

# WILD *at* HEART

DISCOVERING THE SECRET  
*of A MAN'S SOUL*

JOHN ELDREDGE



WESTBOW  
PRESS

A Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers  
*Since 1798*

[www.thomasnelson.com](http://www.thomasnelson.com)

Copyright © 2001 by John Eldredge

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Published in association with Yates & Yates, LLP, Literary Agents,  
Orange, California

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NKJV are from THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1990, 1994 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Scripture quotations noted *The Message* are from *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English*. Copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson.

Scripture quotations noted NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (R), © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission

ISBN 0-7852-6694-1 (IE)

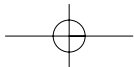
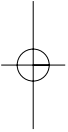
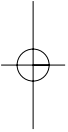
ISBN 0-7852-6883-9 (HC)

*Printed in the United States of America.*

04 05 06 07 08 BVG 47 46 45 44 43

For Samuel, Blaine, and Luke.

I love your warrior hearts.  
You definitely have what it takes.



OTHER BOOKS BY JOHN ELDREDGE

*The Sacred Romance* (with Brent Curtis)

*The Sacred Romance Workbook*

*The Journey of Desire*

*Wild at Heart Field Manual*

*Dare to Desire*

*Waking the Dead*

*A Guidebook to Waking the Dead*

# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments*

ix

*Introduction*

xi

CHAPTER 1 — Wild at Heart

1

CHAPTER 2 — The Wild One Whose Image We Bear

19

CHAPTER 3 — The Question That Haunts Every Man

39

CHAPTER 4 — The Wound

59

CHAPTER 5 — The Battle for a Man's Heart

77

CHAPTER 6 — The Father's Voice

97

CHAPTER 7 — Healing the Wound

119

CHAPTER 8 — A Battle to Fight: The Enemy

139

CHAPTER 9 — A Battle to Fight: The Strategy

157

CHAPTER 10 — A Beauty to Rescue

179

CHAPTER 11 — An Adventure to Live

197

CHAPTER 12 — Writing the Next Chapter

219

*About the Author*

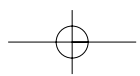
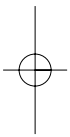
222

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deep thanks to those who have helped me climb this mountain:

Sam, Blaine, Jenny, Aaron, Morgan, Cherie, Julie, Gary, Leigh, Travis, Sealy, and Stasi. Brian and Kyle at Thomas Nelson. The Thursday night poker group. And all those who have been praying for me, near and far.

Brent, for teaching me more about what it means to be a man than anyone else ever has, and Craig, for taking up the sword.



## INTRODUCTION

I know. I almost want to apologize. *Dear Lord—do we really need another book for men?*

Nope. We need something else. We need *permission*.

Permission to be what we are—men made in God's image. Permission to live from the heart and not from the list of "should" and "ought to" that has left so many of us tired and bored.

Most messages for men ultimately fail. The reason is simple: They ignore what is deep and true to a man's *heart*, his real passions, and simply try to shape him up through various forms of pressure. "This is the man you *ought* to be. This is what a good husband/father/Christian/churchgoer *ought* to do." Fill in the blanks from there. He is responsible, sensitive, disciplined, faithful, diligent, dutiful, etc. Many of these are good qualities. That these messengers are well-intentioned I have no doubt. But the road to hell, as we remember, is paved with good intentions. That they are a near total failure should seem obvious by now.

No, men need something else. They need a deeper understanding of why they long for adventures and battles and a Beauty—and why God made them *just like that*. And they need a deeper understanding of why women long to be fought

for, to be swept up into adventure, and to *be* the Beauty. For that is how God made them as well.

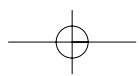
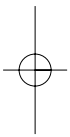
So I offer this book, not as the seven steps to being a better Christian, but as a safari of the heart to recover a life of freedom, passion, and adventure. I believe it will help men get their heart back—and women as well. Moreover, it will help women to understand their men and help them live the life they both want. That is my prayer for you.

*It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly . . . who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who have never known neither victory nor defeat.*

—TEDDY ROOSEVELT

*The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.*

—MATTHEW 11:12 NASB



CHAPTER ONE

WILD AT HEART

*The heart of a man is like deep water . . .*

—PROVERBS 20:5 NKJV

*The spiritual life cannot be made suburban. It is always  
frontier, and we who live in it must accept and even  
rejoice that it remains untamed.*

—HOWARD MACEY

*I want to ride to the ridge where the west commences  
I can't look at hobbles and I can't stand fences  
Don't fence me in.*

—COLE PORTER  
"Don't Fence Me In"

At last, I am surrounded by wilderness. The wind in the top of the pines behind me sounds like the ocean. Waves are rushing in from the great blue above, cresting upon the ridge of the mountain I have climbed, somewhere in the Sawatch Range of central Colorado. Spreading out below me the landscape is a sea of sagebrush for mile after lonesome mile. Zane Grey immortalized it as the purple sage, but most of the year it's more of a silver gray. This is the kind of country you could ride across for days on horseback without seeing another living soul. Today, I am on foot. Though the sun is shining this afternoon, it will not warm above thirty here near the Continental Divide, and the sweat I worked up scaling this face is now making me shiver. It is late October and winter is coming on. In the distance, nearly a hundred miles south by southwest, the San Juan Mountains are already covered in snow.

The aroma of the pungent sage still clings to my jeans, and it clears my head as I gasp for air—in notably short supply at 10,000 feet. I am forced to rest again, even though I know that each pause broadens the distance between me and my quarry.

Still, the advantage has always been his. Though the tracks I found this morning were fresh—only a few hours old—that holds little promise. A bull elk can easily cover miles of rugged country in that amount of time, especially if he is wounded or on the run.

The wapiti, as the Indians called him, is one of the most elusive creatures we have left in the lower forty-eight. They are the ghost kings of the high country, more cautious and wary than deer, and more difficult to track. They live at higher elevations, and travel farther in a day, than nearly any other game. The bulls especially seem to carry a sixth sense to human presence. A few times I've gotten close; the next moment they are gone, vanishing silently into aspen groves so thick you wouldn't have believed a rabbit could get through.

It wasn't always this way. For centuries elk lived out on the prairies, grazing together on the rich grasses in vast numbers. In the spring of 1805 Meriwether Lewis described passing herds lolling about in the thousands as he made his way in search of a Northwest Passage. At times the curious wandered so close he could throw sticks at them, like bucolic dairy cows blocking the road. But by the end of the century westward expansion had pushed the elk high up into the Rocky Mountains. Now they are elusive, hiding out at timberline like outlaws until heavy snows force them down for the winter. If you would seek them now, it is on their terms, in forbidding haunts well beyond the reach of civilization.

And that is why I come.

And why I linger here still, letting the old bull get away. My hunt, you see, actually has little to do with elk. I knew that before I came. There is something else I am after, out here in the wild. I am searching for an even more elusive prey . . . something that can only be found through the help of wilderness.

I am looking for my heart.

## WILD AT HEART

Eve was created within the lush beauty of Eden's garden. But Adam, if you'll remember, was created *outside* the Garden, in the wilderness. In the record of our beginnings, the second chapter of Genesis makes it clear: Man was born in the outback, from the untamed part of creation. Only afterward is he brought to Eden. And ever since then boys have never been at home indoors, and men have had an insatiable longing to explore. We long to return; it's when most men come alive. As John Muir said, when a man comes to the mountains, he comes home. The core of a man's heart is undomesticated *and that is good*. "I am not alive in an office," as one Northface ad has it. "I am not alive in a taxi cab. I am not alive on a sidewalk." Amen to that. Their conclusion? "Never stop exploring."

My gender seems to need little encouragement. It comes naturally, like our innate love of maps. In 1260 Marco Polo headed off to find China, and in 1967, when I was seven, I tried to

## WILD AT HEART

5

dig a hole straight through from our backyard with my friend Danny Wilson. We gave up at about eight feet, but it made a great fort. Hannibal crosses his famous Alps, and there comes a day in a boy's life when he first crosses the street and enters the company of the great explorers. Scott and Amundsen race for the South Pole, Peary and Cook vie for the North, and when last summer I gave my boys some loose change and permission to ride their bikes down to the store to buy a soda, you'd have thought I'd given them a charter to go find the equator. Magellan sails due west, around the tip of South America—despite warnings that he and his crew will drop off the end of the earth—and Huck Finn heads off down the Mississippi ignoring similar threats. Powell follows the Colorado into the Grand Canyon, even though—no, *because*—no one has done it before and everyone is saying it can't be done.

And so my boys and I stood on the bank of the Snake River in the spring of '98, feeling that ancient urge to shove off. Snow melt was high that year, unusually high, and the river had overflowed its banks and was surging through the trees on both sides. Out in the middle of the river, which is crystal clear in late summer but that day looked like chocolate milk, logs were floating down, large tangles of branches bigger than a car, and who knows what else. High and muddy and fast, the Snake was forbidding. No other rafters could be seen. Did I mention it was raining? But we had a brand-new canoe and the paddles were in hand

and, sure, I have never floated the Snake in a canoe, nor any other river for that matter, but what the heck. We jumped in and headed off into the unknown, like Livingstone plunging into the interior of dark Africa.

Adventure, with all its requisite danger and wildness, is a deeply spiritual longing written into the soul of man. The masculine heart needs a place where nothing is prefabricated, modular, nonfat, zip lock, franchised, on-line, microwavable. Where there are no deadlines, cell phones, or committee meetings. Where there is room for the soul. Where, finally, the geography around us corresponds to the geography of our heart. Look at the heroes of the biblical text: Moses does not encounter the living God at the mall. He finds him (or is found by him) somewhere out in the deserts of Sinai, a long way from the comforts of Egypt. The same is true of Jacob, who has his wrestling match with God not on the living room sofa but in a wadi somewhere east of the Jabbok, in Mesopotamia. Where did the great prophet Elijah go to recover his strength? To the wild. As did John the Baptist, and his cousin, Jesus, who is *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness.

Whatever else those explorers were after, they were also searching for themselves. Deep in a man's heart are some fundamental questions that simply cannot be answered at the kitchen table. Who am I? What am I made of? What am I destined for? It is fear that keeps a man at home where things are neat and orderly *and under his control*. But the answers to his deepest questions are not to be

## WILD AT HEART

7

found on television or in the refrigerator. Out there on the burning desert sands, lost in a trackless waste, Moses received his life's mission and purpose. He is called out, called up into something much bigger than he ever imagined, much more serious than CEO or "prince of Egypt." Under foreign stars, in the dead of night, Jacob received a new name, his real name. No longer is he a shrewd business negotiator, but now he is one who wrestles with God. The wilderness trial of Christ is, at its core, a test of his *identity*. "If you are who you think you are . . ." If a man is ever to find out who he is and what he's here for, he has got to take that journey for himself.

He has got to get his heart back.