

John Eldredge Seeks to Rekindle Passion in the Body of Christ

Author of the best-selling *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge says he wants to help Christians break free of works-oriented religion

John Eldredge has a simple way of summing up Isaiah 61:1—"God has sent Jesus on a mission. He has great news for us. God has sent Him to restore and release something. That something is you. He came to give [us] back our hearts and set us free."

That's the crux of the message he shares in books such as his best-selling *Wild at Heart*, which has sold more than 1 million copies, and at conferences across the country that attract thousands of participants each year.

"It's possible that reading my books may create more questions than provide answers," Eldredge told *Charisma*. "That's OK with me. I want my readers to seek God with their whole heart and get the answers for themselves."

He offers some assistance in his latest book, *Epic*, which summarizes the gospel and helps readers share the reasons for their faith. But Eldredge's own journey to faith has been less structured.

He describes himself as a "flaming pagan" who experimented with drugs in the 1970s. The son of an alcoholic parent, Eldredge realized he didn't like the person he had become and at the age of 19 prayed that God would begin changing him.

After studying drama at California Polytechnic University, he spent more than a decade at Focus on the Family, first in its public policy division then as an instructor in its institute. Writing came later, as a byproduct of his interests in acting and counseling.

But he was also seeking a deeper Christian life. "I realized in order for my words to touch others I could not write about anything that I had not first lived," he said. "To this day I do not teach beyond my personal experiences and my own walk with God."

He says his best-known book, *Wild at Heart*, "is not about things a man can do to be a nicer guy. It is a book about the recovery of a man's heart, his God-given masculinity, and his need to be real.

"Many churches have taught men to be nice, be passive, be polite. The real life of the average man seems a universe away from the desires of his heart."

A member of Imago Dei church, which he describes as charismatic, Eldredge said he was deeply influenced by the teachings of Jack Hayford, former senior pastor of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, Calif. "From pastor Hayford I learned the dynamics of healing, counseling, deliverance and discipleship—to see God's people truly set free," Eldredge said.

He brought those characteristics to Ransomed Heart Ministries in Colorado Springs, which he founded in 2000, and to the four-day retreats he hosts in Colorado for approximately 300 people six times a year. He refers to the events as times for

“open heart surgery.”

“God shows up and heals the hurting and brokenhearted,” Eldredge said. “Dogma doesn’t do it. Legalism doesn’t do it. If people come with open hearts and a desire to pursue Jesus, they will find Him.

“Jesus is the antidote for our wounds. One of the things I tell men is this: Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do that. Because what the world needs are men who have come alive.”

Today Eldredge, who holds a master’s degree in biblical counseling from Colorado Christian University, is perhaps one of the nation’s best-known men’s ministers, with Wild at Heart video Bible studies held at thousands of churches nationwide. Jason Kemp led a Wild at Heart Bible study at the Church at Rocky Peak in Chatsworth, Calif.

“The teaching of John Eldredge was deeply impactful,” Kemp told Charisma. “It helped me become more adventuresome and to view my life from the perspective of a spiritual battle. There are few books that have changed my life like Wild at Heart has.”

“I went because I had read the book and was hoping his video would expand on the book to make it come alive, and it did,” added Greg Hunt, a small-group leader at the Church at Rocky Peak and a participant in the Bible study.

“I was reminded that God designed the husband to love and ‘rescue’ his beautiful wife, and to offer her my strength, which I gain from following the Lord and making right

decisions based on the Bible. It has had a tremendous impact on my marriage.”

Eldredge’s message, however, is reaching beyond men. He is collaborating with his wife, Stasi, on a book for women titled Captivating, which is scheduled to release next spring.

And his Waking the Dead is aimed at helping the American church get unstuck from a works-based Christianity. He said many Christians think more knowledge, performance and duty will result in righteousness, and they become exhausted trying to use clever designs of their flesh to handle life and to stay on the straight and narrow path.

“I see a richness in Scripture that beautifully portrays the progressive relationship God desires to have with His people,” Eldredge said. “Many Christians get stranded in the servant-master stage. The full and ultimate height of our relationship is to be a bride to God the bridegroom.”

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