it out quickly. I just turned 39, and I'm still figuring out everything God has put inside me. Nevertheless, I believe that as I continue to grow in my relationship with God, He is going to conceive some things in my spirit that I can't even imagine right now. Don't let what you can't do keep you from doing what you can. Come out of that cage of responsibility and chase the Goose.

NOW WHAT?



PRAYER

Lord help us. Help us, I pray, to be a people of passion, a people who act on those passions that You have conceived in our lives. You invite us into the adventure of following You, and I pray that we would have the courage to accept that invitation. God, I pray for those who have become numb to the possibilities and the passions. Would You turn over the soil of our hearts so that we would begin to live the lives that You called us to? Begin a good work in us. Thank You that You are the One who carries it on to completion. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, because He cares about you" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

CHASING THE GOOSE

- Read *Holy Discontent* by Bill Hybels.
- Make a list of your daily, weekly, and monthly responsibilities. Evaluate each of them as to whether they are furthering or hindering your pursuit of the Wild Goose.
- Make an action plan taking into account the evaluation above, leaving room for the Wild Goose.



notes