

## Discovering my Wild Heart

I was young when I got married; I know that now more than ever. Twenty-two and just out of college. Soon after our wedding, we set out for a two year mission trip to rural Russell County, Alabama. Within a few months of my marriage, questions of uncertainty started arising: “How can I lead this family?” “Do I have what it takes to be the spiritual head of this home?” “Am I man enough to be a husband?” These questions arose because I did not have a rite of passage into manhood. I hid these questions and fears during our marriage preparation, talking the talk and hiding behind my pride. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but the posing could not last much longer.

One Sunday afternoon, I was having lunch with my pastor, Fr Dennis Berry, ST, who took the opportunity to extend an invitation for an upcoming men’s retreat that he was directing. He said that the retreat’s focus came from a book called “Wild at Heart.” I had never heard of the book before but, somehow, I knew this was the answer to my longings. The next day, I drove into town, went to the public library and checked out a copy. From page one, the flames of manhood within my being had been stoked.

The anthem of the book is that all men are haunted by the question, “Do I have what it takes?” It is a question about our need for validation. Every man longs to hear the Father speak blessing to him as he spoke to His Eternal Son at the moment of his Baptism, “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.”(Matt 3:17). For various reasons, we fail to bring this need to the Father and choose to bring it to our bosses, friends, parents, and our wives. Inevitably, the moment comes when they fail to satisfy our need and we get angry because of their inability to be God. Subconsciously, we have made them like idols. Praise the Lord that our idols cannot satisfy! Because only then do we turn to the One True God who can make our cups overflow with love.

As I read the book, I could resonate with the question and what John Eldredge (the book’s author) calls the three core desires of a man’s heart: A Battle to Fight, An Adventure to Live, and a Beauty to Rescue. Think about some of the movies that stir the souls of men and you will see these themes; Braveheart, Star Wars, Avatar, The Last of the Mohicans, Dances with Wolves. In all these stories, we see men who fight with valor, embark on perilous adventures, and fight for the hearts of the women in the films. All these stories borrow themes from the One Story, which is the Gospel. It was Jesus who stepped out of Eternity to go on the greatest adventure and fight the greatest battle, so to rescue the heart of his Bride. He came so that we may be radiant without spot or blemish. And all men are called to mirror this love in our marriages (Eph 5).

Upon finishing the book and attending the retreat, I knew that the timing was not a coincidence; for it was in the wilderness of Alabama that God ushered me into manhood. Living like a missionary was a true adventure, a test to learn full dependence of God’s provisions. I fought for him and learned to call forth the beauty of my bride. Directly because of this transformation, she could see my strength and trusted me as the spiritual head of our household. I know that I could not have earned her trust, if I had not decided to embark on this journey of understanding my masculine heart, a journey that continues to this day. The unfolding of my heart is a continuous process of sanctification.

I can assure you that the journey is worth it. If you would like to get on the path (or need encouragement for the journey), then let me play the part of Fr Dennis and invite you to attend a men's retreat that I am coordinating with a ministry called "Return to Glory." We are a group of men who are dedicated to bringing the themes presented in "Wild at Heart" to our local area. The team is a mixed group of Catholic and Protestant, therefore we welcome all denominations to our events. Our next retreat, entitled "Return to Glory Boot Camp," will be on the weekend of April 29-May 2, at Blue Springs Retreat Center in Marianna, FL. The retreat is a blend of talks, prayer time, movie clips and outdoor adventure. Through these retreats, I have seen the hearts of men come alive and they return home as better husbands and fathers. For more information and registration, please go to [www.return-to-glory.com](http://www.return-to-glory.com).

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