

## **ALSO BY JOHN ELDREDGE**

*The Sacred Romance (with Brent Curtis)*

*The Journey of Desire*

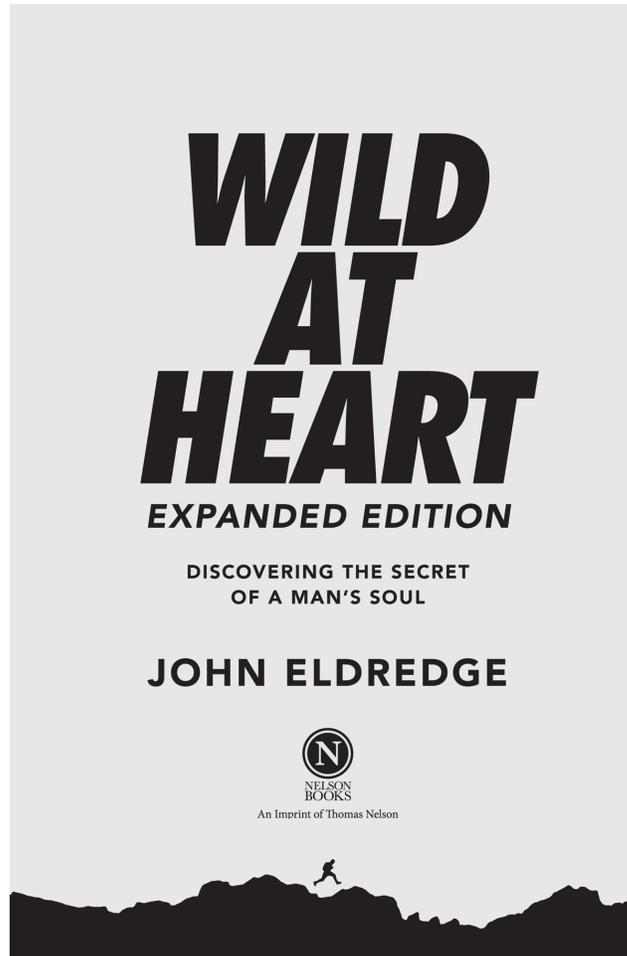
*Walking with God*

*Wild at Heart*

*Waking the Dead*

*Epic*

*Knowing the Heart of God*  
*Beautiful Outlaw*  
*Free to Live*  
*Captivating* (with Stasi Eldredge)  
*Fathered by God*  
*Love and War* (with Stasi Eldredge)  
*Killing Lions* (with Samuel Eldredge)  
*Moving Mountains*  
*All Things New*  
*Get Your Life Back*



*Wild at Heart Expanded Edition*

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For Samuel, Blaine, and Luke.  
I love your warrior hearts.  
You still have what it takes.

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## **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 man, 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.

Jesus gave us a beautiful and simple test for the measure of anything when he said, almost offhand, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16 NASB). A cut-to-the-chase test. You can hold it up to reveal a church, movement, man, or nation. What is the fruit? What does it leave in its wake? I’ve found it an immediate and revealing test.

And I am humbled to say, the fruit of this little book has been, well, unlike anything I’ve ever seen. Utterly phenomenal. It has healed the lives of prisoners

in Colombia, set the hearts of Catholic priests free in Slovakia. It has reached the halls of Congress and the back rooms of homeless shelters, restored the families of men in Australia, launched a movement of freedom and redemption in men around the world. *It works*. But you needn't take my word for it. Come and see for yourself.

You will want to know that I also wrote a Field Manual to go along with it, a guided workbook that will deepen and ensure your experience with God here. Many men have found it helpful. We also created a video series that men have used in small “bands of brothers” with tremendous results.

May God find you through these pages and restore you as his man.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke that curves upwards and then downwards. The "o" and "h" are smaller and more fluidly connected to the "J".

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 who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly . . . who knows 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 neither know victory nor defeat.

**Teddy Roosevelt**

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

ONE

# ***WILD AT HEART***

A man's heart reflects the man . . .

**Proverbs 27:19**

However, the spiritual world 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**

**A**t 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, that holds little promise. A bull elk can easily cover miles of rugged country in no 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. 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 BEGINNINGS

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ([Gen. 2:4–8](#))

Eve was created within the lush beauty of Eden’s garden. But Adam, if you’ll notice, was created from the earth itself, from the clay. In the record of our beginnings, the [second](#) chapter of Genesis makes it clear: man was born from the outback, from the untamed part of creation. Afterward he is 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 had it. “I am not alive in a taxi. 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 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 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 digital, modular, nonfat, zip lock, franchised, online, or microwavable. Where there are no deadlines, smartphones, 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 was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness.

Whatever else those explorers were after, they were also searching for them-

selves.

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 found on television or on his smartphone. 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.

## WESTWARD EXPANSION AGAINST THE SOUL

The way a man's life unfolds nowadays tends to drive his heart into remote regions of the soul. Endless hours at a computer screen; selling shoes at the mall; meetings, relentless texts, phone calls. The business world—where the majority of American men live and die—requires a man to be efficient and punctual. Corporate policies and procedures are designed with one aim: to harness a man to the plow and make him produce. But the soul refuses to be harnessed; it longs for passion, for freedom, for *life*. ♣ As D. H. Lawrence said, "I am not a mechanism."<sup>1</sup> A man needs to feel the rhythms of the earth; he needs to have in hand something real—the tiller of a boat, a set of reins, the roughness of rope, or sim-

<sup>1</sup> D. H. Lawrence, "Healing," in *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: A Poetry Anthology*, ed. Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 113.

ply a shovel. Can a man live all his days to keep his fingernails clean and trim? Is that what a boy dreams of?

Society at large can't make up its mind about men. Having spent the last thirty years redefining masculinity into something more sensitive, safe, manageable, and, well, feminine, it now berates men for not being men 🪓. Boys will be boys, they sigh. As though if a man were to truly grow up he would forsake wilderness and wanderlust and settle down, be at home forever in Aunt Polly's parlor. "Where are all the *real* men?" is regular fare for talk shows and new books. "You asked them to be women," I want to say 🪓. The result is a gender confusion never experienced at such a wide level in the history of the world.

How can a man know he is one when his highest aim is minding his manners?

And then, alas, there is the church. Christianity, as it currently exists, has done damage to masculinity. When all is said and done, I think most men in the church believe that God put them on the earth to be a good boy 🪓. The problem with men, we are told, is that they don't know how to keep their promises, be spiritual leaders, talk to their wives, or raise their children. But, if they try real hard they can reach the lofty summit of becoming . . . a nice guy. That's what we hold up as models of Christian maturity: Really Nice Guys. We don't smoke, drink, or swear; that's what makes us *men*. Now let me ask my male readers: In all your boyhood dreams growing up, did you ever dream of becoming a Nice Guy? (Ladies, was the prince of your dreams dashing . . . or merely nice?)

Really now—do I overstate my case?

Walk into most churches in America, have a look around, and ask yourself this question: What is a Christian man? Don't listen to what is said; look at what you find there. There is no doubt about it. You'd have to admit a Christian man is . . . bored 🪓. At a recent church retreat I was talking with a guy in his fifties, listening really, about his own journey as a man. "I've pretty much tried for the last twenty years to be a good man as the church defines it." Intrigued, I asked him to say what he thought that was. He paused for a long moment. "Dutiful," he said. "And

separated from his heart.” *A perfect description, I thought. Sadly right on the mark.*

As Robert Bly lamented in *Iron John*, “Some women want a passive man if they want a man at all; the church wants a tamed man—they are called priests; the university wants a domesticated man—they are called tenure-track people; the corporation wants a . . . sanitized, hairless, shallow man.”<sup>2</sup> It all comes together as a sort of westward expansion against the masculine soul. And thus the *heart* of a man is driven into the high country, into remote places, like a wounded animal looking for cover. Women know this, and lament that they have no access to their man’s heart. Men know it, too, but are often unable to explain why their heart is missing. They know their heart is on the run, but they often do not know where to pick up the trail. **The church wags its head and wonders why it can’t get more men to sign up for its programs. The answer is simply this: we have not invited a man to know and live from his deep heart.**

## THE INVITATION

But God made the masculine heart, set it within every man, and thereby offers him an *invitation*: come, and live out what I meant you to be. God *meant* something when he meant man, and if we are to ever find ourselves we must find that. What has he set in the masculine heart? Instead of asking what you think you ought to do to become a better man (or woman, for my female readers), I want to ask, *What makes you come alive? What stirs your heart?* The journey we face now is into a land foreign to most of us. We must head into country that has no clear trail. This charter for exploration takes us into our own hearts, into our deepest desires. As the playwright Christopher Fry said,

Life is a hypocrite if I can’t live

The way it moves me!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2015), 64, 6.

There are three desires I find written so deeply into my heart I know now I can no longer disregard them without losing my soul. They are core to who and what I am and yearn to be. I gaze into boyhood, I search the pages of Scripture and literature, I listen carefully to many, many men, and I am convinced these desires are universal, a clue into masculinity itself. They may be misplaced, forgotten, or misdirected, but in the heart of every man is a desperate desire for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to love. ✎ I want you to think of the films men love, the things they do with their free time, and especially the aspirations of little boys and see if I am not right on this.

## A BATTLE TO FIGHT

There's a photo on my wall of a little boy about five years old, with a crew cut, big cheeks, and an impish grin. It's an old photograph, and the color is fading, but the image is timeless. It's Christmas morning 1964, and I've just opened what may have been the best present any boy received on any Christmas ever—a set of two pearl-handled six-shooters, complete with black leather holsters, a red cowboy shirt with two wild mustangs embroidered on either breast, shiny black boots, red bandanna, and straw hat. I've donned the outfit and won't take it off for weeks because, you see, this is not a “costume” at all; it's an *identity*. Sure, one pant leg is tucked into my boot and the other is hanging out, but that only adds to my “fresh off the trail” persona. My thumbs are tucked inside my gun belt and my chest is out because I am armed and dangerous. Bad guys beware: this town's not big enough for the both of us.

Capes and swords, camouflage, bandannas and six-shooters, all the superhero outfits—these are the *uniforms* of boyhood. Little boys want to know they are powerful, they are dangerous ✎ , they are someone to be reckoned with. How many parents have tried in vain to prevent little Timmy from playing with guns?

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Fry, “A Sleep of Prisoners,” in *Selected Plays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 220.

Give it up. If you do not supply a boy with weapons, he will make them from whatever materials are at hand. My boys would chew their graham crackers into the shape of handguns at the breakfast table. Every stick or fallen branch was a spear, or better, a bazooka. Despite what many modern educators would say, this is not a psychological disturbance brought on by violent television or chemical imbalance. Healthy aggression is part of the masculine *design*; we are hardwired for it. If we believe that man is made in the image of God, then we would do well to remember that “the LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name” (Ex. 15:3). 🗡️ God is a warrior; man is a warrior. More on that to come.

Little girls do not invent games where large numbers of people die, where bloodshed is a prerequisite for having fun. Hockey, for example, was not a feminine creation. Nor was boxing. A boy wants to attack something—and so does a man, even if it’s only a little white ball on a tee. He wants to whack it into kingdom come. On the other hand, when my boys were growing up, they did not sit down to tea parties. They did not call their friends on the phone to talk about relationships. They grew bored of games that had no element of danger or competition or bloodshed. Cooperative games based on “relational interdependence” were complete nonsense. “No one is killed?” they asked, incredulous. “No one wins? What’s the point?” Look at the global popularity of the video games boys and men play; they are overwhelmingly games of battle. The universal nature of this ought to have convinced us by now: The boy is a warrior; the boy is his name. And those are not boyish antics he is doing. When boys play at war, they are rehearsing their part in a much bigger drama. One day, you just might need that boy to defend you.

Those Union soldiers who charged the stone walls at Bloody Angle; the Allied troops that hit the beaches at Normandy or the sands of Iwo Jima—what would they have done without this deep part of their heart? Life *needs* a man to be fierce—and fiercely devoted. The wounds he will take throughout his life will cause him to lose heart if all he has been trained to be is soft. This is especially true in the murky waters of relationships, where a man feels least prepared to

advance. As Bly said, “In every relationship something *fierce* is needed once in a while.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, this longing may have submerged from years of neglect, and a man may not feel that he is up to the battles he knows await him. Or it may have taken a very dark turn, as it has with inner-city gangs and terrorists. We need to heal the warrior heart in men, to be sure; set it in the service of goodness. Because the desire is there. Every man wants to play the hero. Every man *needs* to know that he is powerful. Women didn’t make *Braveheart* one of the most popular films of its decade. *Saving Private Ryan*, *Top Gun*, the Die Hard films, *Gladiator*, the Star Wars and Marvel series, all the superhero blockbusters—the movies a man loves reveal what his heart longs for, what is set inside him from the day of his birth.

Like it or not, there is something fierce in the heart of every man. *Every* man.

## AN ADVENTURE TO LIVE

“My mother loves to go to Europe on her vacations.” We were talking about our love of the West, a friend and I, and why he moved out here from the East Coast. “And that’s okay for her, I guess. There’s a lot of culture there. But I need wildness.” Our conversation was stirred by the film *Legends of the Fall*, the story of three young men coming of age in the early 1900s on their father’s ranch in Montana. Alfred, the eldest, is practical, pragmatic, cautious. He heads off to the big city to become a businessman and eventually, a politician. Yet something inside him dies. He becomes a hollow man. Samuel, the youngest, is still a boy in many ways, a tender child—literate, sensitive, timid. He is killed early in the film and we know he was not ready for battle.

Then there is Tristan, the middle son. He is wild at heart. It is Tristan who embodies the West—he catches and rides the wild stallion, fights the grizzly with a knife, and wins the beautiful woman. I have yet to meet a man who wants

<sup>4</sup> Bly, *Iron John*, 4.

to be Alfred or Samuel. I've yet to meet a woman who wants to marry one. There's a reason the American cowboy has taken on mythic proportions. He embodies a yearning every man knows from very young—to "go west," to find a place where he can be all he knows he was meant to be. To borrow Walter Brueggemann's description of God: "wild, dangerous, unfettered and free 🗡️."

Now, let me stop for a moment and make something clear. I am no great hunter. 🗡️ I didn't play college football. In fact, in college I weighed 135 pounds and wasn't much of an athlete. Despite my childhood dreams, I have never been a racecar driver or a fighter pilot. I have no interest in televised sports. (Okay, except March Madness and the World Cup.) I don't like cheap beer, and though I do have an old Landcruiser, its tires are not ridiculously large. I say this because I anticipate that many readers—good men and women—will be tempted to dismiss this as some sort of macho-man pep rally. Not at all. *Wild at Heart* is not about becoming a lumberjack and drinking motor oil. I am simply searching, as many men (and hopeful women) are, for an authentic masculinity 🗡️.

When winter failed to provide an adequate snow base, my boys would bring their sleds in the house and ride them down the stairs. My wife found them once with a rope out their second-story bedroom window, preparing to rappel down the side of the house. The recipe for fun is pretty simple when you're raising boys: add to any activity an element of danger, stir in a little exploration, add a dash of destruction, and you've got yourself a winner. The way they ski is a perfect example. Get to the top of the highest run, point your skis straight downhill and go, the faster the better. And this doesn't end with age; the stakes simply get higher.

A judge in his sixties, a real southern gentleman with a pinstriped suit and an elegant manner of speech, pulled me aside during a conference. Quietly, almost apologetically, he spoke of his love for sailing, for the open sea, and how he and a buddy eventually built their own boat. Then came a twinkle in his eye. "We were sailing off the coast of Bermuda a few years ago, when we were hit by a northeaster (a raging storm). Really, it came up out of nowhere. Twenty-foot swells in

a thirty-foot homemade boat. I thought we were all going to die.” A pause for dramatic effect, and then he confessed, “It was the best time of my life.”

Compare your experience watching the latest James Bond or Star Wars thriller with, say, going to Bible study. The guaranteed success of each new release makes it clear—adventure is written into the heart of a man. And it’s not just about having “fun.” Adventure *requires* something of us, puts us to the test. Though we may fear the test, at the same time we yearn to be tested, to discover that we have what it takes. 🍷 That’s why we set off down the Snake River against all sound judgment, why a buddy and I pressed on through grizzly country to find good fishing, why I went off to Washington, DC, as a young man to see if I could make it in those shark-infested waters. If a man has lost this desire, says he doesn’t want it, that’s only because he doesn’t know he has what it takes, believes that he will fail the test. And so he decides it’s better not to try. For reasons I hope to make clear later, most men hate the unknown and, like Cain, want to settle down and build their own city, get on top of their life.

But you can’t escape it—there is something wild in the heart of every man.

## A BEAUTY TO LOVE

Romeo has his Juliet, King Arthur fights for Guinevere, Robin rescues Maid Marian, and I will never forget the first time I kissed my grade-school sweetheart. It was in the fall of my seventh-grade year. I met Debbie in drama class, and fell absolutely head over heels. It was classic puppy love: I’d wait for her after rehearsals were over, carry her books back to her locker. We passed notes in class, talked on the phone at night. I had never paid girls much attention, really, until now. This desire awakens a bit later in a boy’s journey to manhood, but when it does his universe turns on its head. Anyway, I longed to kiss her but just couldn’t work up the courage—until the last night of the school play. The next day was summer vacation, she was going away, and I knew it was now or never. Backstage, in the dark, I slipped her a quick kiss and she returned a longer one.

Do you remember the scene from the movie *E.T.*, where the boy flies across the moon on his bike? Though I rode my little Schwinn home that night, I'm certain I never touched the ground.

There is nothing so inspiring to a man as a beautiful woman. She'll make you want to charge the castle, slay the giant, leap across the parapets. Or maybe, hit a home run 🏏. One day during a Little League game, my son Samuel was so inspired. He liked baseball, but most boys starting out aren't sure they really have it in them to be a great player. Sam was our firstborn, and like so many firstborns he was cautious. He always let a few pitches go by before he took a swing, and when he did, it was never a full swing; every one of his hits up till that point were in the infield. Anyway, just as Sam stepped up to bat this one afternoon, his friend from down the street, a cute little blonde girl, showed up along the first-base line. Standing up on tiptoe she yelled out his name and waved to Sam. Pretending he didn't notice her, he broadened his stance, gripped the bat a little tighter, looked at the pitcher with something fierce in his eye. First one over the plate he knocked into center field.

A man wants to be the hero to the beauty.

Young men going off to war carry a photo of their sweetheart in their wallet. Men who fly combat missions will paint a beauty on the side of their aircraft; the crews of the WWII B-17 bomber gave those flying fortresses names like *Me and My Gal* or the *Memphis Belle*. What would Robin Hood or King Arthur be without the woman they love? Lonely men fighting lonely battles. Indiana Jones and James Bond just wouldn't be the same without a beauty at their side, and inevitably they must fight for her. You see, it's not just that a man needs a battle to fight; he needs someone to fight for 🏏. Remember Nehemiah's words to the few brave souls defending a wall-less Jerusalem? "Don't be afraid . . . fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."<sup>5</sup> The battle itself is never enough; a man yearns for romance. It's not enough to be a

<sup>5</sup>Nehemiah 4:14 NIV

hero; it's that he is a hero *to someone* in particular, to the woman he loves. Adam was given the wind and the sea, the horse and the hawk, but as God himself said, things were just not right until there was Eve.

Yes, there is something passionate in the heart of every man.

## THE FEMININE HEART

There are also three desires that I have found essential to a woman's heart, which are not entirely different from a man's and yet they remain distinctly feminine. Not every woman wants a battle to fight, but every woman yearns to be fought for. Listen to the longing of a woman's heart: she wants to be more than noticed—she wants to be *wanted*. She wants to be pursued. “I just want to be a priority to someone,” a friend in her thirties told me. And her childhood dreams of a knight in shining armor coming to rescue her are not girlish fantasies; they are the core of the feminine heart and the life she knows she was made for. So Frederick comes back for Jo in *Little Women*, Edward returns to pledge his undying love for Eleanor in *Sense and Sensibility*, and every superhero has his love he must fight for.

Every woman also wants an adventure to share. One of my wife's favorite films is *The Man from Snowy River*. She loves the scene where Jessica, the beautiful young heroine, is rescued by Jim, her hero, and together they ride on horseback through the wilds of the Australian wilderness. “I want to be Isabo in *Ladyhawk*,” confessed another female friend. “To be cherished, pursued, fought for—yes. But also, I want to be strong and a *part* of the adventure.” So many men make the mistake of thinking that the woman is the adventure. But that is where the relationship immediately goes downhill. A woman doesn't want to be the adventure; she wants to be caught up into something greater than herself. Our friend went on to say, “I know myself and I know I'm not the adventure. So when a man makes me the point, I grow bored immediately. I know that story. Take me into one I don't know.”

And finally, every woman wants to have a beauty to unveil. Not to conjure, but to unveil. ✎ Most women feel the pressure to be beautiful from very young, but that is not what I speak of. There is also a deep desire to simply and truly *be* the beauty, and be delighted in. Most little girls will remember playing dress-up, or wedding day, or “twirling skirts,” those flowing dresses that were perfect for spinning around in. She’ll put her pretty dress on, come into the living room, and twirl. What she longs for is to capture her daddy’s delight. My wife remembers standing on top of the coffee table as a girl of five or six, and singing her heart out. *Do you see me?* asks the heart of every girl. *And are you captivated by what you see?*

The world kills a woman’s heart when it tells her to be tough, efficient, and independent. ✎ Sadly, Christianity has missed her heart as well. Walk into most churches in America, have a look around, and ask yourself this question: What is a Christian woman? Again, don’t listen to what is said; look at what you find there. There is no doubt about it. You’d have to admit a Christian woman is . . . tired. All we’ve offered the feminine soul is pressure to “be a good servant.” No one is fighting for her heart; there is no grand adventure to be swept up in; and every woman doubts very much that she has any beauty to unveil. ✎

## BY WAY OF THE HEART

Which would you rather be said of you: “Harry? Sure I know him. He’s a real sweet guy.” Or, “Yes, I know about Harry. He’s a dangerous man . . . in a really good way.” Ladies, how about you? Which man would you rather have as your mate? (Some women, hurt by masculinity gone bad, might argue for the “safe” man . . . and then wonder why, years later, there is no passion in their marriage, why he is distant and cold ✎ .) And as for your own femininity, which would you rather have said of you—that you are a “tireless worker,” or that you are a “captivating woman”?

I rest my case.

What if? What if those deep desires in our hearts are telling us the truth, revealing to us the life we were *meant* to live? God gave us eyes so that we might see; he gave us ears that we might hear; he gave us wills that we might choose, and he gave us hearts that we might *live*. The way we handle the heart is everything. A man must *know* he is powerful; he must *know* he has what it takes. A woman must *know* she is beautiful; she must *know* she is worth fighting for. “But you don’t understand,” said one woman to me. “I’m living with a hollow man.” No, it’s in there. His heart is there. It may have evaded you, like a wounded animal, always out of reach, one step beyond your catching. But it’s there. “I don’t know when I died,” said another man. “But I feel like I’m just using up oxygen.” I understand. Your heart may feel dead and gone, but it’s there. Something wild and strong and valiant, just waiting to be released.

## TWO

# ***THE WILD ONE WHOSE IMAGE WE BEAR***

How would telling people to be nice to one another get a man crucified? What government would execute Mister Rogers or Captain Kangaroo?

**Philip Yancey**

Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.

**C. S. Lewis**

This is a stem Of that victorious stock; and let us fear The native mightiness and fate of  
him.

Henry V

**R**emember that little guy I told you about, with the shiny boots and a pair of six-shooters? The best part of the story is that it wasn't all pretend. I had a place to live out those dreams. My grandfather, my father's father, was a cowboy. He worked his own cattle ranch in eastern Oregon, between the desert sage and the Snake River. And though I was raised in the suburbs, the redemption of my life and the real training grounds for my own masculine journey took place on that ranch, where I spent my boyhood summers. Oh, that every boy should be so lucky. To have your days filled with tractors and pickup trucks, horses and roping steers, running through the fields, fishing in the ponds. I was Huck Finn for three wonderful months every year. How I loved it when my grandfather—"Pop" is what I called him—would look at me, his thumbs tucked in his belt, smile, and say, "Saddle up."

One afternoon Pop took me into town, to my favorite store. It was a combination feed and tack/hardware/ranch supply shop. The classic dry goods store of the Old West, a wonderland of tools and equipment, saddles, bridles and blankets, fishing gear, pocketknives, and rifles. It smelled of hay and linseed oil, of leather and gunpowder and kerosene—all the things that thrill a boy's heart. That summer Pop was having a problem with an overrun pigeon population on the ranch. He hated the dirty birds, feared they were carrying diseases to the cattle. "Flying rats," is what he called them. Pop walked straight over to the firearms counter, picked out a BB rifle and a quart-sized milk carton with about a million BBs in it, and handed them to me. The old shopkeeper looked a bit surprised as he stared down at me, squinting over his glasses. "Isn't he a bit young for that?" Pop put his hand on my shoulder and smiled. "This is my grandson, Hal. He's riding shotgun for me."

## WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

I may have walked into that feed store a squirrely little kid, but I walked out as Sheriff Wyatt Earp, the Lone Ranger, Kit Carson. I had an identity and a place in the story. I was invited to be dangerous. If a boy is to become a man, if a man is to know he is one, this is not an option 🗡️.

A man *has* to know where he comes from, and what he's made of.

One of the turning points in my good friend Craig's life—maybe *the* turning point—was the day he took back his father's name. Craig's father, Al McConnell, was killed in the Korean War when Craig was only four months old. His mother remarried and Craig was adopted by his stepdad, a sour old navy captain who would call Craig a “seagull” whenever he was angry with him. Talk about an identity, a place in the story. He'd say, “Craig, you're nothing but a seagull—all you're good for is sitting, squawking, and sh—ing.” When Craig was a man he learned the truth of his heritage—how his dad was a warrior who had been cut down in battle. How if he had lived, he was planning on going to the mission field, to take the gospel to a place no one else had ever gone before. Craig discovered that his real great-grandfather was William McConnell, the first Protestant missionary to Central America, a man who risked his life many times to bring Christ to a lost people. Craig changed his name to McConnell and with it took back a much more noble identity, a much more dangerous place in the story. Would that we were all so fortunate. Many men are ashamed of their fathers. “You're just like your father” is an arrow many a bitter mother fires at her son. Most of the men I know are trying hard *not* to become like their fathers. But who does that leave them to follow after? From whom will they derive their sense of strength?

Maybe it would be better to turn our search to the headwaters, to that mighty root from which these branches grow. Who is this One we allegedly come from, whose image every man bears? What is he like? In a man's search for his strength, telling him that he's made in the image of God may not sound like a

whole lot of encouragement at first. To most men, God is either distant or he is weak—the very thing they’d report of their earthly fathers. Be honest now—what is your image of Jesus *as a man*? “Isn’t he sort of meek and mild?” a friend remarked. “I mean, the pictures I have of him show a gentle guy with children all around. Kind of like Mother Teresa.” Yes, those are the pictures I’ve seen myself in many churches. In fact, those are the *only* pictures I’ve seen of Jesus. They leave me with the impression that he was the world’s nicest guy. Mister Rogers with a beard. Telling me to be like him feels like telling me to go limp and passive. Be nice. Be swell. Be like Mother Teresa.

I’d much rather be told to be like William Wallace 🗡️.

## BRAVEHEART INDEED

Wallace, if you’ll recall, is the hero of the film *Braveheart*. He is the warrior poet who came as the liberator of Scotland in the early 1300s—a true historical figure beloved by Scots to this day. In the story, when Wallace arrives on the scene, Scotland has been under the iron fist of English monarchs for centuries. The latest king is the worst of them all—Edward the Longshanks. A ruthless oppressor, Longshanks has devastated Scotland, killing her sons and raping her daughters. The Scottish nobles, supposed protectors of their flock, have instead piled heavy burdens on the backs of the people while they line their own purses by cutting deals with Longshanks. Wallace is the first to defy the English oppressors. Outraged, Longshanks sends his armies to the field of Stirling to crush the rebellion. The highlanders come down, in groups of hundreds and thousands. It’s time for a showdown. But the nobles, cowards all, don’t want a fight. They want a treaty with England that will buy them more lands and power. They are typical Pharisees, bureaucrats . . . religious administrators.

Without a leader to follow, the Scots begin to lose heart. One by one, then in larger numbers, they start to flee. At that moment Wallace rides in with his band of warriors, blue warpaint on their faces, ready for battle. Ignoring the

nobles—who have gone to parley with the English captains to get another deal—Wallace goes straight for the hearts of the fearful Scots. “Sons of Scotland . . . you have come to fight as free men, and free men you are.”<sup>1</sup> He gives them an identity and a reason to fight. He reminds them that a life lived in fear is no life at all, that every last one of them will die someday. ✎ “And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!”<sup>2</sup> He tells them they have what it takes. At the end of his stirring speech, the men are cheering. They are ready. Then Wallace’s friend asks,

“Fine speech. Now what do we do?”

“Just be yourselves.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to pick a fight.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, someone is going to stand up to the English tyrants. While the nobles jockey for position, Wallace rides out and interrupts the parley. He picks a fight with the English overlords and the Battle of Stirling ensues—a battle that begins the liberation of Scotland.

Now—is Jesus more like Mother Teresa or William Wallace? The answer is, it depends. If you’re a leper, an outcast, a pariah of society whom no one has ever touched because you are “unclean,” if all you have ever longed for is just one kind word, then Christ is the incarnation of tender mercy. He reaches out and touches you. On the other hand, if you’re a Pharisee, one of those self-appointed doctrine police . . . watch out. ✎ On more than one occasion Jesus “picks a fight”

<sup>1</sup> *Braveheart*, directed by Mel Gibson (Seattle: Icon Productions and The Ladd Company, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> *Braveheart*.

<sup>3</sup> *Braveheart*.

with those notorious hypocrites. Take the story of the crippled woman in [Luke 13](#). Here's the background: The Pharisees are like the Scottish nobles—they, too, load heavy burdens on the backs of God's people but do not lift a finger to help them. What is more, they are so bound to the Law that they insist it is a sin to heal someone on the Sabbath, for that would be doing "work." They have twisted God's intentions so badly they think that man was made for the Sabbath, rather than the Sabbath for man ([Mark 2:27](#)). Christ has already had a number of skirmishes with them, some over this very issue, leaving those quislings "wild with rage" ([Luke 6:11 NLT](#)).

Does Jesus tiptoe around the issue next time, so as not to "rock the boat" (the preference of so many of our leaders today)? Does he drop the subject in order to "preserve church unity"? Nope. He walks right into it, he baits them, he picks a fight. Let's pick up the story there 🗡️:

One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are healed of your sickness!" Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised and thanked God! But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath." ([Luke 13:10–14 NLT](#))

Can you believe this guy? What a weasel. Talk about missing the point. Christ is furious:

But the Lord replied, "You hypocrite! You work on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from their stalls on the Sabbath and lead them out for water? Wasn't it necessary for me, even on the Sabbath day, to free this dear woman from the bondage in which Satan has held her for eighteen years?" This shamed his enemies. And all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did. ([Luke 13:15–17 NLT](#))

## A BATTLE TO FIGHT

Christ draws the enemy out, exposes him for what he is, and shames him in front of everyone. The Lord is a *gentleman*?! Not if you're in the service of his enemy. God has a battle to fight, and the battle is for our freedom. As Tremper Longman said, "Virtually every book of the Bible—Old and New Testaments—and almost every page tells us about God's warring activity."<sup>4</sup> I wonder if the Egyptians who kept Israel under the whip would describe Yahweh as a Really Nice Guy? Plagues, pestilence, the death of every firstborn—that doesn't seem very gentlemanly now, does it? What would Miss Manners have to say about taking the promised land? Does wholesale slaughter fit under "Calling on Your New Neighbors"?

You remember that wild man, Samson? He's got a pretty impressive masculine résumé: killed a lion with his bare hands, pummeled and stripped thirty Philistines when they used his wife against him, and finally, after they burned her to death, he killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey. Not a guy to mess with. But did you notice? All those events happened when "the *Spirit of the LORD* came upon him" (*Judg. 15:14*, emphasis added). Now, let me make one thing clear: I am not advocating a sort of "macho man" image. I'm not suggesting we all head off to the gym and then to the beach to kick sand in the faces of wimpy Pharisees. I am attempting to rescue us from a very, very mistaken image we have of God—especially of Jesus—and therefore of men as his image-bearers. Dorothy Sayers wrote that the church has "very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah," making him "a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."<sup>5</sup> Is that the God you find in the Bible? To Job—who has questioned God's strength—he replied:

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Dan B. Allender and Dr. Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 111.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004), 4.

Do you give the horse his strength  
or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?  
Do you make him leap like a locust,  
striking terror with his proud snorting?  
He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength,  
and charges into the fray.  
He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;  
he does not shy away from the sword.  
The quiver rattles against his side,  
along with the flashing spear and lance.  
In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;  
he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.  
At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, “Aha!”  
He catches the scent of battle from afar,  
the shout of commanders and the battle cry. (Job 39:19–25)

The war horse, the stallion, embodies the fierce heart of his Maker. And so do we. Every man is “a stem of that victorious stock.” Or at least, he was originally. You can tell what kind of man you’ve got simply by noting the impact he has on you. Does he make you bored? Does he scare you with his doctrinal Nazism? Does he make you want to scream because he’s just so very nice? In the garden of Gethsemane, in the dead of night, a mob of thugs “carrying torches, lanterns and weapons” comes to take Christ away. Note the cowardice of it—why didn’t they take him during the light of day, down in the town? Does Jesus shrink back in fear? No, he goes to face them head-on.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he,” *they drew back and fell to the ground.*

Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?”

And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these

men go.” (John 18:4–8, emphasis added)

Talk about strength. The sheer force of Jesus’ bold presence knocks the whole posse over. A few years ago a good man gave me a copy of a poem Ezra Pound wrote about Christ, called “Ballad of the Goodly Fere.” It’s become my favorite. Written from the perspective of one of the men who followed Christ, perhaps Simon Zelotes, it’ll make a lot more sense if you know that *ferē* is an Old English word that means *mate*, or *companion*:

Ha’ we lost the goodliest fere o’ all  
For the priests and the gallows tree?  
Aye lover he was of brawny men,  
O’ ships and the open sea.

When they came wi’ a host to take Our Man  
His smile was good to see,  
“First let these go!” quo’ our Goodly Fere,  
“Or I’ll see ye damned,” says he.

Aye he sent us out through the crossed high spears  
And the scorn of his laugh rang free,  
“Why took ye not me when I walked about  
Alone in the town?” says he.

Oh we drunk his “Hale” in the good red wine  
When we last made company,  
No capon priest was the Goodly Fere  
But a man o’ men was he.

I ha’ seen him drive a hundred men  
Wi’ a bundle o’ cords swung free,  
That they took the high and holy house  
For their pawn and treasury . . .

I ha’ seen him cow a thousand men  
On the hills o’ Galilee,  
They whined as he walked out calm between,

Wi' his eyes like the grey o' the sea,  
Like the sea that brooks no voyaging  
With the winds unleashed and free,  
Like the sea that he cowed at Genseret  
Wi' twey words spoke' suddenly.

A master of men was the Goodly Fere,  
A mate of the wind and sea,  
If they think they ha' slain our Goodly Fere  
They are fools eternally.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is no “capon priest,” no pale-faced altar boy with his hair parted in the middle, speaking softly, avoiding confrontation, who at last gets himself killed because he has no way out. He works with wood, commands the loyalty of dockworkers. He is the Lord of hosts, the captain of angel armies. And when Christ returns, he is at the head of a dreadful company, mounted on a white horse, with a double-edged sword, his robe dipped in blood ([Rev. 19](#)). No question about it—our God is a warrior!

## WHAT ABOUT ADVENTURE?

If you have any doubts as to whether God loves wildness, spend a night in the woods—alone. Take a walk out in a thunderstorm. Go for a paddle with a pod of killer whales. Get a bull moose mad at you. Whose idea was this, anyway? The Great Barrier Reef with its great white sharks, the jungles of India with their tigers, the deserts of the Southwest with all those rattlesnakes—would you describe them as “nice” places? Most of the earth is not safe; but it's *good*. That struck me a little too late when hiking in to find the upper Kenai River in Alaska. My buddy Craig and I were after the salmon and giant rainbow trout that live in

<sup>6</sup> Ezra Pound, “Ballad of the Goodly Fere,” in *New Selected Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Seiburth (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2010), 14.

those icy waters. We were warned about bears, but didn't really take it seriously until we were deep into the woods. Grizzly sign was everywhere—salmon strewn about the trail, their heads bitten off. Piles of droppings the size of small dogs. Huge claw marks on the trees, about head-level. *We're dead*, I thought. *What are we doing out here?*

It then occurred to me that after God made all this, he pronounced it *good*, for heaven's sake. It's his way of letting us know he rather prefers adventure, danger, risk, the element of surprise. This whole creation is unapologetically *wild*. God loves it that way.

Most of us do everything we can to *reduce* the element of risk in our lives. We wear our seat belts, watch our cholesterol, and practice birth control. I know some couples who have decided against having children altogether; they simply aren't willing to chance the heartache children often bring. What if they are born with a crippling disease? What if they turn their backs on us, and God? What if . . . ?

Yet this is the world God has made—a world that requires us to live with risk. Because God wants us to live by *faith* . “Then the Lord intervened” is perhaps the single most common phrase about him in Scripture, in one form or another. Look at the stories he writes. There's the one where the children of Israel are pinned against the Red Sea, no way out, with Pharaoh and his army barreling down on them in murderous fury. Then God shows up. There's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who get rescued only *after* they're thrown into the fiery furnace. Then God shows up. He lets the mob kill Jesus, bury him . . . then he shows up. Do you know why God loves writing such incredible stories? Because *he loves to come through*. He loves to show us that he has what it takes.

Against Goliath, a seasoned soldier and a trained killer, he sends . . . a freckle-faced little shepherd kid with a slingshot. Most commanders going into battle want as many infantry as they can get. God cuts Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. Then he equips the ragtag little band that's left with torches and watering pots. It's not just a battle or two that God takes his chances

with either ✍️ . Have you thought about his handling of the gospel? God needs to get a message out to the human race, without which they will perish . . . forever. What's the plan? First, he starts with the most unlikely group ever: a couple of prostitutes, a few fishermen with no better than a second-grade education, a tax collector. Then, he passes the ball to us. Unbelievable.

Trying to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free will has stumped the church for ages. We must humbly acknowledge that there's a great deal of mystery involved, but for those aware of the discussion, I am not advocating open theism. Nevertheless, there is definitely something wild in the heart of God. He loves adventure; he made little boys.

## A BEAUTY TO FIGHT FOR

And all his wildness and all his fierceness are inseparable from his romantic heart. That theologians have missed this says more about theologians than it does about God. Music, wine, poetry, sunsets . . . those were *his* inventions, not ours. We simply discovered what he had already thought of. Lovers and honeymooners choose places like Hawaii, the Bahamas, or Tuscany as a backdrop for their love. But whose idea was Hawaii, the Bahamas, and Tuscany? Let's bring this a little closer to home. Whose idea was it to create the human form in such a way that a kiss could be so delicious? And he didn't stop there, as only lovers know. Starting with her eyes, King Solomon is feasting on his beloved through the course of their wedding night. He loves her hair, her smile; her lips "drop sweetness as the honeycomb" and "milk and honey are under her tongue." You'll notice he's working his way *down*:

Your neck is like the tower of David,  
built with elegance . . .  
Your two breasts are like two fawns . . .

Until the day breaks  
and the shadows flee,

I will go to the mountain of myrrh  
and to the hill of incense. (Song 4:4–6)

And his wife responds by saying, “Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits” (Song 4:16). What kind of God would put the Song of Songs in the canon of Holy Scripture? Really, now, is it conceivable that such an erotic book would have been placed in the Bible by the Christians *you* know? And what a delicate, poetic touch, “two fawns.” This is no pornography, but there is no way to try to explain it all as “theological metaphor.” That’s just nonsense. In fact, God himself actually speaks in person in the Songs, once in the entire book. Solomon has taken his beloved to his bedchamber and the two are doing everything that lovers do there. God blesses it all, whispering, “Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers” (Song 5:1), offering, as if needed, his own encouragement. And then he pulls the shades.

God is a romantic at heart, and he has his own bride to fight for. He is a jealous lover, and his jealousy is for the hearts of his people and for their freedom.

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch . . .  
As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,  
so will your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:1, 5)

And though she has committed adultery against him, though she has fallen captive to his enemy, God is willing to move heaven and earth to win her back. He will stop at nothing to set her free:

Who is this coming from Edom,  
from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson?  
Who is this, robed in splendor,  
striding forward in the greatness of his strength?  
“It is I, speaking in righteousness,  
mighty to save.”

Why are your garments red,  
like those of one treading the winepress?  
“I have trodden the winepress alone;  
from the nations no one was with me.  
I trampled them in my anger  
and trod them down in my wrath;  
their blood spattered my garments,  
and I stained all my clothing.  
For the day of vengeance was in my heart,  
and the year of my redemption has come.” (Isa. 63:1–4)

Whoa. Talk about a Braveheart. This is one fierce, wild, and passionate guy. I have never heard anyone in church talk like that. But this is the God of heaven and earth. The Lion of Judah.

## LITTLE BOYS AND LITTLE GIRLS

And this is our true Father, the stock from which the heart of man is drawn. Strong, courageous love. As George MacDonald wrote,

Thou art my life—I the brook, thou the spring.  
Because thine eyes are open, I can see;  
Because thou art thyself, 'tis therefore I am me.<sup>7</sup>

I’ve noticed that so often our word to boys is *don’t*. Don’t climb on that, don’t break anything, don’t be so aggressive, don’t be so noisy, don’t be so messy, don’t take such crazy risks. But God’s design—which he placed in boys as the picture of himself—is a resounding YES. Be fierce, be wild, be passionate.

Now, none of this is to diminish the fact that a woman bears God’s image as well. The masculine and feminine run throughout all creation. As Lewis said, “Gender is a reality and a more fundamental reality than sex . . . a fundamental

<sup>7</sup> George MacDonald, *Diary of an Old Soul* (Eastford: Martino Publishing, 2015), 11.

polarity which divides all created beings.”<sup>8</sup> I am very aware of the pain and confusion the “gender debate” has caused many dear people. I believe God’s heart aches over his sons and daughters, and their search for identity and belovedness. So let’s go back for a moment to the origins of humanity, to hear again what our loving Father wanted to say about us from the start:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ([Gen. 1:26–27](#)).

Male and female he created us. Gender is a source of great dignity, and beauty, honor, and mutual respect. In this rather sensitive hour, many good people fear naming the differences between men and women at all, largely because they believe it will usher in discrimination and divisiveness. But this need not be. When we understand just how glorious gender is, how distinct and complementary, how unique and utterly worthy of respect on all sides, I think we can find a better way in our relations. After all, Jesus—the most loving man ever—seemed to think that gender was essential to human understanding:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’” ([Matt. 19:4](#)).

Gender simply must be at the level of the soul, in the deep and everlasting places within us. God doesn’t make generic people; he makes something very distinct—a man or a woman. In other words, there is a masculine heart and a feminine heart, which in their own ways reflect or portray to the world God’s heart. A male lion is awesome to behold, but have you ever seen a lioness? There is also something wild in the heart of a woman, but it is feminine to the core.

Eve and all her daughters are also “a stem of that victorious stock,” but in a

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 172.

wonderfully different way. As a counselor and a friend, and especially as a husband, I've been honored to be welcomed into the deep heart of Eve. Often when I am with a woman, I find myself quietly wondering, *What is she telling me about God? I know he wants to say something to the world through Eve—what is it?* And after years of hearing the heart-cry of women, I am convinced beyond a doubt of this: God wants to be loved. He wants to be a priority to someone. How could we have missed this? From cover to cover, from beginning to end, the cry of God's heart is, "Why won't you choose me?" It is amazing to me how humble, how *vulnerable* God is on this point. "You will . . . find me," says the Lord, "when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). In other words, "Look for me, pursue me—I want you to pursue me." Amazing. As Tozer said, "God waits to be wanted."<sup>9</sup>

And certainly we see that God wants not merely an adventure, but an adventure to *share*. He didn't have to make us, but he *wanted* to. Though he knows the name of every star and his kingdom spans galaxies, God delights in being a part of our lives. Do you know why he often doesn't answer prayer right away? Because he wants to talk to us, and sometimes that's the only way to get us to stay and *talk* to him. His heart is for relationship, for shared adventure to the core.

And yes, God has a beauty to unveil. There's a reason that a man is captivated by a woman. Eve is the crown of creation. If you follow the Genesis narrative carefully, you'll see that each new stage of creation is better than the one before. First, all is formless, empty and dark. God begins to fashion the raw materials, like an artist working with a rough sketch or a lump of clay. Light and dark, land and sea, earth and sky—it's beginning to take shape. With a word, the whole floral kingdom adorns the earth. Sun, moon, and stars fill the sky. Surely and certainly, his work expresses greater detail and definition. Next come fish and fowl, porpoises and red-tailed hawks. The wild animals are next, all those amazing creatures. A trout is a wonderful creature, but a horse is truly magnificent. Can you hear the crescendo starting to swell, like a great symphony building and

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications Inc., 1948), 17.

surging higher and higher?

Then comes Adam, the triumph of God's handiwork. It is not to any member of the animal kingdom that God says, "You are my very image, the icon of my likeness." Adam bears the likeness of God in his fierce, wild, and passionate heart. And yet, there is one more finishing touch. There is Eve. Creation comes to its high point, its climax with her. She is God's finishing touch. As Paul later wrote, man "is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7). And all Adam can say is, "Wow." Eve embodies the beauty and the mystery and the tender vulnerability of God. As the poet William Blake said, "The nakedness of woman is the work of God. . . . The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of Eternity too great for the eye of man."<sup>10</sup> The reason a woman wants a beauty to unveil, the reason she asks, *Do you delight in me?* is simply that God does as well. God is captivating beauty. As David prayed, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may . . . gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Ps. 27:4). Can there be any doubt that God wants to be *worshiped*? That he wants to be seen, and for us to be captivated by what we see? As C. S. Lewis wrote,

The beauty of the female is the root of joy to the female as well as to the male . . . to desire the enjoying of her own beauty is the obedience of Eve, and to both it is in the lover that the beloved tastes of her own delightfulness.<sup>11</sup>

This is far too simple an outline, I admit. There is so much more to say, and these are not hard and rigid categories. A man needs to be tender at times, and a woman will sometimes need to be fierce. But if a man is only tender, we know something is deeply wrong, and if a woman is only fierce, we sense she is not what she was meant to be. If you'll look at the essence of little boys and little girls, I think you'll find I am not far from my mark. Strength and beauty. As the

<sup>10</sup> William Blake, "Proverbs of Hell" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1906), 15.

<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 61.

psalmist said,

One thing God has spoken,  
two things have I heard:  
that you, O God, are strong,  
and that you, O Lord, are loving. (Ps. 62:11–12)