

JOHN & STASI
ELDREDGE

Bestselling authors of *Wild at Heart* and *Captivating*

Love &
War
Devotional
for Couples

The 8-week adventure that will help you find
the marriage you always dreamed of

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INTRODUCTION

Our lives are lived moment by moment, in increments we can actually handle. Our marriages are lived the same way. Not anniversary to anniversary or even month to month, but daily—in the ordinary ins and outs of time. The choices we make in the moments create the lives we enjoy—or don't. Thus, a love and war devotional. This devotional is a tool for you, for your marriage. We invite you to walk alongside us for eight weeks—five days a week—and dive deeper into the tangible realities of your marriage. We'll focus on Scripture and the heart of God and the heart that he placed in you and the heart he has placed in your spouse.

The journey of our lives is a journey of transformation. We are here to learn how to love. How do we learn? Moment by moment. Day by day. Week by week. Our marriages grow and become what God intended and what we ultimately long for in the same way. We are all of us learning to love.

Let's learn together.

WEEK ONE

Remembering What We Wanted



DAY 1

Romance Meets Reality



We love because he first loved us.

—1 JOHN 4:19

We probably ought to just start here: marriage is fabulously hard. Maybe that's an odd way to begin, but it is *true*, and everybody who's been married knows this, though years into marriage it still catches us off guard, all of us. And newly married couples, when they discover how hard it is, seem genuinely surprised. Shocked and disheartened by the fact. *Are we doing something wrong? Did I marry the right person?* The wonders that lure us into marriage—romance, love, passion, sex, longing, companionship—sometimes seem so far from the actual reality of married life that we wind up fearing we've made a colossal mistake, caught the wrong bus, missed our flight. And so the hardness of marriage can also come as something of an embarrassment.

Or maybe it's just us. Don't you feel embarrassed to admit how hard your marriage is?

Yep. This is everyone. We might as well come out and admit it.

The sooner we get that shame off our backs, the sooner we'll find our way through. Of course marriage is hard. In fact, if you look back at the first marriage, that fairy-tale start in Genesis, you see that Adam and Eve had a pretty rough go at it. And they didn't even have parents to screw them up as children or friends giving them ridiculous advice. The fall of man seems to come during the honeymoon or shortly thereafter. (And how many honeymoon stories seem to reenact that little drama?) They hit rough water as soon as they set sail. This is the story of the first marriage, and it's a bit sobering.

But it also gives us some encouragement. It's normal for marriage to be hard. Even the best of marriages.

And God is in that.

In order to have the life we want, the life we are made for, and the marriage we long for, we need God. That's a very good thing! Because without him, nothing is as it should be. With him, all things are possible. Yes, marriage can be extremely hard. But that is not a reason to despair. Nor is it the final truth. There are seasons in marriage—in every relationship. Marriage is meant to be wonderful, and most of the time it is. Though it's sometimes so hard, think of the difficulty as a doorway. A doorway to all the *more* Jesus has for us in himself! There is hope!

Dear God, as I begin this study, I offer up this time for your purposes. Please help me draw closer to your heart and deepen my marriage in every good way. Sometimes it is very hard. Even painful. I invite you into that as well. Have your way with me, with my spouse, and with our marriage. We need you. I am looking to you. In Jesus' mighty name, amen.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:3–5)

DAY 2

Recovering Desire



“What do you want?”—Jesus

—JOHN 1:38

Somewhere along the way, we all lose heart in marriage. We all do. It happens to the best of us. The Dan Fogelberg song “Along the Road” speaks of a relationship that has “joy at the start,” and suggests that along the journey, the heart “gets lost in the learning.”

We might find a way to manage our disappointment. We might do our best to fight off resignation, but it works its way in. We let go of what we wanted, what we dreamed of, what we were created for. We begin to settle. Oftentimes we even forget what it was we wanted in the first place!

Because marriage is hard, sometimes painfully hard, your first great battle is not to lose heart. That begins with recovering

desire—the desire for the love that is written on your heart. Let desire return. Let it remind you of all that you wanted, all that you were created for. And then consider this—what if God could bring you your heart’s desire? What if the two of you could find your way to something beautiful?

That would be worth fighting for.

Don’t start with, *How can that happen?* The *how* will come in time. You have to begin with *desire*. Start with what is written on your heart. What was it that you once dreamed of as a young man or woman? What was it you wanted when you fell in love?

Father, thank you for my marriage. Thank you for my spouse. Lord, you know where we are with each other right now. You know the desires we each had coming into our marriage even if they were unclear to us. And only you know the dreams you have for our marriage. Once again, I give my marriage to you. I surrender myself, my spouse, and our life to you, and I ask for your will to be done in us and through us. Holy Spirit, blow gently onto the embers of our heart’s desires where we have forgotten or abandoned what you placed there. Rekindle the flame. Remind us. And help us keep our eyes on you as the source of all that is good

and lovely and worth living for. Let hope rise. In Jesus' name, amen.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires
of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16)

DAY 3

A Glorious Difficulty



*How good and pleasant it is when
brothers [and sisters] live together
in unity!*

—PSALM 133:1

Marriage is glorious. And yes, sometimes marriage is difficult. Okay. A lot of the time it is difficult. For everyone. This doesn't necessarily mean we are blowing it. Partly, it simply means we are human beings. When John and I got married, we looked forward to years of intimacy and laughter and the joy of being husband and wife. Our expectations of ease and marital bliss were quickly... not met. We were stunned. Most couples are. But, for heaven's sake, bringing together a man and a woman—two creatures who think, act, and feel so differently—and asking them to get along for the rest of their lives under the same roof is like taking Cinderella and

Huck Finn, tossing them in a submarine, and locking the hatch. What should we think will happen?

Actually, before you lock the hatch, toss in the constant experience of all our fears, our wounded hearts, our self-centeredness, our self-doubts, and our resolute commitments to self-protection. Good Lord, help us. Anyone looking for undeniable proof of the existence of God need look no further. The fact that *any* marriage makes it is a miracle of the first order. Bona fide proof that there are forces in the universe working on behalf of mankind.

Think of all those fairy tales about a boy and girl who find themselves thrown together in a dangerous land, working together while each carries a tragic flaw that pricks the other. Those fairy tales have it right. The husband is that boy. The wife is that girl. And your life is the adventure through that dangerous land.

But gloriously, we all are on the road to becoming the man or the woman we are meant to be. To cooperate with God and yield to his desires for our lives is what speeds the process. None of us is perfect. In fact, many of our unique quirks are not so endearing! Though we share much in common with our spouses, we are *so* different from each other as well. Wonderfully, *gloriously* different.

*Dear God, I surrender my life to you again today.
I want to be the person that you have created me to
be. Please show me the areas in my life that I need*

to repent of and be healed of. I want to change for the good. I choose to cooperate with you. Lord, I pray to see my life and my marriage the way you do. I don't want to just eke by in our marriage. I want all the life and joy and victory and oneness that's possible! In your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13, NLT)