

Excerpts from the

WILD AT HEART

Field Manual

*A Personal Guide to Discovering
the Secret of Your Masculine Soul*

By John Eldredge

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CHAPTER 1 WILD AT HEART

This is not a book about the seven things a man ought to do to be a nicer guy. It is a book about the recovery and release of a man's heart, his passions, his true nature, which he has been given by God. It's an invitation to rush the fields at Bannockburn, to go West, to leap from the falls and save the beauty. For if you are going to know who you truly are as a man, if you are going to love a woman deeply and not pass on your confusion to your children, you simply must get your heart back. You must head up into the high country of the soul, into wild and uncharted regions and track down that elusive prey.

SETTING OUT

Write down a handful of movies that have stirred your heart over the years. Who would you love to be in those movies? Why?

A BATTLE TO FIGHT

Who were your boyhood heroes? Did they have a great battle to fight? Look back now at your favorite movies you jotted down. What is the hero's great battle?

ADVENTURE

What were some of the "great adventures" you had—or dreamed of or read about—as a boy? Describe an adventure you've had in more recent years, a time when you really came alive. What happened?

ON WILDERNESS

On page 4 of the book, I mention a Northface ad that says, "I am not alive in an office. I am not alive in a taxicab. I am not alive on a sidewalk." Where do you most come alive?

A BEAUTY TO RESCUE

Remember the first time you fell in love? What was it about her that turned your head, captured your heart? Think back again to the movie roles you'd love to play—who are the damsels you'd love to rescue? Have you sensed that your passion to rescue the beauty is a good thing, part of your destiny?



CHAPTER 2

THE WILD ONE WHOSE IMAGE WE BEAR

This is our true Father, the stock from which the heart of every man is drawn. From which your heart is drawn. What if you were an orphan, and you had never known your true father? What if you then somehow learned the truth—that your father was in fact a hero of some kind, a fighter pilot, the most decorated man in his squadron, who shot down dozens of planes single-handedly. On top of that, what if it was said by those who knew your father well that you truly are his son, a chip off the old block? 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.

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Read this: Chapter 2

Watch this: *Braveheart*

Do This: Look through any photos you have of your father.

SETTING OUT

What was your father's occupation? What did he like to do? What was he like emotionally?

Was your father a man who lived life as a great adventure, a man willing to take risks?

Was he a man with a deep sense of personal mission?

What was your father's great battle or battles?

GOD'S ADVENTURE TO LIVE

What does the world God made tell you about his likes, his personality?

What do you learn about God's heart from a place like the outback of Australia, or the open ocean of the North Atlantic?

But what about his own life? We know he has a battle to fight—but does God have an adventure to live?

If we're honest I think most of us would have to admit that we try to reduce the element of risk in our lives. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your willingness to take risks (a) at work and (b) in your relationships.



CHAPTER 3

THE QUESTION THAT HAUNTS EVERY MAN

The evidence is clear: Adam and Eve's fall sent a tremor through the human race. A fatal flaw entered the original, and it's been passed on to every son and daughter. Thus, every little boy and every little girl comes into the world set up for a loss of heart. Even if he can't quite put it into words, every man is haunted by the question, "Am I really a man?"

Have I got what it takes . . . when it counts?"

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Read this: Chapter 3.

Watch this: *Legends of the Fall*

Do this: Look at some family photos of yourself as an adult, including pictures from the last couple of years.

SETTING OUT

How come there are so many lonely women, so many fatherless children, so few *men* around?

How come when men look in their hearts they don't discover something valiant and dangerous, but instead find anger, lust, and fear?

Most of the time, do you feel more fearful than you do fierce? Why is that?

OUR STRUGGLES

Without a great battle in which a man can live and die, the fierce part of our nature goes underground and just sort of stews there in an anger that seems to have no reason. Are you aware of a simmering anger down under the surface of your life? How do you react when somebody cuts you off on the highway?

POSERS

Are you aware of that fear, that one day you'll be "found out"? What is it you are afraid people are going to see about you as a man?



CHAPTER 4 THE WOUND

The story of Adam's fall is every man's story. It is simple and straightforward, almost mythic in its brevity and depth. Then comes the story we are much more aware of—our own story.

Every boy, in his journey to become a man, takes an arrow in the center of his heart, in the place of his strength. Because wounds are rarely discussed and even more rarely healed, every man carries a wound. And the wound is nearly always given by his father.

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Read this: Chapter 4

Watch this: *The Kid*

Do this: Follow your development from a boy to a young man through photos—maybe the annual family Christmas photo—or yearbooks.

FROM FATHER TO SON

Are you comfortable being physically affectionate with your children?

How would you sum up your father's "life lesson" to you?

Examples: Work hard and you'll get ahead; always look out for Number One; you can't really trust anyone.

THE FATHER-WOUND

What *is* your wound? Do you remember how it was given—the way it came? And what was the *message* of that wound—or that series of wounds? What did it say to you about yourself?

ONE FINAL QUESTION

What would you have love to hear from your father? An apology? An affirmation?



CHAPTER 5

THE BATTLE FOR A MAN'S HEART

The assault on our masculine heart continues long after our "wound" is given. (And remember, a man is not wounded once, but many times, throughout the course of his life.) Nearly every blow falls in the same place—as an attack on his strength. Life takes it away, one vertebra at a time, until he has no spine left at all.

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Read this: Chapter 5.

Can you recall other assaults you've endured over the years?

What about school – which "crowd" did you hang with? Were you taunted or teased? Were you called names?

OUR SEARCH FOR AN ANSWER

We need to know who we are and if we have what it takes. Where do we go to find an answer?

What drives you?

Where in your life are you looking for the answer to your Question?

What would it feel like death to lose, or to know you will *never, ever* attain?

Where does most of the energy of your life get spent in a normal week? And why are you spending it there?

TAKING IT TO EVE

What has been your history with women?

Make a list of the names of the key women in your life, the women you've had a relationship with or wanted a relationship with. Start with your first love, your first sweetheart, and go right up to the present, including your wife or current relationship. Select two or three and describe in a word or phrase your relationship with each one.



CHAPTER 6 THE FATHER'S VOICE

The theme of the chapter is initiation—that mysterious and now lost process whereby a boy becomes a man and knows it. We need initiation, but the way in which God initiates us often comes in a surprising direction: thwarting our false self, our plan for redemption, and taking us into our wound. Most of us have been misinterpreting what God is doing in our lives for a long time.

Recall the story I tell about the day on the ranch when Pop sent me to get the steer—alone.

Do you have a story like it, maybe not from a ranch of course, but a day in your life when you were called out like that by someone who believed in you—when you felt both a little scared and also honored, believed in?

What happened?

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Watch this: *Groundhog Day*

Read this: Ask your wife to read *Wild at Heart*

THWARTING THE FALSE SELF

Let's do a little excavation. Be straightforward now: What's basically been your plan for making life work? And what was the "golden bat" you brought to that plan?

Example: *Life will work out if I'm successful*, and I chose that route because I'm good at making money but not good at much else.

How's it going? Is your plan working?

Where *isn't* your life going well right now? Where are you experiencing the most disappointment or "frustration" in your life?

In order to take a man into his wound, so that he can heal it and begin the release of the true self, God will thwart the false self. He will take away all that you've leaned upon to bring you life. What's your reaction to reading that? What do you fear God will take away?



CHAPTER 7

HEALING THE WOUND

Abiding in the love of God is our only hope, the only true home for our hearts. It's not that we mentally acknowledge that God loves us. It's that we let our hearts come home to him, and stay in his love. How? How does anyone love and let himself be loved? There is no formula to that, but here are a few thoughts . . . It begins by not turning to our "other lovers," all those things we've used to comfort our hearts and make us feel validated and numb our pain. Let them go—even legitimate things like the gym or good food. For how long? Longer than you're comfortable with, long enough to let your heart's longing to be loved come to the surface.

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Read this: Reread Chapter 7 in *Wild at Heart*.

Watch this: *Good Will Hunting*

ENTERING THE WOUND—THE DOORWAYS

There are many doorways God can use to take us back into our wound . . . I also confessed that it was my anger that caused me to stop and look under the hood. That might be another door God uses—if you've been feeling angry or "frustrated" lately, go back to that.

Ask yourself, *What's underneath the anger? Why am I so mad?*

How do you feel about needing help?

Have you ever asked for help with your wound, your brokenness?

Most of us are fiercely independent; we never even stop to ask for directions, let alone for something as deep as help with our own soul.

But what if it were okay, simply the way we're all made?

What if receiving help was normal for a man, and meant nothing about failure or weakness?



CHAPTER 8

A BATTLE TO FIGHT: THE ENEMY

You need a battle to fight; you need a place for the warrior in you to come alive and be honed, trained, seasoned. If we can reawaken that fierce quality in a man, hook it up to a higher purpose, release the warrior within, then the boy can grow up and become truly masculine.

Earlier in the book I said that the reason the Enemy fired all those arrows at your heart is because he fears you.

Can you allow for a moment that that might be true—that these very doubts you now wrestle with telling you you aren't dangerous, you'll never be a great warrior with a true battle, are in fact lies?

What does that possibility arouse in you?

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Watch This: *Saving Private Ryan*

Do this: Reread Chapter 8 in the book, if you need to.

WARRIORS AND MERCENARIES

Mercenaries are guys who are hired to fight, guys who have no stake in the battle at hand except a paycheck. They are fighting the wrong battle or for the wrong reason, or both. After all, Saul thought he was fighting the right battle before that little incident on the Damascus road. And King Saul (is it something in the name?!) was certain it was his God-given mission to kill David.

If you feel that you are in the right battle, are you willing to test that a bit?

Take a moment to define your battle:
What is it over? What's at stake?

And who is your adversary, your enemy? Meaning, who are most of your aggressive energies *really* aimed at in the course of a week?

And how does that tie into God's Great Battle—the one described in Isaiah 61:1–3?

Who called you to this battle? How can your brothers support you in this battle?



CHAPTER 9

A BATTLE TO FIGHT: THE STRATEGY

Don't even think about going into battle alone. Don't even try to take the masculine journey without at least one man by your side. The church understands that a man needs other men now, but what we've been offered is a two-dimensional solution: "accountability" groups or partners. Ugh. That sounds so Old Covenant: "You're really a fool and you're just waiting to rush into sin, so we'd better post a guard by you to keep you in line."

We don't need accountability groups; we need fellow warriors, someone to fight alongside us, someone to watch our back. We don't need a meeting of Really Nice Guys; we need a gathering of Really Dangerous Men. Name one or two guys whom you'd want to gather with to fight for each other. Will you approach them and raise the idea? And if you can't think of anyone, if all the men you know are posers, then start praying for allies.

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Watch This: *The Matrix*

Do this: *Pay attention* to the thoughts that go through your head throughout the day.

HANGING ON TO THE TRUTH

After a round or two of intimidation, Satan then offers us a deal. He'll "suggest" to you through thoughts and feelings—sometimes through the words of another person—that your life would be easier if you just backed off.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9 and James 4:7. What is God saying through Peter and James that we must do in our battle against the devil?

Which part of your heart does that engage, call up, require?

Has the Enemy offered you a deal you've been able to identify? Has there been a thought or a feeling to back off some arena of your life—or to get yourself a "little pleasure on the side"?

INTIMACY WITH GOD

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the thrill of flossing and 10 being great sex, where would you put your "quiet time," your devotional life?

Can you think of some times in the past that were rich with God? What were you doing?



CHAPTER 10

A BEAUTY TO RESCUE

Okay, let's admit it—this is the deepest and hardest battle we ever face. The tower is real, the damsel is in distress, and the dragon isn't just going to roll over and say, "Sure—take her. Live happily ever after." What is more, this battle cuts to the quick of our own masculinity more than any other. To charge the beaches at Normandy and be taken out by a mortar shell isn't anywhere as personal as going in after your wife and having her shut you down—or laugh in your face. We've all stayed clear of this battle for a reason. Am I right?

Think about the rest of your days with the Eve in your life—what do you want with her?

*What do you want with your woman?
What do you want sexually with her?
What do you want emotionally with her?
What do you want spiritually with her?*

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Watch this: *The Titanic*

Do this: Ask your wife to read Chapter 10 and then discuss it.

EVE'S WOUND

Just as every little boy is asking one question, every little girl is, as well. But her question isn't so much about her strength. No, the deep cry of a little girl's heart is *am I lovely?* Every woman needs to know that she is exquisite and exotic and *chosen*. This is core to her identity, the way she bears the image of God.

Do you see this core longing in her life today? How? Where?

If she doesn't seem to care at all about being deeply desired and fought for— what does that tell you about what's happened to her heart?

OFFERING YOUR STRENGTH

How many times a week do you tell your wife that you love her?

And in a given week, is it common for the two of you to have a personal conversation about your life or hers, one that lasts more than five minutes?



CHAPTER 11

AN ADVENTURE TO LIVE

Casual adventures are not unspiritual because they are casual. For many of us, they are a starting point, where we learn to sort of flex our soul's muscles, if you will. They should lead us and prepare us for Critical Adventures, which we're going to have to embrace or we'll remain selfish, self-centered men. Critical adventures build us up to Crucial Adventures, the deep destiny of our lives. All the while we are asking, "What is the desire beneath this desire?" What is it I am really yearning for?"

BEFORE SETTING OUT

Watch this: *The Legend of Baggar Vance*

Do this: Take your journal, and stay with one question all day: "If I could do with my life what I most *want* to do, what would I do?"

MADE FOR ADVENTURE

Have you ever had an experience where you embraced an adventure in spite of your fears, and discovered the thrill of living freely? What was it?

If you have a few extra moments, I want you to recall some of the adventures you've had from the major seasons of your life. When did you *really* experience freedom, exhilaration, take a risk, come alive?

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

I told the story of how I became an author and a counselor, how that journey began with these simple words:

Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Is that the question you asked yourself that led to the life *you* are living now? If not, what was the question you asked that resulted in the life you now have?

Do a simple survey of your life, thinking back over those moments when you really loved what you were doing.

How about jobs you really loved, or better, assignments *within* a job that you truly enjoyed.



CHAPTER 12

WRITING THE NEXT CHAPTER

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

A BATTLE AND FIGHT

What great battle would you love to devote your life to?

What do you want to be different about the world or about the church or about someone's life because you lived?

And what is the next step, the next move you need to make in order to move toward that vision? Will you do it? When?

AN ADVENTURE TO LIVE

What great adventure would you love to enter into? (No doubt all three of these Core Desires are going to be related somehow.)

What quest would you love to take?

And what is the next step, the next move you need to make in order to move toward that vision? Will you do it? When?

A BEAUTY TO RESCUE

Who is the woman God has called you to fight for? (Of course, some of you won't have an answer for this right now. That's okay. This can apply to women in your family, female friends, or the woman who may one day come. What is the impact you want your life to have upon hers?

And, what is the next step you need to take in order to move toward her, fight for her? Will you do it? When?

