Captivating

A GUIDED JOURNAL TO AID IN
UNVEILING THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S SOUL

BY JOHN AND STASI ELDREDGE

THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE  DALLAS  MEXICO CITY  RIO DE JANEIRO
Welcome and well done! Choosing to purchase this “guided journal” means that you are hungry for more. More of God, more healing, and more restoration into the woman you were created to be. It says that you are willing to take a journey of discovery with him. You have said “yes” to God. You are continuing to say “yes.” May he meet you in the deep places of your heart and bring you hope, courage, healing, and the delights of intimacy that only God can bring.

First, this is not your normal “workbook.” There are no wrong answers. No fill-in-the-blanks. You don’t have to struggle or worry about “getting it right.” Who wants another workbook anyway? We have enough work to do already. Besides, calling this a workbook would imply that the messages in the book Captivating are to be mastered. And mastered in a measurable way. Not at all. The messages in the book are to be pondered, considered. Some embraced. Some practiced. Some set aside for a later time.

This journal is for your heart.
And words are the voice of the heart.

The excerpts from the book and the questions we ask are here simply to provoke further exploration of your own heart and the heart of God. The pages provided allow space for your soul to express what lies within. Don’t edit yourself. These pages are for you and God alone. If you choose to journey with other women in a small group, share what you desire. You don’t need to be afraid of getting it wrong or saying something stupid. We really are in this thing together. It’s amazing how much in common we have in our experiences, our feelings, our doubts, our fears.

Within each chapter, we have included special features called “Windows to the Heart” and “Lifting the Veil.” These include excerpts from other books and movies as well as side notes that we wanted to include but couldn’t fit in the companion book, Captivating. We hope you enjoy them and that they are helpful in your journey with God.
If you are using this little book to facilitate deeper conversations, don’t try to answer all of the questions together in one gathering. Three or four will be enough. React. Respond. Share honestly. Take the risk of being vulnerable with one another. A covenant of privacy will help. Decide together that what is shared within the confines of your gathering is sacred and not to be shared with others.

Providing a haven where one’s heart is welcomed to show up is a great gift. Your heart is wanted. Whether you are using this journal alone, with God, or with a group of women and God, allow room for your heart to show up. Quiet yourself. Relax. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you, speak to you, reveal what he desires to reveal.

The invitation is a true one. It is from God. And it is ever before you to come more fully into his presence and know him. Know yourself. And become ever more you, ever more his.

All of us are on a journey whether we know it or not. A journey of becoming. Henri Nouwen writes in *The Life of the Beloved* that, “the spiritual life is not simply a way of being, but also a way of becoming.” May God use this book in your life to aid you in becoming the woman you truly are. May he draw near to you as you draw near to him. Ask him to come. And rest assured that he will for, indeed, he has promised to do so; he delights in coming.

—Stasi Eldredge
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 [until you shimmer], 
her salvation like a blazing torch. 
The nations will see your righteousness, 
and all kings your glory [your beauty]; 
you will be called by a new name 
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. 
You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand [the crown of creation], 
a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 
No longer will they call you Deserted, 
or name your land Desolate. 
But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah 
for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. 
As a young man marries a maiden [he pursues her, romances her] 
So will your sons marry you; 
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride [you are lovely], 
so will your God rejoice over you.

—Is. 62:1–5 NKJV
CHAPTER ONE

The Heart of a Woman

Sometimes it's hard to be a woman.
—Tammy Wynette

You belong among the wildflowers
You belong in a boat out at sea
You belong with your love on your arm
You belong somewhere you feel free.
—Tom Petty, “Wildflowers”

I love the sentence “Sometimes, it’s hard to be a woman” from the old Tammy Wynette song. Talk about an understatement. Yes, there are many, many times when it is very hard to be a man as well. Yet, we women are living at a time when the pressures from without and the pressures from within to live well as a woman often feel massive and relentless. Sometimes, it’s harder to be a woman.

Welcome, Beloved of God. Take a deep breath. Relax. You are among friends here. Before you pick up a pen, take a moment to invite Jesus into your time now; ask Him to guide and lead and have his way with your thoughts and your heart. He is after all, the creator of our hearts, as women. He knows who we are. He knows and understands the stories of our lives much better than we do. And he knows the desires of our hearts with intimate detail. He placed them there. Let’s ask him to come and to help us.
Dear Jesus, I love you. I need you. I come before you now, once again, as yours, asking for your help, your grace. My life is yours. My heart is yours. Would you please come and shine your light into the depths of my heart that I might understand myself better and come to know your healing and your presence more deeply. Help me to remember what I need to remember. Help me to see, to understand, to repent, to forgive and to become. Jesus, I give you access to all of my heart. I invite you into every part. Come, Holy Spirit, have your way—that I might love you, God, more deeply and truly with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

John and I love movies, because they speak so deeply to the heart. (You’ll remember that Jesus loved to tell stories, too. He did it to reach the heart.) In chapter one of the companion book we said, “Look at the games that little girls play, and if you can, remember what you dreamed of as a little girl. Look at the movies women love. Listen to your own heart and the hearts of the women you know. What is it that a woman wants? What does she dream of?” It might be really helpful, as a way of entering into this journey, to go back and watch one or two of your favorite movies. And as you do, ask yourself, Why do I love this? What does it stir in me?

In fact, why don’t you jot down the names of several movies you love right here:
Now, as you begin, flip back over chapter one in *Captivating* and skim the pages. Did you highlight anything? What strikes you? What did it evoke in your heart?

What do you like about this chapter?
What do you not like about it? What are you struggling with?

What, if anything presented in this chapter, are you having a hard time believing?

COMING ALIVE

I began chapter one in the companion book by retelling the story of our Oxbow Bend canoeing experience; the beauty of it and the dangerous turn it took.

We rose to the challenge working together, and the fact that it required all of me, that I was in it with my family and for my family, that I was surrounded by wild, shimmering beauty and it was, well, kind of dangerous made the time . . . transcendent.
A Woman's Journey

Have you experienced something similar? Can you recall a time in your life when you felt alive as a woman? Who were you with? What happened? How did you feel?

When did you first know that you were no longer a girl, but had become a woman, a “grown up”? Was there a milestone? An event?

Do you feel like you are a woman? Are there places in your heart where you still feel young?
There seems to be a growing number of books on the masculine journey—rites of passage, initiations, and the like—many of them helpful. But there has been precious little wisdom offered on the path to becoming a woman. Oh, we know the expectations that have been laid upon us by our families, our churches, and our cultures. There are reams of materials on what you ought to do to be a good woman. But that is not the same thing as knowing what the journey towards becoming a woman involves, or even what the goal really should be.

What expectations have been laid upon you, as a woman? What do you feel the pressure to be?

The church has not been a big help here. No, that’s not quite honest enough. The church has been part of the problem. Its message to women has been primarily “you are here to serve. That’s why God created you: to serve. In the nursery, in the kitchen, on various committees, in your home, in your community.” Seriously now—picture the women we hold up as models of femininity in the church. They are sweet, they are helpful, their hair is coiffed; they are busy, they are disciplined, they are composed, and they are tired.

Think about the women you meet at church. They’re trying to live up to some model of femininity. What do they “teach” you about being a woman? What are they saying to us through their lives?
What have you been taught that a mature, godly woman should look like?

**Unseen, Unsought, and Uncertain**

I know I am not alone in this nagging sense of failing to measure up, a feeling of not being good enough as a woman. Every woman I’ve ever met feels it—something deeper than just the sense of failing at what she does. An underlying, gut feeling of failing at who she is. I am not enough, and, I am too much, at the same time.

Have you ever felt that way? Are you feeling it these days? In what ways?

The result is Shame, the universal companion of women. It haunts us, nipping at our heels, feeding on our deepest fear that we will end up abandoned and alone.

After all, if we were better women—whatever that means—life wouldn’t be so hard. Right?
Do you believe that? That if you were “better” life wouldn’t be so hard? “Better” in what ways?

Why is it so hard to create meaningful friendships and sustain them? Why do our days seem so unimportant, filled not with romance and adventure but with duties and demands? We feel unseen, even by those who are closest to us. We feel unsought—that no one has the passion or the courage to pursue us, to get past our messiness to find the woman deep inside. And we feel uncertain—uncertain what it even means to be a woman; uncertain what it truly means to be feminine; uncertain if we are or ever will be.

Do you feel like you know what it means to be a true woman? Do you feel like you are?

Aware of our deep failings, we pour contempt on our own hearts for wanting more. Oh, we long for intimacy and for adventure; we long to be the Beauty of some great story. But the desires set deep in our hearts seem like a luxury, granted only to those women who get their acts together. The message to the rest of us—whether from a driven culture or a driven church—is *try harder.*
Do you resonate with that? Do you ever feel that way? How have you—how are you now—“trying harder”?

**The Heart of a Woman**

And in all the exhortations we have missed the most important thing of all. We have missed the *heart* of a woman. And that is not a wise thing to do, for as the Scriptures tell us, the heart is central. “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23 NKJV). Above all else.

Think about it: God created you as a woman. “God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27 NKJV). Whatever it means to bear God’s image, you do so as a woman. Female. That’s how and where you bear his image. Your feminine heart has been created with the greatest of all possible dignities—as a reflection of God’s own heart. You are a woman to your soul, to the very core of your being. And so the journey to discover what God meant when he created woman in his image—when he created you as his woman—that journey begins with your heart.

Is it a new thought to you that your heart as a woman is the most important thing about you? What does that mean to you?
TO BE ROMANCED

Listen to your own heart and the hearts of the women you know. We think you’ll find that every woman in her heart of hearts longs for three things: to be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure, and to unveil beauty. That’s what makes a woman come alive.

Amen? Do you see those desires within your own heart? In the movies that you love? In your dreams? In your disappointments?

—I will find you.
No matter how long it takes, no matter how far—I will find you.

—NATHANIEL TO CORA IN THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

How do you think Cora felt as Nathaniel made this pledge to her?
The desire to be romanced is set deep in the heart of every little girl and every woman. By looking at the stories we love, we can get a hint, a clue to what those desires are. What were some of your favorite games as a little girl? Do you remember role-playing games that you played as a child? If you do, who or what did you like to pretend to be? A horse? A movie star? A mother? An undercover agent?

What were some of your favorite stories or movies while you were growing up?

What are some of your favorite stories and movies now?

Lifting the Veil

God is the Master Storyteller. He loves to use stories to capture our imaginations and speak to our hearts. There is a reason, a spiritual reason, why you love the stories you do. It would be good to ask God about that; to reveal the deeper reasons to you. It would be a good idea to make time in the next month or so to revisit them; rent the film, check out the book. Maybe make a “girls’ night” and share some of your favorite movies with a friend.
Our guess is that although women also love adventure stories, heroic tales and battle epics, the stories that make your heart sigh with longing most are those that portray deeply meaningful relationships: specifically, good women being pursued, wanted, desired, and fought for by worthy, noble men. That desire is universal and written on the heart of every woman.

When we are young, we want to be precious to someone—especially Daddy. As we grow older, the desire matures into a longing to be pursued, desired, wanted as a woman. Now, being romanced isn’t all that a woman wants, and John and I are certainly not saying that a woman ought to derive the meaning of her existence from whether or not she is being or has been romanced by a man, but don’t you see that you want this? To be desired, to be pursued by one who loves you, to be someone’s priority? Most of our addictions as women flare up when we feel that we are not loved or sought after. At some core place, maybe deep within, perhaps hidden or buried in her heart, every woman wants to be seen, wanted, and pursued. We want to be romanced.

Do you want to be romanced? In what ways? (And if that desire seems far away, or undesirable, ask yourself, “Why is that? When did I lose that desire?”)
An Irreplaceable Role in a Great Adventure

Sometime before the sorrows of life did their best to kill it in us, most young women wanted to be a part of something grand, something important. Before doubt and accusation take hold, most little girls sense that they have a vital role to play; they want to believe there is something in them that is needed and needed desperately.

Did you want to play a vital role in a great story?

I love remembering the story of the canoe trip on Oxbow Bend for many reasons, but chief among them is the fact that I was needed, and I did not fail. Are there places in your life where you feel that you are needed, vital, and essential? Do you like that?

What sort of adventures do you enjoy? And, do you enjoy them most by yourself or in sharing them with a close friend or loved one?

My guess is that although there are times when we need to be ALONE, for the most part, we want to share our lives, our experiences, our adventures, even our sorrows with others. As we wrote in Captivating, that is because,
As echoes of the Trinity, we remember something. Made in the image of perfect relationship, we are relational to the core of our beings and filled with a desire for transcendent purpose. We long to be an irreplaceable part of a shared adventure.

Does that ring true to you? Do you want this?

**Beauty to Unveil**

What would it feel like to know that Jesus, your King, is enthralled by your beauty?

*The King is enthralled by your beauty.*

—Psalm 45:11 NIV
Little girls being raised in healthy homes have a sparkle in their eyes. They are like our little friend Lacey whose story we told of her flitting from office to office singing her newly made-up song. Most little girls enjoy playing dress up, wearing “twirl skirts.” Did you? Take a moment and try to recall how you felt. What did you enjoy about it? If you have a young daughter, does she delight in playing “dress up”?

Do you remember a time when you were young that you wanted to be beautiful? When you wanted others to find you beautiful?

All little girls want to be delighted in. Their young hearts intuitively want to know they are lovely. Some will ask with words, “Am I lovely?” Others will simply ask with their eyes. Verbal or not, whether wearing a shimmery dress or covered in mud, all little girls want to know. When you were young, and your young heart asked the question “Am I lovely?” how were you answered?
By those whose opinions matter to you, how do you think you would be answered today?

The desire to be beautiful does not diminish with age. It remains. It is an ageless longing. Do you believe that?

Now, we know that the desire to be beautiful has caused many women untold grief (how many diets have you been on?). Countless tears have been shed and hearts broken in its pursuit. As Janis Ian sang, “I learned the truth at seventeen that love was meant for beauty queens, and high school girls with clear-skinned smiles.” Beauty has been extolled and worshiped and kept just out of reach for most of us. For others, beauty has been shamed, used, and abused. Some of you have learned that possessing beauty can be dangerous. And yet—and this is just astounding—in spite of all the pain and distress that beauty has caused us as women, the desire remains.
How would you describe your feelings towards your own beauty? Ambivalent? Hopeless? Content? Longing?

Do you like having your picture taken? Do you like looking at those pictures later?

Now this is key: The desire to be beautiful, to have a beauty all our own to unveil is not primarily about our looks. It is a desire to be captivating in the depths of who we are.

Who in your life is beautiful to you? Why?
Is it primarily because of their outward appearance, or is it more a matter of their heart?

This isn’t about dresses and make-up. Beauty is so important that we’ll come back to it again and again in this book. For now, don’t you recognize that a woman yearns to be seen and to be thought of as captivating? We desire to possess a beauty that is worth pursuing, worth fighting for, a beauty that is core to who we truly are. We want beauty that can be seen; beauty that can be felt; beauty that affects others; a beauty all our own to unveil.

Do you want this beauty? Do you remember wanting it?

THE HEART OF A MAN

As I (John) described in Wild at Heart, there are three core desires in the heart of every man as well. (If you haven’t read that book, you really should. It will open your eyes into the world of men.) But they are uniquely masculine. For starters, every man wants a battle to fight. It’s the whole thing with boys and weapons. . . . Men also long for adventure. Boys love to climb and jump and see how fast they can ride their bikes (with no hands). Just look in your garage—all the gear and go-carts and motorcycles and ropes and boats and stuff. . . . Finally, every man longs for a beauty to rescue. They really do.
Have you seen that in the men you know? In your husband, brothers, friends and sons?

And, how have you felt about those desires in men? Do you like them? Encourage them?

Now—can you see how the desires of a man’s heart and the desires of a woman’s heart were at least meant to fit beautifully together? A woman in the presence of a good man, a real man, loves being a woman. His strength allows her feminine heart to flourish. His pursuit draws out her beauty. And a man in the presence of a real woman loves being a man. Her beauty arouses him to play the man, draws out his strength. She inspires him to be a hero. Would that we all were so fortunate.

As a woman, do you long to draw out the strength of a man?

**BY WAY OF THE HEART**

The longings God has written deep in your heart are telling you something essential about what it means to be a woman, and the life he meant for you to live. Now we
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know—many of those desires have gone unmet, or been assaulted, or simply so long neglected that most women end up living two lives. On the surface we are busy and efficient, professional, even. We are getting by. On the inside, women lose themselves in a fantasy world or in cheap novels, or we give ourselves over to food or some other addiction to numb the ache of our hearts. But your heart is still there, crying out to be set free, to find the life your desires tell you of.

You can find that life. If you are willing to embark on a great adventure. Are you aware of your heart wanting more?

Let’s quiet our souls again and talk to God.

_Dearest God, You fashioned my heart within. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. You had your eye upon me before the foundation of the world. Would you please come again for me now and tenderly and firmly hold my heart? Awaken my desires. Restore them to me. Lead me into becoming the woman you created me to be; the woman I long to be. I will risk taking this journey with you . . . this journey into my heart, and into yours. I trust you. I love you. I need you. All this, and all the unspoken longings of my heart, I pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen._