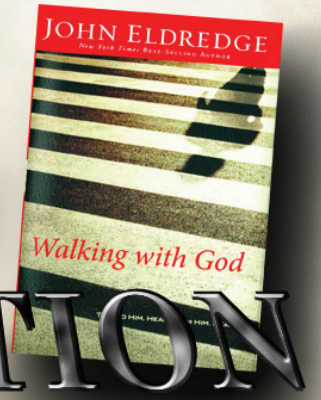


# WHEN IMAGINATION BECOMES REVELATION

## MYSTICISM AND MADNESS FROM JOHN ELDREDGE'S WILD HEART

by G. Richard Fisher



John Eldredge's latest book, *Walking with God*, prompts a lot of questions, but gives few solid answers, especially biblical ones.

In today's publishing world, money trumps truth and best-selling authors such as Eldredge, founder of Ransomed Heart Ministries and author of *Wild at Heart*, have unsurpassed liberty with respect to theology. Thomas Nelson Publishers should be ashamed for releasing this ride into fantasy and mysticism.

This book could be called *Walking with Eldredge*, because it is first and foremost about Eldredge's experiences, feelings, impressions, and sensations. Even though Eldredge counsels, "Our tendency is to go with whatever we're feeling. It is not a reliable guide,"<sup>1</sup> he regularly disregards his own advice.

In the introduction, he writes:

"This is a series of stories ... describing my experiences and putting words to the things God is showing me, I can shed light on your experiences ... what I offer here is a series of stories of what it looks like to walk with God over the course of about a year. I am going to open my journals to you."<sup>2</sup>

The key to the book is his experiences, not what the Bible teaches. This presumes that all of Eldredge's expe-

riences are good and right. His writing is sometimes like a free-association session in which he throws out a word or phrase and then has to interpret it. It is reminiscent of the magic eight-ball toy: Whatever pops up in the little window might be the word of direction.

Eldredge makes a feeble disclaimer: "In sharing these stories, I am in no way suggesting that this is the only way to walk with God."<sup>3</sup> However, he quotes George MacDonald to the effect that what is in his heart is in every heart,<sup>4</sup> leaving one with the idea that Eldredge's way will be our way in the end.

Eldredge boasts that his personal narratives "will open up new horizons for you."<sup>5</sup> He promotes his website, which he says adds "another dimension to this book" that will "provide further guidance, clarification and counsel through video" and "will help a great deal in your walk with God."<sup>6</sup> So it is clear he means his practices are to be emulated. Eldredge also makes it obvious that this is not only about our experiences and his experiences, but it is about *interpreting those experiences*.<sup>7</sup> Interpreting one's experiences can be as tricky as looking for images in clouds or ink blots.

Preoccupation with self is one of our major problems. We are called by Jesus to deny self (Matthew 16:24).

The focus on our experiences and their meaning is as subjective and complicated as calling the psychic hotline or consulting the horoscope. The best course is to let Scripture guide and regulate our experiences and to talk to a mature, knowledgeable, and trusted Christian friend capable of counseling with the Word.

### O CHRISTMAS TREE — MUCH ORDEAL DOST THOU BRING ME

One of Eldredge's illustrations is a story of him taking his family out to cut down a Christmas tree. The night before their trip, two feet of snow fell. The wind-chill factor was minus 10. Their Suburban slid into a ditch and got two flat tires. Eldredge called the outing an ordeal.<sup>8</sup>

Eldredge then writes that he ignored God's counsel to go out the previous weekend, claiming that on the Friday after Thanksgiving, "I sensed God saying we were to go up the following day" and "the whole ordeal could have been avoided had we simply listened."<sup>9</sup>

The event could be interpreted in a number of different — and more biblical — ways. Eldredge himself admits, "Our assumptions control our interpretation of events."<sup>10</sup> So there is no proving that this had anything to do with listening for a voice from God.

Some would call it poor judgment to venture out after a blizzard with a wind-chill factor below zero. Others might argue that bad things happen and God can teach us through those circumstances, according to Romans 5:3. Others would say that what matters is how we respond to those events and that we handle them in a biblical way. Those obsessed with sin and the devil might assert that such troubles stem from unconfessed sin or a demonic curse.

Thus, interpreting our experiences is problematic. It is far better to make wise choices at the start and handle unplanned and unexpected consequences God's way. One with biblical wisdom would know already that God would never want us to put our families in jeopardy for something as trivial as a Christmas tree.

### JESUS SPEAKS, ARE YOU LISTENING?

Eldredge writes that we need to hear the voice of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> And while this is a valid premise based on John 10:27 — “My sheep hear My voice” — the real issue is the source of that voice. The answer determines whether we get lost in subjectivism, mysticism, and delusion and whether we really find the voice of Christ. Mystics, such as Eldredge, say we go inside ourselves as we try to sense something. However, the biblical answer is that we hear the voice of Christ in the pages of Scripture. We cannot know the words of Jesus without the New Testament (John 12:47-50, see also Matthew 22:31b, James 1:25).

Early in his book, Eldredge exhibits a sloppy handling of Scripture as he reads concepts into the Bible that are not there. For example, under the subheading, “Does God Still Speak?,” Eldredge describes God seeking out Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:8-9 as “a beautiful story.”<sup>12</sup> When God showed up in Genesis 3:8, the fallen man and woman were trying to hide from Him. God's coming to them was to judge them and strip them of His blessings. It certainly was not for guidance. God tracked them down to

pronounce judgment (Genesis 3:10-19). That was hardly beautiful.

Eldredge writes, “Intimacy with God is the purpose of our lives. It's why God created us.”<sup>13</sup> However, this is not what Scripture teaches. Intimacy with God is a wonderful thing that we find in prayer and Scripture, but Ephesians 3:14-21 is clear that the primary purpose of our lives and the purpose of the Church is the glory of God. The chief cause of man is to be theo-centric, not ego-centric. We are to glorify God in good days or bad. And in times of intimacy with God, as well as dry times, we are to live for the glory of God and exist to bring praise to His name. Even our most unpleasant times can be His glory times because we know all things work together for good to those that love God (Romans 8:28). Isaiah caught this priority when he declared, “For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel” (Isaiah 44:23).

We are not saying God does not want intimacy, but only that His glory is to be the major focus and the purpose of our lives. Jeremiah 9:23-24 reminds us:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,’ says the LORD.”

The Apostle Paul extols God and says, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). And to the Corinthians, Paul says, “as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him who glories glory in the LORD,’” (1 Corinthians 1:31) and “glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Focusing on our intimacy makes man the focal point. However focusing on God's glory makes God the center of attention and main attraction.

In another story, Eldredge establishes a scenario in which two friends meet, but one never says anything. He throws into the mix a father who never speaks to his children.<sup>14</sup> This is an attempt at a straw man, with God being the friend or father who never speaks. Eldredge acknowledges that God does speak to us from the Bible — he again employs his feeble disclaimer: “I am not minimizing in any way the authority of the Scripture.”<sup>15</sup> But his admission actually refutes his own position, which he implies by way of his one-sided relationship illustration. His point is that a Christian should not think God speaks only through the Bible. Thus, for Eldredge, God's infallible, inerrant, eternal, and powerful Word is not enough. He apparently does not believe the Bible is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation and all that we need for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness as 2 Timothy 3:14-17 confirms. Paul, in Romans 15:4, says the Word of God is our comfort. God conveys and speaks His comfort through Scriptural promises.

Those who affirm that the Word is sufficient will be grieved to read Eldredge's denigration of the Word of God. His position intimates that with only the Bible and without the mysticism we could never really know true and deep intimacy with God. This is not too far from the position espoused by many prominent cults, which teach that the Bible falls short of God's complete message. Eldredge also confuses special direct divine revelation of the past, which is now part of Scripture, and believes it ought to be happening today.

### AND HE WALKS WITH ME AND HE TALKS WITH ME

Beyond just listening for God's voice, Eldredge writes about an “intimate, conversational walk with God,” which he says “is meant to be normal.”<sup>16</sup> Yet Eldredge is not clear about what he means. He writes, “I can sense the Spirit saying,” and at other times admits, “Sometimes we can get clarity, and sometimes we can't.”<sup>17</sup> This sounds more confusing

than conclusive, more like guesswork than guidance. It's much easier to follow Scripture than to have a conversation in one's head while trying to sense something.

The Puritans thought of Scripture as a direct connection with God. They were committed to the sufficiency of the words of the Bible to convey God to them. They saw mysticism and the seeking of voices as a departure from God and a delusion. To them, true spirituality did not consist of private whisperings or audible voices. Consider their statement in the Westminster Confession:

"...therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased."<sup>18</sup>

These men concluded that God certainly is revealing Himself, not in the old former ways of direct revelation, but in the Word. They believed that God stood before them in the pages of Holy Writ. They further wrote:

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances

concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed."<sup>19</sup>

Bernard Ramm states clearly the orthodox proposition that, "*everything essential to salvation and Christian living is clearly revealed in Scripture.* ... What is essential to salvation and sanctification is treated *extensively* in Scripture either in terms of distinct passages or abundance of references. We are in constant danger of extending our theology beyond the information given in the Scripture. This danger can be checked only when we limit our theology to extensive references in Sacred Scripture. We may consider a doctrine Scriptural when there is extensive treatment of it in Scripture, not when we can find only a passing reference to it."<sup>20</sup>

### CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Eldredge tries to teach his readers how to hear the voice of God. He writes that one way to accomplish this is to come up with a question and ask quietly in your mind, "*What is your counsel?*"<sup>21</sup> Eldredge further describes the basics:

"Start with small questions. Repeat the question quietly in your heart to God. Bring yourself to a posture of quiet surrender. ... Pause and listen. ... Quite often we can sense God's direction on a matter before we hear actual words."<sup>22</sup>

While one may think he has escalated to a heightened realm of spiritual communication with such effort, it is much safer — but not as thrilling — to ask what the Bible says either directly, indirectly, or in principle. But that is not where Eldredge is taking us. Another step contained in Eldredge's directive is to "seek further direction by listening."<sup>23</sup> If nothing is heard, Eldredge instructs his readers to prompt God by asking other generic questions such as *We should go?*

or *We should stay home?* This practice advances into even more subjectivism as Eldredge explains that "over time, those deep impressions begin to form into words."<sup>24</sup>

So this is really about our faulty impressions and hunches. Eldredge claims he can end up hearing a voice through this process.<sup>25</sup> What is very obvious in this is that this is about talking to oneself and developing impressions. It is fraught with a propensity for self-delusion. Time is better spent studying God's Word rather than sitting around muttering to oneself and trying to interpret random thoughts and ideas. Psalm 1 directs us to meditate on God's Word.

It is not our intent to be too unkind or harshly judge Eldredge by saying he is tapping into an occult force or a demonic realm, but it must be asked, "To whom is he speaking?" His readers will have to decide. One thing is sure, the inner conversations Eldredge describes for himself are so mundane and unbiblical they could not be of God. One must never confuse imagination with revelation. Herein is the key to Eldredge's error.

### CONFESSIONS OF A MYSTICAL MIND

Eldredge is on target biblically when he says, "There is no substitute for the written Word of God. No matter how precious a personal word may be to us, no matter how cool some insight may be, it doesn't compare to the written Word. I've seen too many immature Christians chase after 'revelation' and go wacky because they are not rooted and grounded in the Scripture."<sup>26</sup> Yet this is really double talk because what Eldredge affirms on one page, he is really condemning on other pages — and in his own practice. Eldredge cannot have it both ways. This is a vain attempt to try to sell his goods to both mystics and non-mystics. He has already told us to try to hear a "gentle whisper" or a "still small voice" earlier in the book.<sup>27</sup>

Eldredge may also lure sensitive young disciples into confusion by his

mystical approach to ascertain what to read in the Bible. After saying he's "all for" programs which help one "read through the Bible in a year or study a certain book,"<sup>28</sup> he dulls the process by writing:

"But in addition to all that, let me add how rich it can be simply to ask God, *What would you have me read today?*"<sup>29</sup>

Eldredge would have better served his readers by staying with his first recommendation. God can and will use His Word when and where He sees fit.

It is comical, and even sad, to read Eldredge relate how he ran frantically throughout his house asking God where his misplaced watch might be.<sup>30</sup> There is only silence, but Eldredge advises in our times of not hearing from God to "Keep listening."<sup>31</sup> Eldredge never did hear a voice telling him where the watch was. But after 90 minutes and another prayer, he does something he's never done before: he sits on the floor to put his socks on. And from that "particular spot" he can see his watch under the bed. His point seems to be that God leads in other ways. One wonders if God really does help Eldredge find lost and misplaced items each and every time, or if there are times when misplaced belongings never turn up in spite of his entreaties to the Almighty.

Misplacing items should alert us that perhaps we need to be more organized, because God is a God of order. Eldredge should try to find out how the watch got under the bed and eliminate that possibility next time. God can trust us to do small things like take care of our watch and be good responsible stewards over our property.

### DIMINISHMENT AND OTHER FOUL SPIRITS

Eldredge also errs in his understanding and methodology of fighting against demonic powers. At one point he has writer's block and asks God with what he is dealing:

"*Diminishment*, he says. Oh yes, that's been an enemy of mine for many years. A spirit of Diminishment. Okay. I bring the full work of the Lord Jesus Christ against Diminishment, and I bind Diminishment from me.' Remember, Jesus says to 'tie up the strong man' (Matthew 12:29). Clearly the context of his instruction is dealing with foul spirits, because in the preceding verse he has just said, 'But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (v. 28). Then he says to bind the enemy."<sup>32</sup>

The notion that Jesus commanded His followers to "bind the enemy" is not biblical. Eldredge is confusing his flesh and his weaknesses with the demonic. His premise that we have to "tie up the strong man" and "bind the enemy" is wrong.

There are many deliverance clichés and traditional myths that have been repeated for so long that people think they are true. David Kirkwood deals with many of the myths and in his book, *Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare*, he titles one section, "Didn't Jesus Instruct Us to 'Bind the Strong Man'?"<sup>33</sup> Kirkwood writes:

"Three times in the gospels we find Jesus making mention of 'binding the strong man.' In none of those three cases, however, did He tell His followers that 'binding the strong man' was something they should practice. ... Thus Jesus spoke metaphorically of Satan, comparing him to a strong man guarding his possessions. The only one able to take the strong man's possessions would be someone even stronger, namely, Himself. This was the true explanation as to how He cast out demons. Satan is the 'strong man,' and Jesus is the one who overpowered him to plunder his house. Isn't that exactly what Jesus did through his sacrificial death? He broke Satan's power over all those who would believe in Jesus. His casting out

of demons was a foreshadowing of an even greater deliverance that He would accomplish for Satan's captive!"<sup>34</sup>

So it is clearly unscriptural for anyone to go around trying to bind some alleged demonic strong man. Jesus is the deliverer, not us. Here, in Matthew 12:29, is Jesus' argument:

"No man can carry away the furniture from a strong man's house until he has overpowered and bound the strong man. So I could not remove the inferior devils out of the bodies of men, unless I had first conquered and bound their master, Satan himself."<sup>35</sup>

Eldredge introduces another idea: "agreements."<sup>36</sup> The novel speculation of agreements he puts forth is that we unknowingly agree with a demonic attack by thinking the demonic attack is something else, such as one of our own thoughts. This is not easy to follow because Satan's "attacks are often quite subtle, masquerading as something else (like writer's block)."<sup>37</sup>

So by his own diagnosis, Eldredge claims he did not really have writer's block, but a demonic block. Such judgments present a false dilemma: follow Eldredge's advice or risk collusion with demons.<sup>38</sup>

### RECKLESS ABANDONMENT

Eldredge explains how he and friends sat around the living room trying to sense if anything is blocking one of them from hearing a voice from God. Eldredge begins to doubt he should be doing this, but then someone says, "Well, I hear the word *abandonment*."<sup>39</sup>

Anne, the woman who heard the word "abandonment," confesses that in the past she thought because her "first baby had terrible colic and screamed all day," God abandoned her.<sup>40</sup> The group then led the woman in a ritual prayer to "break the agreement."<sup>41</sup> "Having done that, we could then bring the work of Jesus Christ against the spirit of abandonment and

against every lying spirit that had brought this to Anne," Eldredge writes.<sup>42</sup> But here again, only misconstrued Scripture — Eldredge applies Ephesians 4:26-27 — is provided for these strange practices and questionable rituals that would be at home in any occult setting.

Eldredge says he hears the voice of God and Anne says she does too. Anne's message from the voice was, "He said he loves me."<sup>43</sup> But she should already know that from the Bible. Romans 8:31-39 assures us that God's love is always there with eternal and enduring power. Such a thought would fortify her in the future when her feelings become unstable. The Apostle Peter clearly says the Word takes precedence over experience, emotions, and feelings (1 Peter 1:16-19).

For a time Eldredge says he heard the words "My love" over and over and over for months.<sup>44</sup> However, he maintains he never was certain why God was saying this. Eldredge spends so much time in introspection and self-analysis that could be spent learning the promises of God.

Eldredge moves into even more dangerous territory when he instructs readers that "you'll soon find that it is far easier to hear the voice of God for someone else than it is to hear it for yourself."<sup>45</sup> Case in point: he hears the voice of God for a lady named Sally. While making coffee one morning, he prays:

*"Jesus, what's up? What's assaulting Sally? I heard Jesus say, Desolation. The spirit assaulting Sally was Desolation. ... My hunch was that Desolation was taking advantage of Sally's emotional distress."*<sup>46</sup>

When we are dealing with the difficulties of others, we cannot be going just on hunches. What started as a guessing game for Eldredge has now progressed into a guessing game about others' lives. Eldredge figured out that Sally somehow made an agreement with "Desolation." Then, following prayer, Sally "began to hear

the voice of God," to which Eldredge rhapsodizes, "Oh, how I wish this kind of intercession was more widely practiced in the body of Christ."<sup>47</sup>

It gets even more bizarre when Eldredge tells us:

*"Remember, warfare works like a virus. It tries to transfer around as much as it can, especially when you've been involved in trying to set someone free."*<sup>48</sup>

Eldredge further warns that if one is having a down day, "don't just assume the attack you are under on any given day is yours. It might be someone else's battle, trying to transfer to you."<sup>49</sup> Here Eldredge does not even try to produce a Scripture. There are many things that can cause a down day. It does not have to be an attack or warfare. Perhaps Eldredge gives us a clue as to what this has done to his life when he says:

*"I hate the pace of my life. I don't live. I get things done. My life is entirely task oriented. I wake and pray, because if I don't pray I get taken out by warfare. ... I used to enjoy asking people, 'How are you?' Now I avoid the question, because it's an invitation to a conversation I don't have time for, and, it's going to take us into issues I am going to feel obligated to do something about."*<sup>50</sup>

His admission is stunning. This is what can happen when one gets involved with unbiblical teachings and practices and we spend time trying to ferret out demons that we imagine are afflicting ourselves or others.

### **A LION, A LAMB, AND A DOG NAMED SCOUT**

Eldredge also shares the story of his dog's sickness. Scout had cancer and Eldredge writes that he "began to ask, *Jesus, do you want to heal Scout? Is that what you want to do here?* I sensed the answer was *No. Not this time.*"<sup>51</sup> Eldredge then tells his readers a story about the aftermath of Scout's passing:

*"Now, I don't know what you are going to make of this, but I have to tell you the rest of the story. When Scout died, I heard him bark. Not in my memory, not in the past, but in that moment. In the kingdom of God. I thought, Really? Did I just hear that? I believe that God preserves the life of animals. After all, the Scripture says the lion will lie down with the lamb. Then there must be at least lions and lambs in the kingdom. Why would God stop there? Many good theologians believe we will see our beloved animals in heaven. But I won't go into a theological debate here. I asked Jesus, *What do dogs do in the kingdom, Lord?* And he said, *They run.* And then I saw Scout, with the eyes of my heart, running with a whole pack of very happy dogs, near the feet of Jesus. I shared my story with Stasi and the boys, and Blaine said, 'Yes. I heard something too. Right after Scout died. Jesus said, *'He won't give me the ball.'*" That was Scout's trademark, to come up to you to play ball, tennis ball already in his mouth, but then he wouldn't give it to you. To hear that from Jesus was more precious to us than I can say."*<sup>52</sup>

Beyond the mystical and whimsical details of this story again lies an even more serious concern: Eldredge's handling of Scripture. He either ignores or does not know the context of Isaiah 11:1-10 and handles it in a subjective, cavalier way. First, and of minor emphasis, is Eldredge's premise of the lion lying down with the lamb. Isaiah never said that, but rather said the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the young goat (Isaiah 11:6).

Second, and of major importance, is his hermeneutic of confusion. Eldredge shuffles the earthly millennial kingdom passages in Isaiah 11 and thinks that those passages are speaking about heaven. Isaiah 11 describes the Messiah's reign on *earth* (v. 10). The setting is clear in verse 4

where the earth is mentioned twice and again in verse 9 declaring that, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD." In the millennial earth there will be a return to Eden-like conditions as the curse is lifted and animals no longer are ferocious. In this idyllic setting, "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb" (v. 6).

Hebrew scholars concur that, "The meaning of 'the earth' is also determined by that of 'all my holy mountain.' The *land of Israel*, the dominion of the Son of David in the more restricted sense, will be from this time forward the paradisaical centre, as it were, of the whole earth, — a prelude of its future state of perfect and universal glorification."<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the poor exegesis, all of what Eldredge claims is speculation. There must be a reason God has left these details out of Scripture. Obviously we do not need to know about the postmortem state of animals, neither do we need to animate our imagination where the Bible is silent. If God wanted us to know these things, He would have given them in Scripture. Where Scripture is silent, we should be too.

Saying that Jesus is playing ball with dogs in heaven is trite and unscriptural. Scripture is clear as to exactly what Jesus is doing in heaven. The Bible tells us, "He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He *always lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:24-25, emphasis added). His focus is on His redeemed.

### VOICES OVER VERSES

As one would expect, Eldredge's advice for personal "day-to-day decision making" is also overtly subjective and even dangerous. He instructs us: "Ask God. Listen for his voice. Together. Surrender to what you hear."<sup>54</sup> But how do we know what we are hearing is really God's voice? Perhaps we are hearing our own imagination. Eldredge, himself, warns of *the snare of speculation*.<sup>55</sup> Even more

deadly would be a demonic voice. Remember, Satan is the master deceiver and can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 4:3, 14). Because most of Eldredge's "voices" are not biblical or capable of being checked by the Bible, he cannot know that what he is hearing is not demonic.

Carolyn Nystrom, in her online review of *Walking with God*, faults Eldredge in this regard:

"...this kind of moment-by-moment seeking of God's will is not for the marginally sane — which includes many of us at various stages of our lives. Seeking God's guidance for each momentary choice can become so paralyzing that a praying Christian fears to take even one step out of his or her current circle because it might go in some wrong, un-God-guided direction. Alternatively, a person accustomed to constantly listening for an inner voice from God may begin to mistake all sorts of inner urges and motives for God's voice and thus lose the basic spiritual skill of self-examination. And, sadly, some Christians really do hear voices and see visions brought on by schizophrenia.<sup>56</sup> Schizophrenics fairly often mistake the hallucinatory voices of their illness for the voice of God."<sup>57</sup>

Consider the following: Abraham had few scripturally recorded, direct divine revelations in his whole lifetime. Joseph had fewer than Abraham. Job had one. Esther had none. We have all of God's revelation complete in the Bible to guide us in our own decision making. What we have by comparison with even the greatest prophet or patriarch is overwhelming.

One of the building blocks of orthodox theology is the commitment to God's special revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Bible. It is fixed, firm, and sure. It is forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89). It needs neither addition nor alteration. It is all that we need, and more than we need. The Psalmist found so much light,

insight, and direction from God's Word that he proclaimed:

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalms 19:7-11).

### ELDREDGE'S PRESCRIBED PRAYERS

Eldredge has also developed a number of ritual prayers, some of them for protection from demon powers.<sup>58</sup> Some of them seem excessive and preoccupied with the demonic. Colossians 3:1-4 directs us to set our affections on Christ in the heavenlies and not on demons.

Nystrom further writes:

"...the book gives the Devil perhaps more than his due. Yes, spiritual warfare is real — as Eldredge says in his statement of core values. But to remain on constant alert for dark forces entering the home through, for example, some unidentified etchings on the handle of a dagger seems to me unnerving and draining of time and energy that might better be put to considering how we might use (and not use) that dagger. Such mundane musings must seem shallow to those who feel divinely driven into spiritual warfare."<sup>59</sup>

Absent from Eldredge's presentation on how we should conduct our spiritual lives is any suggestion of a believer being regularly under the preaching of the Word of God. Eldredge never mentions the need to sit under sound biblical preaching.

However, the New Testament exalts it as a priority in Acts 6:1-4, 1 Timothy 4:13, 5:17, and 2 Timothy 4:1-3. Craig Larson reminds us:

“But the leaders of the Reformation placed primary attention on public teaching and preaching, and Karl Barth, writing to well-educated Westerners, regarding the proclamation of the Word as one of the three fundamental ways that people experience the life-changing Word of God.”<sup>60</sup>

Larson summons our attention to the truth that preaching keeps us from self-deception, brings the special presence of the Holy Spirit in God’s Word, challenges us to action, moves us to corporate obedience, protects us from error, and can be listened to with a very low threshold of difficulty. The Apostle Peter tells us how to grow in the Lord, and it is not by sensing our impressions and dredging up hunches, but rather “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

In closing, Nystrom summarizes the weaknesses of Eldredge’s book:

“This book’s greatest flaw is its failure to recognize the *guarding* aspect of God’s guidance. In even the smallest matter, Eldredge would say, ‘I’m praying about it, trying to get some guidance.’ While not wholly undesirable, this approach seems to miss the point of a benevolent God who genuinely cares for and protects his children — the comforting message of Psalm 23. There we don’t see a shepherd hiding behind rocks playing peekaboo with his sheep, but one who proactively walks ahead of them, who comforts, provides food, protects, and restores so that they need ‘fear no evil.’ The Puritans had a way of assuming God’s guarding guidance by saying, ‘I will do thus unless providentially hindered.’ In this view of divine guidance, God lays out before his people a veritable smorgasbord of opportunities,

saying, ‘See what a wonderful table I have placed before you. Choose; enjoy. I am with you.’ To trust God’s guarding guidance is wonderfully freeing when it comes to geographic moves, marriage proposals, vocational choices, or even routes for horseback riding. Depending on the weight of the matter, we draw on common sense; the teachings of Scripture; the advice of wise, godly friends; the guidance of the church; and our own interests, abilities, and inclinations. We pray throughout this process — and then we choose. If that door is closed from the other side we can smile with relief, even if disappointed, because God our guarding guide has protected us. And so we move on under his continued care, continuing to graze on his smorgasbord of opportunities.”<sup>61</sup>

#### Endnotes:

1. John Eldredge, *Walking with God*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008, pg. 132.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. ix, xii.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. xii.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pg. xiii.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 11.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 13.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 17, italic in original.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.
18. G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1964, pg. 1, quotation rendered in italics in source.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10, quotation rendered in italics in source.
20. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: W.A. Wilde Company, 1956, pp. 122, 124, italics in original.
21. *Walking with God*, op. cit., pg. 31, italics in original.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 32.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

27. *Ibid.*, pg. 30. (For a biblical understanding of “the still small voice,” see G. Richard Fisher, “What is the Still, Small Voice? Manufacturing Mystics Young and Old,” *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2007, pp. 5-7.)
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 43.
29. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 50.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 55, italic in original.
33. David Kirkwood, *Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare*. Pittsburgh: Ethnos Press, 1994, pp. 89-91.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90, 90-91.
35. J.R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1958, pg. 668.
36. *Walking with God*, op. cit., pg. 57.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 58, italic in original.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, pg. 59, italics in original.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 60.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76, italics in original.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 110.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111, italics in original.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 111.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 112.
49. *Ibid.*, pg. 113.
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
51. *Ibid.*, pg. 122, italics in original.
52. *Ibid.*, pg. 125, italics in original.
53. C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, Vol. VII, pg. 287, italics in original.
54. *Walking with God*, op. cit., pg. 137.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-136.
56. Sadly, what the medical field sometimes quickly labels as schizophrenia can be a matter of extensive sleep loss, a brain tumor, early dementia, food deprivation, or just bad reactions to prescription drugs. Doubly sad is the fact that some authors claim that these untreated situations and maladies (with their hallucinations) are the voice of God and publishers collude with them for the sake of some profit.
57. Carolyn Nystrom, “Should I Fish or Lay Low?” *Christianity Today* online edition, posted Sept. 18, 2008. Document available at: [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/28.89.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/28.89.html).
58. *Walking with God*, op. cit., pp. 149-153.
59. “Should I Fish or Lay Low?” op. cit.
60. Craig Brian Larson, “The Blind Spot of the Spiritual Formation Movement,” *Christianity Today* online edition, posted Sept. 24, 2008. Document available at: [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/septemberweb-only/139-31.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/septemberweb-only/139-31.0.html).
61. “Should I Fish or Lay Low?” op. cit., italic in original. 