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Clear Some Space

In Pursuit of the Wild Goose – 01

Matthew 21:12-17

Pastor Tim Bohlke

A few hundred years after the birth of Christ, the Roman Empire was falling and a spiritual darkness was overtaking Europe, not unlike the darkness that is in many parts of the world today. But in the midst of this darkness there arose these bands of radical Christians in northern England and Ireland. These enduring, mission-driven, fiery, resilient Christians were later referred to as the Celtics. These Celtic Christians who identified so closely with God's creation and nature had a name for God, the Holy Spirit. They called Him the *Wild Goose.* That name has always intrigued me, yet it's in this mysterious, untamed nature of God that is so undeniable throughout history. That name serves as a reminder to us today that God, the Holy Spirit, cannot be tracked, tamed, boxed-in, contained, formulized, or controlled. You see, wild geese—they're wild. They shift and move; they make noise. They fly in formation, yet they're free—free to change direction, to move, to adjust at will. Celtic Christians believe that wild geese are a reminder that when it comes to God, expect the unexpected. There's an element of discovery, a mystery of adventure, of unpredictability that has been lost in this faith journey today. Yet there is something so compelling, isn't there, something that calls us out to the adventure of following God wherever He would lead.

Pastor and author Mark Matterson said this about the Celtics: "I think the Celtic Christians were on to something, something that institutional Christianity has missed out on for a long time. I wonder if, throughout history, we have attempted to clip the wings of the *Wild Goose* and in so doing, we have ended up settling for something much less than God ever intended. Pursuing the *Wild Goose* can truly be something different. The pursuit may take us to places we never imagined and paths and routes we never even knew existed."

Now I grew up on a farm in central Nebraska, a little town, and my parents were people of deep Christian faith, and their words and their actions really did line up. Through the years I saw the impact they were having on so many people around them, and there was something about them that I wanted to emulate; I wanted to have that kind of impact. So as a teenager, as I went through middle school and high school, I tried to do that as best I could—make decent decisions most of the time, and walk through those high school years trying to lead out and impact others. The problem was in my small town there weren't a lot of people interested in spiritual things and if they were, or they had some level of interest in God, certainly it wasn't making a difference on the day to day decisions. So that part of my high school journey was kind of lonely.

As I headed into college—I came to the University of Nebraska—I made this unconscious decision that I was going to be done being a leader and I was going to be a follower for awhile. I fell into the wrong crowd and proceeded to live a year in college of really reckless living and a little bit out of control sometimes. When I got to the end of that first year of college, there was something stirring in me. It was like: there's got to be more than this. Something in me really wanted to live for something bigger or something deeper and just start having that kind of impact that I'd seen growing up again. And so I began to make some different decisions and got involved in a campus Christian group. People started investing in me and I started doing life and making decisions differently.

As my sophomore year started, I became convinced that I needed to go back to the dorms I had lived in and share with some of the guys there why I wasn't moving back and, while I still wanted to be friends with them, my decisions and things I was going to do were going to be a little different. And so I'll never forget this walk up the four flights of stairs at Harper Dorm. I mean I took the stairs instead of the elevator so I had more time to back out, probably, kind of wrestled with it, but still there was a passion in me that said: I need to tell these guys what's different. And so I went room to room to the guys I knew and unfortunately for me it was Monday night so Monday Night Football was going on. A lot of them were gathered in the lounge but I went in there—I knew it was now or never for me—and during commercials, whatever I said, I have no idea—kind of blanked out for the night probably. No idea if my words had impact but I'm not sure if that was the point. But I was so passionate and engaged! I thought about that when I was thinking about sharing that story with you. Only a handful of times since college have I done something that bold, where I was just totally risking a lot in terms of personal relationships and that kind of thing. And it made me wonder: does time—whether that's weeks or months or years—soften us in our faith journey? Can just living life in the busyness and the pace and all the things we're dealing with—making a living and doing all that stuff—can that cause us to slow down, to settle in our faith, to drift maybe from the passionate pursuit of God that made us dangerous when we first started out on this journey?

The Celtic Christians I've been reading about were anything but safe and they definitely did not coast or settle into their faith. They passionately pursued God in a very deep, authentic and individual kind of way, but yet corporately in a kind of way that they passed that passion on to generations, and survived and thrived during a really difficult time. These Celtics were warred against, fought against, persecuted, and pushed to the edge of the North Sea in England and Ireland, yet they not only survived during this time, but they thrived during one of the darkest times in the history of the world. Among these guys—the men and women of that day—was a monk named Patrick who many felt was the founder of what would later become the Celtic movement. Patrick left everything and sought God in extended times of solitude. And when I say extended, I'm talking years; I mean years of solitude, in a wilderness, seeking God and learning process. And before he found himself and planted himself in Ireland where he launched a little community, he started investing in people, brought them into this kind of safe refuge, and started to learn and to expand. These early Celtics believed that God was not only wild and mysterious but deeply personal and relational and engaged and walked with them from day to day no matter what life threw at them.

These resilient, fierce warriors of the faith who referred to God as the *Wild Goose*, fought for that extended time of solitude and did that throughout all of their lives, and they multiplied that vision into others in generation after generation that lasted literally hundreds of years. They fought for community. They established these little outposts—kind of missionary communities—that ended up multiplying and spreading throughout Ireland and England and on into Europe. And they stayed the course in their mission they felt they'd been given to retain culture, to protect the Scripture for future generations and to not let each other forget that as long as we are pursuing God with passion and intentionality, that we can make it no matter what life throws at us.

Since college, for me, it's been a journey of struggle in my faith to keep it fresh, to keep it moving, to not let life—the successes and the accomplishments and the failures and the struggles and the deep disappointments that I faced over the last few years in one way or another—get in the way of a clear sight-line to God, and to not let the baggage of that settle in, but keep that fresh environment. That's been an ongoing journey, and probably is for many of you in this room.

Over the last several months Bryan has been taking us through a study of 1Samuel. If you've been around, he's been asking us to look at the trajectory of two great (once great, and great) leaders in the Hebrew nation: Saul and David. Saul let the years of spiritual baggage, personal baggage, leadership baggage, pride and all kinds of stuff get in the way and block a clear pathway and a clear advantage point to God. And we know how that ended if you were here last week—in despair and desperation as his enemies closed in. He became convinced that God was no longer with him and in despair fell on his own sword to end it. And there's David who would become king and who refused to let the people and himself forget that as long as we keep God at the center, as long as He was literally in the center of our lives and our focus, we could make it. Only then could we become the country and the individuals that we were meant to be. And so it became the passion of David's life to, as king, build a temple—a temple that would not only be the symbolic center of the Hebrew nation to keep their focus right but would also be a literal dwelling place of God! I mean crazy to think about—a real, literal dwelling place where God would, so to speak, move into the neighborhood—and it became his passion to do that. But when it became clear in his lifetime he wasn't going to finish that, he passed that passion, that mission on to his son Solomon, who would become king. We're going to pick up this story with a prayer that David is praying for his son Solomon to keep the course, to stay the course, to build the temple, to keep the people's focus on God. So I want to read that to you; it's in 1 Chronicles 29—David's praying again for Solomon:

> **God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep this generous spirit alive forever in Your people always. (**Keep it alive in me.) **Keep their hearts set firmly in You. And give my son Solomon an uncluttered and focused heart so that he can obey what You command, live by Your directions and counsel, and carry through with the building of The Temple for which I have provided. (***The Message, 1 Chronicles 29:19)

Now we know as we read on in this story and through Solomon's journey that the clutter, the unfocused nature of his life would come later in his reign as women and sex and power and wealth and his own incredible talents would get in the way of a strong finish. But through most of Solomon's journey as king, he pursued God. He pursued God with passion and he inspired a whole country to do the same. And so I wanted to pick up this part of the story when Solomon, in fact, does build this temple and he completes that goal and he gathers the nation of Israel together to dedicate this temple. Think of the epic nature of this moment, right? We know what Israel has been through. Through generations the stories have been passed down—coming out of slavery, the tremendous provisions that have been made through all the generations of the years—and now David becomes king and his mission to build this temple doesn't get done, but he provides what needs to be done and then his son Solomon finally builds this temple. They know what they've been through as a nation and they bring everybody together and Solomon—that's the kind of moment we've got here—gathers the people and commits and dedicates this temple to God. We see his prayer to God in 2 Chronicles 6 where he says:

> **There Solomon knelt in front of the full view of the congregation that had gathered; stretched his hands toward heaven and prayed: "God, oh God of Israel, there is no other God like you in the sky above or the earth below and unswervingly keeps covenant with His servants and unfailingly loves them while they sincerely live in obedience to His way. You kept Your word to David, my father, Your promise. You did exactly what You promised, every detail. The proof is before us today. Keep it up God, oh God of Israel, continue to keep the promises You made to David, my father, when You said 'You will always have a descendent to represent My rule on Israel's throne, on the one condition that Your sons are careful to live obediently in the presence You have. Oh God, God of Israel, let this all happen. Confirm and establish**

it. Can it be that You will dwell with mankind on earth? (The Message: selected from 2 Chronicles, Chapter 6)

Eugene Peterson and his interpretation of this passage says, *"Can it be, God, You will actually move into the neighborhood while the cosmos itself isn't large enough to give you breathing room, let alone this temple I built."* Yet God moves into the neighborhood.

What seems critical from these passages to me is great memory, an uncluttered and focused heart, and clear sight-lines to God for David and then Solomon to complete the task at hand. Now let's fast forward this story several hundred years. Jesus Christ now is on the scene. The temple that was built has been sacked and torn down and rebuilt and now Jesus comes, in what Jesus knows to be the last week of His life on earth. At thirty-three He's in the last week of three years of a passionate ministry on earth.

Side note: (Jesus at thirty-three, multiple disciples with Him that went on this journey with Him; most people feel those disciples were much younger, some maybe even teenagers.) Don't wait, you 30's, 20's, teenagers in this auditorium today. God can use you to change the world. Don't tell me you can't. We've seen it. Don't wait for position or whatever to say you're really going to do something. Do it now! I mean, take the steps you feel like you need to take that God has taken. Don't wait! Time's too short. Life's too short. We can attest to that. So Jesus comes in the last week of His life and where does He go? Where does He decide to go on the last week, in His last moments? He goes to Jerusalem where He's welcomed by the people at first as a hero, as a conqueror, as a king, as a deliver, and He in fact would be all that, but in a very different way than the people thought. But where does He go as He arrives in Jerusalem? What's first on the priority list? He goes to the temple. He goes right to the heart of what has become a very distracted, very cluttered, very unfocused, hypocritical, and in many ways a legalistic faith on the part of the Jewish leaders and the Jews of the day. This radical, fierce, wild warrior Jesus goes right to the heart of the Hebrew faith; He goes to the temple. So if you want to read with me what Jesus does when He gets to the temple, turn to Matthew 21 and we're going to read a couple of verses. So often I've read over this story so quickly and miss some of the incredible moments within it. So let's slow it down and look at this: Matthew 21, verse 12

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." And *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus said "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

(*NASB, Matt. 21: 12-17)

Another translation of the Bible on this passage says this:

Jesus went straight to the temple and he threw out everyone who had set up shop there, buying and selling. He kicked over the tables of the loan sharks and the stalls of the dove merchants, and he quoted this text:

My house was designated a house of prayer;
You have made it a hang-out for thieves.

(Now the critical point to me in this story—once the room was cleared—right?)
Now there was room for the blind and the crippled to get in, and they came to Jesus and He healed them. (*The Message)

And after the confrontation again with the religious leaders of the day (which was the habit of Jesus throughout His ministry) He turned His head in frustration and left the city and spent the night.

As I kind of processed and walked through this passage, a few things came to mind that I needed to deal with, and I want to share a couple of those with you today because I think there's something maybe in it for each of us. First off, this is not the Jesus I grew up learning about. I mean, this is not Him, right? I grew up in a church and went to church a couple of times a week, got dragged there on choir nights 'cause my mom sang in the choir, all that stuff. In the front of the little church that I grew up in, there was this huge picture of Jesus on the side of the hill, chilling with a couple of little lambs and a real soft, meek face with just kind of a little glow...and just relaxed, right? I mean, yes, we have a compassionate, engaging, loving Jesus, but we've also got a fierce Jesus. There is another translation of this passage that says Jesus actually made a weapon, a whip-like weapon as He entered the temple to clear it out. Okay, this is fiercely intentional; this is plan and sustain. This wasn't just a little stage here; this was a place with all kinds of things going on. This is a big place and Jesus rolls in and clears this thing out and does what it takes—gets the animals out, gets the trading out. Think about the tables that He kicks over. We think about that as maybe one table He tossed, right? I mean, no, this is the main trade of what's going on in Jerusalem and these are people who are used to extorting people's money, right? He doesn't tell them, "Hey, get up and grab your coins and get out." He tosses it, and we know the passion of that part of the world. Think about that. When those tables get tossed, money is everywhere. What's going on? He's creating chaos; He's clearing it out. And I have to deal with that in terms of that part of who Jesus is.

And then the second part here is where it really kind of hit home. When the temple was cleared, then the hurting, then the people that needed engagement could come in. Not till then. And when they did, Jesus was able to work with them, heal them and minister to them. And it raised the question for me: what do I need to clear out? What do I need to push aside so I have more clear sight-lines to God? What is that? And on the heels of that, I know that, for me, I've been re-convinced I need to seek God in quiet and solitude, and in extended times so I can listen. Unplug the noise in this busy culture we are in; unplug the noise and listen to where God's at, where He's moving, what He wants me to do, what He wants me to think about, what steps I need to take, what tables need to be tossed, what needs to be pushed aside so I have got clear sight-lines to God.

The last thing that came to my mind that I really wanted to share with you on this part of it, is that I've got to remember what the invitation was. For me, initially, in middle school and high school and all throughout, we were invited into a fight. We were invited into what would be a struggle, something we are going to have to fight for. You hear that from this stage a lot. This isn't a cruise. I mean this is an engaged battle. We can all attest to some level of that. We weren't invited into a journey of safety, so we could kind of settle in and coast. That's never been the thing, although many of us hope for that and rightly so. But we're not invited into safety; we're invited into an adventure. We're invited into mystery. We're invited to risk. You and I, I think we've been invited by God into the pursuit and to be pursued by the *Wild Goose*.

Several years ago I was director of a large ministry with a lot of things going on and I was beginning to struggle a little bit and became burdened with the journey of leaders and what was going on and wanted to kind of revisit this idea—this invitation for people—for myself first and then for others. I gathered with Ben Harms, as some of you know, and a couple of others in Boulder, Colorado, and said: what if we could create something that was really different for people—instruments for leaders at the time, pastors, and young business leaders—that kind of thing that showed them an invitation and encouraged them, challenged them, and hopefully inspire them to really re-engage in a passionate pursuit of God and the Wild Goose. So on the heels of that we created an organization called *Harbor Ministry* and the first leadership events we did under that was *Rhythm in Twenty*. It was a three year journey for millennial leaders (guys in their 20's and 30's). We start the ninth group of that this fall. Young guys have come from all over the country, literally coast to coast, and three different countries to join that journey, that invitation, to pursue this wild, mysterious God of ours that's calling us out.

And then a few years ago we thought: what would that look like for older leaders? And so we got together again, began to dream and think about it. For guys 30 and up we created another leadership track called *Rogue Journey* and we began to invite guys into that as well from all over the country, working with twenty guys at a time to *Rogue*. In the midst of that, we created this story to help us tell the story of what this invitation must be like and what we're hoping for and what we believe God is inviting each of us in this room to. We made this video and I want to show it to you because I think it powerfully speaks to what I'm talking about and the invitation I think God's giving to each of us this morning. So it's just a couple of minutes, but take a look at this video and then we will finish up.

Video:

> *"Why am I going back there again? Why that place? Why do I feel like I'm searching for something? This isn't what I thought I'd be. Am I doing okay? Am I trying my best? Why do I feel busy, yet so bored?" (Voice gets drowned out by noise.)*
>
> *"Once again that restless stir has brought me back searching, hoping, and wondering—begging to hear from and engage the infinite. Somewhere along the way the vision and dream and passionate pursuit of God that made me come alive, made me dangerous in the first place—is it still there? Have I settled? It feels like days, months, and even years have flown by. Family, leadership, work, losses, the struggles and successes, the hope and the disappointments—they all just add up so fast. It feels like I'm constantly pouring myself into others. It leaves me wondering if I've lost some of myself in the process. Life feels full and yet somehow empty. So this place, I am back, hoping for more, wondering if there's a way to re-kindle that fire in my soul. Those adventurous waters I'm longing for must be out there somewhere—some wild man to fill my empty self, the doubt, the worry, frustration. Those voices always come back." (Voice gets drowned out by noise.)*
>
> *"No, there is something here worth fighting for. So here's to taking a risk and stepping out. Here's to not settling. Here's to fighting for the journey..."*

So how about this? How about together we decide, "NO, no, we're not going to just settle or coast." I mean what could happen if these two thousand say we're not going to settle or coast? We're going to take the next step; we're going to engage this thing in this real invitation that God has given us—an authentic pursuit of God into the unknown, to the wild and mysterious side of that. What about it?

We showed that video to a group of business men in February down in Florida, and a couple of them came up to me afterwards and said, "I've got no idea who you are, what you're going to do when we are out in Colorado, but I'm going!" Just their willingness to enter in and step into whatever that would be, they showed up along with guys from California and elsewhere and we started that kind of rogue journey—that kind of wild, radical pursuit of God and what He has in store for us.

So what's there for us today—to respond to this kind of invitation that God's made for every one of us in this room? We want to invite you on a two-week wild goose chase. We have some devotional kind of things—handouts—at the exits when you leave. If you haven't got one, grab one, and I want to invite you into an every day kind of journey to pursue the *Wild Goose*—to pursue God, because there's a belief here: If we seek God, we will find Him; if we will take the time and the passion to pursue God, we will find Him. That's the core belief of this thing. That's the "why". So we want to invite you on a two-week wild goose chase. We'll have another hand-out next Sunday for the next seven days, and we'd ask you to just carve out a little time and before we close, I want to walk you through a little bit of what we're going to do, a little bit each day:

Monday: I'm going to invite you to *Clear some space* in you life. Keep it real simple. Clear a drawer. It could be, clear your room, clear your car out. That's going to be real easy for some of you and it's going to be real hard for some of us to figure that out. But clean just something simple—like clear it out, dump it and see what that feels like. Maybe re-visit Matthew 21 and this story of Jesus walking into the temple and doing what He needed to do to get it done—that kind of fierce intentionality it took. So clear some space.

Okay, on Tuesday: *Enter the quiet*. This is critical. This has been the model of the whole thing here—that we can engage a pursuit of God—to turn off the noise and so for just fifteen minutes sometime on Tuesday, kind of put down your agenda, unplug, disconnect, turn things off and just listen. Just be in God's presence. No pressure, nothing has to happen or does happen. Just be quiet and practice that idea of quieting down. Okay?

On Wednesday I'm going to ask you to take a few minutes and *Remember*. Remember the times that God maybe showed up in your story in significant ways. All of us are here in different places on our spiritual journeys. Some of you are just on the front end, checking this out. Some of you have been struggling, disconnected—don't see the relevancy of it. We're all in different places, right? But God, I believe, is calling you out to something different and so just take some time to remember and think about it. Psalm 77 is one of my favorite psalms in the Bible. The author is Asaph who I really relate to. He's emotional; he's a high-feeler. He's written a couple of other psalms and you can see the swings and the emotion, depending on how he's feeling. He kind of writes that way, and I can really relate to him. He's in despair at the first of that psalm— frustrated, angry at God, disappointed—doesn't understand why evil seems to be taking over, why good people are getting mowed over. But something beautiful happens I think in verse 12 of Psalm 77, where it just turns on a dime when he says, "...but yet I come and ponder the ways God has showed up through all the generations." And there's a whole powerful turn and Asaph's whole perspective changes at that moment. There's power and strength in remembering. That's Wednesday.

Thursday: Gets a little harder. Alright, let's *Clear some of the sight-lines*. Are there some tables you need to toss? Are there some things you need to clear out? Is there any spiritual or emotional baggage that you just need to release, to let go of, to surrender? As I am preparing this and standing before you, there are a couple of things very clear that come to my mind that might, if unchecked, block that clear kind of pathway to God and some things I just need to let go of and trust Him that I

can't control anyway. I've got to let go. And so I want you to do that kind of hard work on Thursday, of just taking some time and saying: is there anything I need to release, let go of, clear out in my own journey that will make a clearer pathway to God?

Friday: Ask yourself this question—real simple: *Am I willing to do what it takes*? Will I tackle that? It's one thing to name it and one thing to do it. If there's somebody we need to forgive or somebody we need to engage, or whatever that may be. Are you willing to take the step? Are you willing to do what it takes to do that? One of my favorite places on the planet is Crested Butte, Colorado. I've gone there for years with friends and family, mountain biked for many years there. Love this place—a great place of beauty in southwest Colorado. But there was one pattern of time where there was a valley with rivers and they got dammed up. Beaver dams were creating all kinds of chaos with the free flow of clear water through the valley, and the next year we came back and it was totally cleared out. We asked the park rangers what happened and they said, "We blew it up, put dynamite in the beaver dams and blew then up." I mean you do what it takes, right? Is there anything you need to blow up, toss, turn, a habit, a struggle, something that's blocking you from taking that next step that God maybe's calling you out to do? Are you willing to do what it takes?

And then Saturday: Last day of the week, I ask you to *Re-enter the quiet*, maybe for an hour. I know this is hard but maybe take an hour and just kind of re-enter that quiet place that maybe you cleared out, and just again seek God and ask, as you have a more uncluttered life, as you have a little more focused heart, are there any ideas, thoughts, dreams, steps, things that are coming to mind that God's maybe stirring in your heart, now you've got a little clearer view of what's going on? Trust me, this is a hard hour to take; I know. If you do it, but your wife (if you're married) or your husband, your kids—they need you to take this. Do it for each other. Give each other an hour next Saturday and really seek God and get into the habit of that kind of pursuit, that kind of passion and pursuit of God. That's difference making.

I want to close the time here with just revisiting that prayer that David gave to his son Solomon, that he prayed. I want to personalize that prayer for you and me. Just join me in praying to God for the strength and the courage and whatever it is we need to engage a passionate pursuit of God, to respond to the invitation He's given us to join the adventure, to risk and pursue the *Wild Goose*.

> *God, God of our Father Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep Your generous Spirit alive in us. Keep it forever alive in Your people. Help us to awaken this day to everything You have for us. O, God, keep our hearts firmly set on You, keep You as the centerpiece of our lives. Give us an uncluttered and focused heart so that we have the ability to obey the directions and take the steps that You want us to take to respond to Your direction, Your counsel and carry through with all the things You have for us this day. Lord, I pray we won't box You in, try and contain You, that you will give us this morning and as we head into this week a passion, a desire, a resilient spirit, a fierce intentionality to follow You and pursue You no matter what gets thrown at us. Amen.*

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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