



***Walking With God* by John Eldredge: A Critical Theological Review**

by Jim Osman

**Kootenai Community Church
kootenaichurch.org**

What would cause a person to pick up a book he normally wouldn't touch and spend time he really doesn't have to read something he violently disagrees with? I did so for a number of reasons: First, *Walking With God* will surely become a widely read book in Christian circles (unfortunately). Since I believe it is *filled* with error and unsound theology, a response to that book is in order, even though my audience is likely not going to be much larger than our own local fellowship.

Second, the message of the book goes right to the heart of what I have written on at great length in *The Kootenai Communicator* on a number of different occasions in recent years.

Third, when I heard that a recently published book by a popular author promoted a theology of hearing God's voice through nudging, promptings, and impressions, I knew it would provide a great opportunity to critique a viewpoint I find inherently flawed and dangerous and to use that critique to highlight the error and danger of the "hearing from God" theology.

About the Book

Walking With God (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008) is the latest offering from wildly popular author John Eldredge. You are likely familiar with his name, if not some of his books. Eldredge is the author of *Epic*, *Waking the Dead*, *Wild At Heart*, and *Desire*, and co-author of *Captivating*, and *The Sacred Romance*. Already a New York Times best-selling author, Eldredge's latest offering (*Walking With God*) is sure to enjoy wide sales and circulation in the years to come. If the trends with Eldredge books continue, we can expect to see journals, study guides, and Bible studies published all based on this latest book.

The Good Stuff

First, let me offer some positive comments on the book. Eldredge is a good writer (a lousy expositor and theologian, but a good writer). The book is easy to read and engaging. It is organized without regular chapter divisions, but divided into four sections titled "summer," "fall," "winter," and "spring." Each is a collection of "*stories of what it looks like to walk with God over the course of about a year*" (pg. ix)¹. The book is intended to read like a journal or a daily blog. The conversational and devotional tone is sure to appeal to large numbers of people. Likewise, most, if not all, will be able to relate to the struggles of faith, unanswered prayer, doubt, spiritual warfare, discouragement, and emotions of joy, sadness, happiness, excitement, and depression that Eldredge openly wrestles with in the book.

Occasionally Eldredge makes some sound and accurate points concerning the issue he is addressing, namely "hearing from God." For instance, he states that life is not based on feelings (101) and gives a nod toward the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Scripture (41, 42). I will discuss his treatment of these topics in far greater detail later in this review, but as you will see, even his nod toward these great doctrines quickly dissipates as he spends the rest of the book promoting a method of hearing from God that can and does only undermine both the authority and centrality of Scripture.² Unfortunately, what Eldredge gives with the one hand he quickly takes away with the other.

1 When quoting from the book or referencing material in the book, I will put exact quotes in *italics* followed by the page number in brackets; (78) and (30-32, 67) for example.

2 I have written on the sufficiency of Scripture in relation to extra-Biblical revelations previously in a series on this subject available at www.kootenaichurch.org/pages/columns/voiceofgod/voiceofgodmenu.htm.

“How To” Walk With God According to Eldredge

According to Eldredge, “walking with God” means that we learn the discipline of listening to His voice and enjoying “*conversational intimacy*” with God (xi). In fact, the words “*conversational intimacy*” are used a number of times throughout the book to describe God speaking to us via an inner voice and giving direct revelation of His will, thoughts, desires, and directions which we cannot obtain from Scripture (13). Supposedly we are to ask God questions and then hear Him give us direct answers to those questions. “Should I go to the ranch this weekend?” (30-32), “What passage should I read in my Bible today?” (44), “Which chapter in the gospel of John should I read?” (44), and, “Should I ride the horse today?” (80), are all examples of questions we should ask Jesus. Not only should we ask such questions, but as you will see later, the failure to ask such questions and listen for the answers can bring disastrous consequences according to Eldredge’s theology. In fact, Eldredge records the answers that Jesus gave him to those very questions in the book. This is what Eldredge means by “*walking with God*” and “*conversational intimacy*.”

Eldredge is bold enough to offer this book as a “*sort of tutorial on how to walk with God. And how to hear his voice.*” (8) In his own words,

*I assume that an intimate, conversational walk with God is available, and is meant to be normal. I’ll push that a step further. I assume that if you **don’t** find that kind of relationship with God, your spiritual life will be stunted. And that will handicap the rest of your life. (7)*

By “intimate conversational walk” Eldredge means talking to God and then “*hearing God’s voice*” constantly through inner promptings, nudges, leadings, thoughts and “*deep impressions*” which “*begin to form into words*” (32).

Obviously, this approach to walking with God is not optional for Eldredge. If you don’t find such a “conversational” relationship, you can’t be a truly

spiritual Christian and you will never be all that God intends for you to be. Indeed, Eldredge claims you will be “stunted.”

“I have little confidence in those persons who speak of having received direct revelations from the Lord, as though He appeared otherwise than by and through the gospel. His word is so full, so perfect, that for God to make any fresh revelation to you or me is quite needless. To do so would be to put a dishonor upon the perfection of that word.”

Charles H. Spurgeon

The jacket cover of the book promotes this approach as “*the lost treasure of Christian spirituality*” suggesting that one is not “spiritual” unless they are receiving such personalized revelations from God and hearing Jesus speak to them.

On page 49 Eldredge says that this “*conversational intimacy*” is part of experiencing God in a deep way leading one to conclude that the absence of such special revelation can only mean that your relationship with God is shallow. If you are not walking with God in the “*day to day, in the moment*” (65), then you can not have any “*real relationship with Jesus Christ*” (65).

According to Eldredge, only in the constantly unfolding “now” are we able to have “*any real relationship with Jesus Christ*” (65).

Eldredge also asserts that failure to hear God in this way may be due to a satanic attack (58), your false belief in “Christian deism” (45), or because you are too obsessed with something trivial and are not focused enough to hear Him, or because the enemy is blocking you (48).

“Walking With God” For Leaders

This “*conversational intimacy*” is not just for individual Christians in their work-a-day world. Eldredge suggests that this approach could be beneficial to church and ministry leaders.

Pause. Listening to God would be a tremendous source of guidance and relief for the leaders of churches, ministries, and businesses if they would adopt this approach in their day-to-day decision making. Ask God. Listen for his voice. Together. Surrender to what you hear. Think of all the foolish things that would be avoided, and all the noble things God has for us to embrace. It’s an act of humility, really, by which we admit we haven’t

the smarts to run this thing and we need the counsel of God. In the small things as much as the big ones. (137)

“Many godly persons have undoubtedly in this and other ages, exposed themselves to woeful delusions by an aptness to lay too much weight on impulses and impressions.”

Jonathan Edwards

But what are such ministry leaders and church leaders to do when two people hear different things from God? Eldredge offers no counsel on that. Let's say for instance that a church is trying to decide whether to add a multi-million dollar wing on the church for ministry purposes. Where do we turn for such guidance since the Bible doesn't speak specifically about such an issue? Applying the Eldredge model, we would just ask God, “Should we build or not?” Then as leaders we would “listen” to what we might hear by way of an inner voice. What if one very godly leader hears “Don't build,” and another godly leader hears “Build?” Then what? Further, what if each is convinced that Jesus is genuinely speaking to them and they are hearing the Shepherd's voice?

It is just such an approach that leads to chaos in churches and ministries. Eldredge gives us no method by which we might avoid such chaos, but only a subjective, personal, feelings-oriented method of getting guidance from God.

To complicate the issue, Eldredge believes no question is too inconsequential and we can and should receive direct guidance on anything. Imagine that played out in your average leadership meeting in different ministries:

“Lord, what are the nine theme nights You would have us plan for Awana this year?” Then we would all sit around and listen for the Shepherd's direction. With nine or ten different ministry leaders making that decision, you can clearly see there would be anything but clarity in the end.

“Lord, on what date should we have the church potluck?” “Should the church purchase the meat?” “How much meat should we purchase?” “Should we use paper plates or plastic or glass?” “Which hymns should we sing this Sunday?” “Lord, should we play baseball or soccer for the men's ministry this month?” “Which campground should we use for our annual church camp out?” “Which prizes should we give to top boy and top girl in Awana this year?”

Can you imagine a team of leaders trying to lead when each person thinks they are hearing straight from the Shepherd on such matters, believes that their ability to hear this is a mark of their spirituality, maturity, and deepening experience of God, and

that disobedience to such personalized revelation can have disastrous consequences? (80-81) Give me a group of leaders who bleed the Bible and have acquired wisdom over a group of men and women who believe and practice this nonsense any day!

Numerous and Diverse Errors

When I picked up *Walking With God* and began to read, I expected to find one basic error: God speaks to us through still small voices and such personalized revelations are to be expected and experienced by every believer. However, I found not just one basic error presented in the book but a plethora of such errors. Indeed it has become clear to me, that when one thinks that the Shepherd is speaking directly to them apart from Scripture, errors begin to multiply. Here are a few of the biggest and most consequential errors presented in *Walking With God*.

A Faulty Defense of Personalized Revelations

Various examples in Scripture of God speaking through special prophets, priests, kings, or apostles are used as proof that we too should expect God to speak to us. After giving a list of such examples including Moses, Aaron, David, and Noah, Eldredge writes,

I can hear the objections even now: “But that was different. Those were special people called to special tasks.” And we are not special people called to special tasks? I refuse to believe that. And I doubt that you want to believe it either, in your heart of hearts. (13-14)

This is how Eldredge dispenses with serious theological observations and objections: “*I refuse to believe that.*” After all, if we don't want to believe it in our “*heart of hearts*” why should we? Indeed, it is the “heart” which becomes the arbiter of what you *want* to

believe. Eldredge concludes, "Now, if God doesn't **also** speak to us, why would he have given us all these stories of him speaking to others?"

Actually, I can answer that: He has given us these accounts so that we might look to what He has already revealed (**Jude 3, 2 Peter 1:19-21**) and trust it (the Bible) and receive instruction from it.

Eldredge continues,

*Why would God give you a book of exceptions? **This is how I used to relate to my people, but I don't do that anymore.** What good would a book of exceptions do you? That's like giving you the owner's manual for a Dodge even though you drive a Mitsubishi. No, the Bible is a book of **examples** of what it looks like to walk with God. To say that he doesn't offer that to us is just so disheartening. (14-15)*

"And why cannot we be contented with the divine oracles, that holy, pure Word of God, which we have in such abundance and clearness, now since the canon of Scripture is completed? Why should we desire to have any thing added to them by the impulses from above? Why should we not rest in that standing rule that God has given to His church, which, the apostle teaches us, is surer than a voice from Heaven?"

Jonathan Edwards

What does such an assertion say of one's view of the Bible? I would argue that if God is presently giving the type of personalized constant revelation to His people, then the Bible is not needed at all. Why do I need the Bible if God is going to give me His will and His thoughts, and His heart through an inner voice and my subjective impressions?

Scripture Twisting

You will find little by way of **Scripture teaching** in the book (which explains how many of the practices promoted can be simply asserted and not defended from Scripture), but **Scripture twisting** abounds. Indeed, I found it quite disturbing how easily Eldredge could flippantly quote a verse and use it to support his ideas without any regard whatsoever to the meaning of the verse in its original context.

I counted at least 32 separate verses and/or passages which were misapplied by Eldredge.³ One such instance is on page 13 where various examples of God speaking to His spokesman are given as proof that we too may hear His voice. Eldredge doesn't even pause to ask, "Was there anything special about these instances? Do these men play a special and unique role in God's redemptive and revelatory plan?"

John 10 seems to be singled out for special abuse (7-8, 15, 20, 204-205). Jesus' assertion that "My sheep hear My voice" (**John 10:27**) becomes the central plank in the "hearing from God" theology. Speaking of **John 10**, Eldredge confesses on page 45, "*I have spent a good deal of time there.*" Having spent a good deal of time in the passage, I would hope that he would have seen the clear meaning of the text, but that is not the case. Ignoring the context and the meaning of Jesus' words, **John 10** is twisted to promote a theology of hearing from God apart from Scripture.

In reality, **John 10** has nothing to do with Jesus' sheep hearing directly from Him on such subjects as "Should I go fishing?" (67), "Should I ride the horse today?" (80), and "Where is my watch?" (48). In **John 10** Jesus is speaking to Pharisees who opposed Him (**John 9:40**). In Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd He was explaining to the Pharisees why they did not believe and why their "sin remains" (**John 9:41; 10:26**).

When one looks at Jesus' words in even a **slightly** larger context, the meaning becomes clear. He said in **John 10:26-28**, "***But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of My hand.***" It is the salvation of

³ See 7-8, 11, 13, 15, 20, 29, 30, 34, 54, 55, 75, 91, 92, 105, 113, 150, 175, 204-205.

the sheep that is being described in the passage. Notice that “believe” and “eternal life” and “never perish” are the central elements of the text.

Why did the disciples believe on Christ, but the Pharisees reject Him? This is Jesus’ answer. The Pharisees were “**not of His sheep.**” Those who believed **were** His sheep. They had heard His call to eternal life and they followed Him. He gave them life and they will never perish, unlike those who rejected Christ (the Pharisees). **This passage teaches absolutely nothing about hearing individualized revelation from Christ through some subjective internal nudge, impression, or voice.**

Unfortunately, John 10 is not the only passage which suffers abuse at Eldredge’s hands. The account of Elijah hearing the “still small voice” (**1 Kings 19:11-12**) is taken as a prototype for our “*conversational intimacy*” (30). Being “led by the Spirit” (**Galatians 5:25**) is distorted to mean “keeping in step with the Spirit” (75) which for Eldredge means a constant sensitivity to what God might be trying to tell you at any given moment.

In reality, **Galatians 5:25** has to do with being controlled by the Spirit as opposed to the flesh and has nothing at all to do with “hearing God’s voice.” **Psalm 16:7** is taken as proof that God speaks to us through dreams. The mention of “**wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him**” in **Ephesians 1:17** is taken as a pattern for special revelation coupled with wisdom in living life.

It is not just Scripture texts which suffer from Eldredge’s atrocious exegesis, but the meanings of individual words as well. In order to show that God wants us to be happy (20), he twists **John 10:10** (“I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.”), and then he asserts that “*in order for us to be truly happy, we have to be whole. Another word for that is holy.*” Huh?!? That is what holy means? A synonym for “holy” is “whole?” Is that what makes God holy, the fact that He is whole? Where did he come up with this? Is this something that Jesus told him directly?

I can only say with great sadness that the misapplication and twisting of Scripture in this book is grievous enough to make a Jehovah’s Witness blush!

Attacks On Sola Scriptura

As noted above, Eldredge has a lot of good things to say about the Bible as the Word of God. Unfortunately, some of these endorsements of the authority and uniqueness of Scripture are mixed with denials of the same. For instance,

*Now, I know, I know – the prevailing belief is that God speaks to his people **only** through the Bible. And let me make this clear: he does speak to us first and foremost through the Bible. That is the basis for our relationship. The Bible is the eternal and unchanging Word of God to us. It is such a gift, to have right there in black and white God’s thoughts toward us. We know right off the bat that any other supposed revelation from God that contradicts the Bible is not to be trusted. So I am not minimizing in any way the authority of the Scripture or the fact that God speaks to us through the Bible.*

*However, many Christians believe that God **only** speaks to us through the Bible.*

The irony of that belief is that’s not what the Bible says. (13)

In a very subtle but destructive fashion, Eldredge elevates the Word of God, but not above **all** personal revelations, only above those that disagree with the Bible. Like many who promote a “hearing from God theology,” Eldredge wants to have an authoritative, inspired, perfect, pure, unique Word from God in the Bible **and** his moment-by-moment personal dispatches from Heaven by way of an inner voice from the Shepherd. Contrary to his assertion, the Bible does **not** teach that God speaks to us through a host of other means.

In light of his statements and his belief that we constantly hear God’s voice, we are left to conclude that when Eldredge says that the Bible is the Word of God to us, what he means is that the Bible is a small fraction, a sampling, an example of God’s voice which is constantly heard by Christians in every generation.

Eldredge attempts again to assert the supremacy of the written Word saying,

God speaks to us through the Bible. And what is said there has more authority than anything else in our lives. It is the bedrock of our faith, the test of all things, a living connection to the heart and mind of God – when we approach it with the help of the Spirit of God. . . . 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. (41-42)

He doesn't bother trying to explain exactly why the Bible has more authority than a “*personal word*.” Why should I consider a book written 2,000 years ago more precious and more authoritative than that word I get from God in the here and now? What makes the Bible incomparable? Eldredge doesn't bother offering us any reasons for this. Indeed, someone who believes as Eldredge does is hard pressed to give us any theological reason for those assertions.

Yet, in spite of his few orthodox statements regarding Scripture, *Walking with God* is all about how to live one's entire life around personal words from God apart from Scripture! Other than brief endorsements like the ones above, everything in this book points one away from Scripture toward individual revelations. Such statements serve only to satisfy those who want both the Word and their “still small voice.”

As best as I could see, these two brief statements form all that the author has to say in this book about the Word of God and its centrality to the Christian life. However, such endorsements ring hollow and quickly fade from memory since what we are ultimately left with in *Walking With God* is a manual of how to ignore Scripture in favor of hearing from God.

Those who believe that the Bible is sufficient for “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (**2 Peter 1:3**) are consistently held up for ridicule and correction. He refers to “*this fellow*” who “*holds the assumption that God doesn't really speak to his children*” (6-7). That seems to be Eldredge's view of those who hold to Sola Scriptura. In Eldredge's world, if you don't believe that we are all receiving and supposed to receive

specialized revelations from the Shepherd (aka “*conversational intimacy*”), then you don't believe that God speaks to His children. He goes on to say, “*And so, when he found himself assaulted and undermined by all that had unfolded in his life, he had no source of guidance or explanation. It was sad to see the toll it had taken*” (7).

The “*guidance or explanation*” that Eldredge is speaking of in the context is the still small voice that he says is God speaking directly to him apart from Scripture. Apparently the Bible is not enough for “*guidance or explanation*.”

For those who don't accept Eldredge's view of hearing God's voice, he seems to think they are stuck in a “*relationship [with God] where there is no communication whatsoever*” (12-13). This can only lead a discerning reader to ask, “What does he think the Bible is? Does he think that those who talk to God in prayer and read the Bible to hear from Him have a relationship with *no communication*?”

No matter what brief comments (and they are brief **and few**) he may make concerning the greatness of Scripture, the reality is that Eldredge does not believe that the Bible is sufficient. Those who do believe that are ridiculed and looked down upon as “*stunted*” (7)

Christians.

In fact, Eldredge not only asserts that the Bible does not teach that God speaks only in Scripture (13), but he goes on to assert that God speaks through our experiences (xiv), dreams (105), and even hawks (117). For Eldredge such additional revelation is needed for “*matters of counsel*

or guidance that are not directly addressed by Scripture” (32).

Eldredge's firm belief that God speaks to us through many means is seen even in his suggestion that **his** book will be a means through which God will speak. He suggests a meditative approach to reading his book so that you might hear the voice of God speaking to you through Eldredge's words. He thinks that even his book may give us “*help interpreting the events of our lives, and what we are experiencing*” (xiii). On page xiii Eldredge suggests,

Though it is the quintessence of enthusiasm to pretend to be guided by the Spirit without the written Word, yet it is every Christian's bounden duty to be guided by the Spirit in conjunction with the written Word of God.

George Whitefield

I think this format will allow you to pause along the way at those points where God is speaking to you, shedding light on your story, or teaching you something new. Pause there. Let that be the lesson for the day.

“Let him who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture.”

Martin Luther

Don't just plow through! Take your time, and let him speak.

When one honestly believes that we can hear the voice of God in a myriad of different ways, then suggesting that we meditate on those sources like we would Scripture is only reasonable. After all, why not take the same approach to the newspaper, the football schedule, the street sign, the department store advertisement, or a license plate? Or are we just to suppose that it is Scripture and Eldredge that are sources of revelation to us? Once the uniqueness of Scripture is eliminated, then anything becomes a potential place where we can hear God's voice.

Eldredge's Subjective Process

Although Eldredge warns us that feelings are not a reliable guide for living life (132), one cannot help but notice that the majority of this book is an illustration of someone doing just that. Eldredge constantly speaks about how he feels, what he senses, his emotions, and what he think he hears God say to him. Eldredge, of course, would argue that he doesn't live his life based on his feelings. In fact, he proposes a process by which we can develop this “*conversational intimacy*.”

Eldredge does not shy away from giving instruction on how to listen and what to ask God.⁴ On pages 30-31 Eldredge gives instruction on how to listen to God's voice (any teaching from a Scriptural passage to support this “process” is **glaringly absent**) saying,

This is step one in learning to listen to the voice of God: ask simple questions. You cannot start with huge and desperate questions, such as, 'Should I marry Ted?' or 'Do you want me to sell the family business tomorrow?' or 'Do I have lung cancer?' . . .

⁴ This process is described on pages 30-32, 47, 67, 80-81, 123, 197-198, 202, and 204.

That's like learning to play the piano by starting with Mozart, learning to ski by doing double black diamonds. There is way too much emotion involved, too much swirling around in our heads. I find that to hear the voice of God, we must be in a posture of quiet surrender. Starting with small questions helps us lean to do that.

Yeah, you know what verse that is don't you? Neither do I! Was Saul in a spirit of “quiet surrender” when he heard the voice of Christ on the Damascus Road? No. Where in Scripture do we read of a person having to be in a spirit of quiet surrender to hear the voice of God? Nowhere. Surely Eldredge wouldn't argue that Saul of Tarsus was an exception to this. After all, according to Eldredge, the Bible is not a book of **exceptions** but a book of **examples**. So where are our examples of person after person being in a state of quiet surrender before they could hear the voice of God?

Further, why is it that God is only able in the beginning to communicate on “small” issues like “Should I ride my horse today?” and unable to give direction on larger issues like “Should I marry Ted?” Do we see this pattern with Saul of Tarsus hearing God for the first time? Did Isaiah or Moses only get small instructions from the Lord in the beginning: “Should I fry my manna or boil it?” No.

Eldredge continues,

*What I'll do is sit with the question before God for several minutes. To help me stay present to God and not begin to wander. . . , I'll repeat the question quietly in my heart. **God do you want us to go to the ranch or stay home? I am settling myself before God. Do you want us to go to the ranch or stay home? Settle down and be present to God. Pause and listen. Repeat the question. Should we go to the ranch or stay home? What is your counsel?*** (31)

All of this repeating of the question and listening is designed to bring one to a place of “surrender” and a

willingness to do whatever might be revealed as an answer.

What if no discernible answer is forthcoming? If God isn't able to get through with an answer, then we just have to start "trying on" answers. Eldredge says,

Now, if I don't seem to be able to hear God's voice in that moment, sometimes what I will do is "try on" one answer and then the other. Still in a posture of quiet surrender, I ask the Lord, "Is it yes, you want us to go?" Pause. In my heart I am trying it on, letting it be as though this is God's answer. "We should go?" Pause and listen. "Or is it no, you want us to stay home?" Pause and let this be his answer. "We should stay home?" Pause and listen again. . . . By "trying on" the possible answers, I find it enables me to come into alignment with his Spirit. And, over time, those deep impressions begin to form into words. (32)

Concerning the same issue, Eldredge encourages us to listen to the "checks in our spirit" as a means of "trying on" different answers. He writes, *"You may have heard someone use the expression 'I had a check in my spirit.' It refers to an internal pause, a hesitancy, a sudden reluctance to proceed"* (32). Of course, not a single Scripture reference is given, obviously because none could be offered. What verse is it that talks about "trying on" an answer from God, or being guided by a "check in the spirit"?

Does the above formula resemble anything you see in Scripture? Did any of the men whom Eldredge so readily points to as examples hear God in this way and discern His voice in such a manner? Did Saul of Tarsus say, "Should I stop persecuting Christians?" Wait. Pause. Listen. Try on an answer. "I should keep persecuting them?" No. Check in my spirit. The Lord must be saying, "Stop persecuting Christians."

Is this how we read of Moses discerning God's will? How about Noah? "Build an ark, Lord?" Pause. Listen. Try on an answer. "Build a piano?" No. Check in my spirit. I think the Lord is saying "ark." Of course, this is

absurd and even a moment's reflection on Eldredge's process brings that to light.

Further elaborating on the process, Eldredge writes,

Let go of the pressure that says you have to hear from him right now or things aren't right between you. Things are fine. [Of course, he has himself built such pressure by saying that without hearing from God in this way you will be "stunted" and won't possess the "lost treasure of Christian spirituality."] You are his. Rest your heart and your relationship there. Then ask this simple question: "God what would you have me read today?" Pause and listen. Repeat the question. If you begin to get an impression, or believe you heard him say something, repeat it. "Was that John 10, Lord? You want me to read John 10?" (That "Trying it on" thing.) Practice this over the course of several weeks. You will be delighted with what unfolds. (47)

"I speak most plainly here, no additional revelation is to be expected, because the book of God is ended, the revelation of God is finished, and he that adds to the sacred book is cursed."

Charles Spurgeon

Once again I ask, "Where do we see this process laid out in Scripture either by teaching or by example?" This is more in keeping with some forms of Christian gnosticism than anything Biblical. What type of God has difficulty communicating clearly? In fact, let's deal with that question next.

Eldredge's Stuttering Impotent God

You can see from a couple of the brief quotations above, that God is supposedly not always able to communicate clearly. In fact, He may be hindered from communicating because of satanic activity (48, 58), or because you have not quietly surrendered (30-31). Supposedly, God may not be able to get through to us unless we check in with Him periodically throughout the day to give Him opportunity (75). You know, like Saul of Tarsus was doing on the road to Damascus when God spoke to him!

Amazingly, we may even hear from God and not know it right away. Eldredge says, *"Sometimes I'll let*

the pad of paper sit on my desk for a week and pray over it from time to time before I'm confident that I've heard from God (202).

What?! How can you hear from God and not be confident you have heard from Him? Is that what Moses did? Kept a pad of paper on his desk and prayed over it before he was "*confident*" he had actually heard from God?

The God of the Bible communicates when He wants and how He wants and no activity of rebels or demons, no lack of sensitivity or lack of surrender, nothing in all of creation can prohibit Him. God is not hindered in communicating. Further, when men heard from God, they did not doubt that they heard God. Whether it was Moses, Noah, David, Isaiah, Daniel,

or Saul of Tarsus, men who heard God speak in the Bible did not lack confidence that they were hearing God! What kind of a God has trouble speaking? What kind of a God cannot overcome the resistance of His creatures to express Himself clearly and confidently? **Listen, God does not try to speak - He does!** When He does, it is clear, it is precise, it is authoritative, it is binding, it is confident.

The communications from God that Eldredge receives bear **no** resemblance to the type of speaking God does in Scripture. If the Bible is intended to give us an example of what hearing from God looks like, we should expect that the types of revelations Eldredge says we receive would be just like what we see in Scripture. They are not.

The impressions and communications that Eldredge receives are more often than not hints, figures, clues, and veiled single word answers that are often confusing, unclear, and in need of some deciphering. For instance, when he asked the Lord "What am I dealing with in this spiritual warfare?" Jesus supposedly answered, "Diminishment." Eldredge took that to be the name of a spirit that was afflicting a certain person like a virus (55). It is not clear to me that there is actually a demon named "Diminishment." But supposedly that is what Jesus told Eldredge.

When Eldredge asked God, "What are you saying,

Lord?" Jesus responded with "My love" (75). My love? What does that mean? Even when Eldredge heard Jesus say this he confessed, "*I haven't really known what to do with this*" (76). It is a hint, a vague reference to an emotion or truth that Eldredge supposedly spends time reflecting on to discern its meaning. In fact a good portion of the time spent explaining the "my love" answer is spent wondering what God is trying to say.

He wonders what he is to make of receiving this repeated, incomplete, cryptic answer. What is the significance and why does God keep repeating it?

Seeing a hawk during a hiking trip, Eldredge sensed that God was speaking through the hawk. He asks, "What is the hawk saying to me?" The answer: "A symbol of My heart" (117). One is left to wonder how a hawk is a symbol of God's heart and what possible benefit such a

revelation could be. Only adding confusion, Eldredge asks, "What is the meaning of the hawk?" to which Jesus answers, "My love."

Having asked God, "*How do I think I'm doing God? How do you think I'm doing?*", he heard the answer "*Just barely.*" And then, "*In you*" (140-141). When he reflected upon the answer, "*In you,*" he wondered,

What's that supposed to mean? Somewhere way down in the depths of me, I could sense a comfort and assurance in the phrase, sensed it was speaking to some deep need. But for the life of me, in the moment, I didn't get it. (141)

Later on God was able to say, "*I am in you,*" which helped to clear things up. If only God had been a little more clear in the beginning! If only God could speak in complete sentences, we could avoid so much confusion!

When wrestling with the decision to put down a pet, Eldredge heard God say, "*Two days,*" and then later, "*Your hearts*" (126). That's it. Just two words. Can't Jesus speak in complete sentences? And what are we to make of "your hearts?" That could mean anything. He interpreted these words to mean that they were to put the dog down in two days and that the reason was because this "*would have been wrenching upon all our*

"There is a special curse pronounced upon any who shall add to this Book; and you may rest assured that the Holy Spirit will not so transgress in a matter which He has peremptorily forbidden all his children to commit."

Charles Spurgeon

hearts to drag this out and let the cancer ravage Scout beyond recognition" (126).

Yet it is possible that the "two days" meant that they should have done it two days prior, or two days after Christmas, or perhaps to wait two days before arranging the vet. By the way, I wonder if he consulted Jesus on which vet to choose and what time of the day to have the dog put down and if it should be by injection or some other means.

Perhaps the "your hearts" meant that their hearts were deceived about the two days or that their hearts were not in the right place to make this decision. This type of revelation is open to private interpretation (**2 Peter 1:19-21**). If only Jesus could more clearly communicate to us, we wouldn't have any doubt what He meant.

Does this type of communication bear any resemblance to what we read in Scripture? No. In Scripture God is not limited to giving just one- and two-word answers to questions, but is very specific and clear. Entire chapters are spent giving detailed instructions, prophecies and warnings. In fact, after reading Eldredge, one is left wondering if Jesus can speak in complete sentences anymore. One-, two-, and three-word answers which are often more confusing

"One erroneous principle, than which scarce any has proved more mischievous to the present glorious work of God, is a notion that it is God's manner in these days to guide His saints, at least some that are more eminent, by inspiration, or immediate revelation. . . . This error will defend and support errors. As long as a person has a notion that he is guided by immediate direction from heaven, it makes him incorrigible and impregnable in all his misconduct. . . ."

Jonathan Edwards

we need only look at an incident in the life of the

Eldredge family which was filled with sorrow. I don't relate this to poke fun, but only to highlight the theological chaos that this method of walking with God is destined to bring.

The Eldredge family dog, Scout, died. In fact, they had to have the vet come and put Scout down because Scout was filled with cancer. After giving the details concerning the pain and emotion of the event and the arrival of the vet, Eldredge writes,

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?" (125)

Eldredge knows that many will not embrace what he "heard" and so he is quick to acknowledge that based upon the statement that "the lion will lie down with the lamb" in the kingdom, there will be animals in Heaven. From this, Eldredge draws his confidence that "I believe that God preserves the life of animals" (125) in the Kingdom.

Knowing that many will disagree, he says,

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. (125)

Look at the convoluted thinking in that paragraph. Many good theologians believe our pets will be in Heaven, and Eldredge acknowledges that this is a subject of theological debate. He doesn't want to engage the subject or try to defend one position or the other. **Yet**, he **does** enter the theological debate by saying that Jesus told him that there **will** be dogs in Heaven. It seems to me that that should end all theological debate! Doesn't the fact that Jesus ruled on such a subject end the debate? Doesn't Jesus' statement to Eldredge on the issue constitute dependable revelation? Or was Jesus lying?

Eldredge got confirmation to what Jesus told him when he relayed those words of Jesus to his family.

I shared the story with Stasi [his wife] 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. (125)

Apparently in Eldredge's theology, a statement from Jesus to himself and his son Blaine is not sufficient to settle the debate about pets in Heaven. In fact, based upon what Eldredge was told by the Shepherd Himself, there should be no debate whatsoever.

"Some, I know, fall into a very vicious habit, which habit they excuse themselves - namely, that of ordering their footsteps according to impressions. Every now and then I meet with people whom I think to be rather weak in the head, who will journey from place to place and will perform follies by the gross under the belief that they are doing the will of God because some silly whim of their diseased brains is imagined to be an inspiration from above."

Charles Spurgeon

It would be far more consistent and intellectually honest for Eldredge to simply say, "Up to this point, many have doubted whether God brings our pets to Heaven or not. I want you to know that the debate is over. The issue is settled. Jesus told me that dogs run in the kingdom and my son heard Jesus playing fetch with Scout. I heard the words of Jesus so that settles it."

As it is, there is no need to look to the Scripture for insight on the nature of the kingdom or

the nature of Heaven. All that is needed is to ask Jesus and listen for the Savior's voice. There is no need to observe from Scripture that "the lion will lie down with the lamb." All that is needed is Jesus' words to Eldredge to settle the issue.

Only in Eldredge's theology can Jesus making a theological statement on a theological issue be seen as not entering into a theological debate. This is twisted. What are we to make of what Jesus revealed to John

Eldredge? Is it authoritative or not? If so, we should write it in the back of our Bible and preach from it like we do the rest of the Scriptures. If not, we can dispense with this "hearing from God" as so much nonsense. I opt for the latter.

A Very Confusing Definition of "Gospel"

This part of the review would be much easier and perhaps unnecessary if Eldredge had spent a bit more time describing and defending the gospel. His lack of description and lack of clarity on the gospel leads one to question whether he even understands what the gospel is. That is disturbing to say the least!

For instance, in a section titled "*Not Every Gospel is Equal*" (164) Eldredge rightly asserts that we ought to judge between truth and error and lovingly state that which is true and confront and expose that which is false. He argues that we have a responsibility to speak out against error. (Ironically, I believe we have that responsibility too, which is why I write this review.)

The problem is that Eldredge seems to use the term "gospel" to refer to distinctions between various movements within Christianity. He encourages us to "judge" between some beliefs within Christianity. For instance, in explaining why he does not refer people to a particular Christian college, Eldredge asserts that "*They just don't get it.*" In his own words, "*What I was referring to were three issues – that the heart is central to the Christian life, that we are invited into a conversational intimacy with God, and that spiritual warfare is real*" (165).

Apparently, this particular Christian college didn't believe the heart was central to the Christian life, didn't believe we all hear from God in the way Eldredge describes, and didn't embrace the view of spiritual warfare that he promotes in this book (dealt with below).

Is this what Eldredge believes is the gospel? The answer to that question is difficult to assess. Problematic is the fact that in the only section on the gospel in the book, Eldredge does not mention the depravity of man, his lostness in sin, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, forgiveness, redemption, the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, the resurrection, the need for repentance or the need for faith. What are we to make of that?

Eldredge even quotes the anathema placed on

false gospels in **Galatians 1:6-9**. Yet, he seems to mean that anyone who does not accept his view of spiritual warfare and hearing God's voice fall under that pronouncement. If his perspective on "hearing God speak" is part of his "gospel" then it is Eldredge who is under the anathema, not those who question his peculiar practices.

Hearing From God For Others

Without any support from Scripture by way of citing verses (Eldredge isn't bound to the Bible since much of his theology comes from his extra-Biblical revelations) he claims,

Listening to God on behalf of one another may be one of the greatest gifts we can offer each other in the body of Christ. If you haven't yet, 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. I'm not sure all the reasons for that. (110)

What verse is that? What spiritual gift listed in **Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, Romans 12, or 1 Corinthians 12** would that be?

Eldredge admits that sometimes people can give mistaken information when trying to hear the voice of God for you (124). Again, God has a hard time communicating to His children clearly. People sometimes get it wrong. Although he admits that people may be mistaken, he offers no counsel on how to discern when someone is mistaken.

What are we to do when someone "hears the voice of God" on our behalf and we suspect it is wrong? The results of not obeying such revelation from God to others on our behalf may carry disastrous and deadly consequences as we will see later. What if someone says, "God is telling me that you are to sell your home, be a missionary to Muslims in Darfur and not marry"?

You may respond, "Well, I don't at all sense that that is the Lord's call on my life."

They can respond, "I know I am hearing the voice of God for you. This is one of the most precious gifts I can be offering to you. This is my spiritual gift, my service to the body of Christ. How can you doubt what I am hearing and what God is clearly saying?"

Truly, this theology can only lead to chaos and confusion in the body of Christ!

A Candid Admission

Eldredge admits that there is danger in living the way he is suggesting. On page 203-204 he writes,

*Now, I am not encouraging a senseless approach to life. I'm not saying that you should follow every thought that passes through your head. There is wisdom, and there is revelation. They go together, hand in hand. [Here he quotes and twists the meaning of **Ephesians 1:17**]. . . Knowing that, we need to admit that risk is always involved when we encourage others to walk with God. People have done a lot of really stupid things in the name of following Jesus. For that reason there are folks in the church who don't want to encourage this sort of risk, this walking with God. Over the centuries they have tried to eliminate the messiness of a personal relationship with Jesus by instituting rules, programs, formulas, methods, and procedures. Those things may have eliminated some of the goofy things that happen when people are encouraged to follow God for themselves. But they also eliminated the very intimacy God calls us to.*

Ironically, it is Eldredge's system of following Jesus and hearing from God that has resulted in people doing really stupid things in the name of following Jesus. That in itself should be cause for concern and should prompt one to wonder if there is a more Biblical way that does not produce such devastating fruit. Indeed, I would suggest that looking to Scripture and Scripture alone for the voice of God would be the proper corrective.

It is Eldredge who has offered "programs, formulas, methods and procedures" for people to follow. He offers formulaic prayers which promise protection from the demonic. He has laid out methods of hearing God's voice including asking questions, pausing, listening, submitting, asking the second question, and trying on answers. He has given in this book procedures for dealing with demons, for prayer, and for knowing God's will.

Indeed, a lot of people have done a lot of foolish things in the name of “hearing from God” when simply reading and obeying their Bibles could have saved them a fountain of grief. In the end, when one follows the unclear, confusing, subjective promptings of their depraved mind in the name of “hearing from God,” God gets blamed for a lot of sin, stupidity, and silliness.

Spiritual Warfare

The purpose of this review is to critique Eldredge's theology of “hearing the voice of God” so I do not want to spend too much time on the various errors in his theology of spiritual warfare. Yet surprisingly, a good amount of the book is taken up with this subject so it deserves some attention. I have critiqued these methods of spiritual warfare in a series of sermons I

preached from ***Ephesians 6***, so I will not go into a thorough treatment on the theology of spiritual warfare here. Below is a list of the errors, falsehoods, and false doctrines concerning spiritual warfare that are presented prominently in

“How one views Scripture will determine the rest of one's theology.”

- James White

Walking With God.

- Eldredge seems to make much of the power and influence of “agreements.” In fact, these form a large part of his view of spiritual warfare, the power of the demonic, and what Eldredge calls the “thief of joy” (81). These “agreements” can be made with ourselves, the thief of joy, or with the enemy (Satan). An “agreement” can be an erroneous belief (e.i. “God doesn't love me”) or wrong behaviors or wrong patterns of living (147). In Eldredge's worldview, these “agreements” seem to take on a mystical power, a Satanic energy, or a binding quality. These “agreements” need to be “renounced” and “verbally repudiated” or Satan may gain a foothold (173, 176, 182, 184, 186, 195, 196, 210).
- Eldredge mentions praying against the “thief of joy” (81). We are not told exactly who or what that is, but this thief appears more than once

and needs to be prayed against repeatedly.

- Eldredge says we should command demons out loud (54) and quotes ***Acts 16:18*** in support.
- Eldredge teaches the need to banish demons named Lust, Desolation (111), Diminishment, and Despair. We are told to call the spirits by name (54-56, 217).
- We are told to “bind Satan” (55-56, 217) and supposedly it takes much time for God to work through these prayers and we need to wait for the effects of our prayers in the spiritual realm to work themselves out in the physical realm.
- He teaches that demons cause sorrow, emotional pain, spiritual oppression, and can jump from one person to another (98). He says that spirits afflict like a virus moving from one person to another, even through casual contact (112). We have to pray against them as they move from person to person (113, 173) since someone else's warfare can transfer to you.
- Eldredge asserts that we have the power to send a spirit (demon) to the “feet of Jesus” (111).
- Feelings and thoughts must be “renounced” lest the Devil gain a foothold (112-113).
- Individual sins have to be renounced in order to be delivered, healed, or freed from them no matter how far past they may be (160).
- Nightmares are caused by demons who must have specific prayers, mantras, or incantations uttered against them (170) in order to be defeated. Waking up early or being unable to get a full night's sleep is caused by demons and some form of spiritual warfare is needed to defeat this “thief of joy” (148).
- The prayer offered at the end of the book is typical of the type of mantra-like, voodoo-style,

reverse curses upon the demonic that are offered on a more than regular basis throughout the book. These include: 1) “bringing the full work of Jesus Christ” to bear on people, animals, inanimate objects, kingdoms, demons, struggles, hexes, curses, Satanic oppression, and a host of situations and circumstances (106-107, 111, 124, 129, 150, 170, 173, 194, 216-217), 2) praying over animals to “bring them under the authority and kingdom of Jesus Christ (81, 90), 3) breaking or reversing curses, or hexes (136, 216-217), 4) naming spirits and rebuking incantations (150, 216-217), 5) praying over a knife and forbidding it to be a channel for unclean spirits (174) and 6) being wary since spirits can attach themselves to all kinds of things (75).

In short, Eldredge's view of demons, the demonic, the occult, spirits, Satan, and Christian spiritual warfare leaves a lot to be desired. It has more in common with a pagan worldview and extra-biblical practices than anything found in Scripture. References to Scripture or biblical support for any of his spiritual warfare practices are **glaringly absent!** The lack of Scriptural support for these practices doesn't deter Eldredge one bit. Many of the methods he employs are done because they are things that Jesus directly tells him to do, whispering in his ear.

A Case Study in Bad Theology

The poor theology, superstition, and chaos of the Eldredge teaching comes into clear focus in one particular section where all these errors seem to collide in Technicolor. On page 79, Eldredge begins telling the story of a horse ride gone bad. Unfortunately, the ride ends in an accident which breaks his nose, one wrist and dislocates the other wrist requiring surgery.

Eldredge had asked the Lord whether to ride the horses or not, and having received a “yes” he went riding. He even prayed over the horse one of his mantra-like prayers bringing the animal “under the authority of Christ and His kingdom.” However, during the ride Eldredge took the horse past a wood pile in one particular draw which had spooked the horse in the past. Once the horse was spooked, Eldredge was on

the losing end of a run-away horse resulting in the injuries.

Why the tragic accident? Eldredge attributes the accident to two things: 1) not asking “where” to ride the horses (since it was going past a particular woodpile which spooked the horse and caused the accident), and 2) not praying over the horse *long enough* in order to bring it under the authority and kingdom of Jesus Christ and to bring down peace upon the animal by “binding” fear and rebellion.

In fact, Eldredge offers this lesson learned,

*That's a really important part of listening to God, by the way. Ask the **next** question. So often we get an answer to the first part of a question but fail to ask the second half. . . Don't just get a first impression and then blast ahead. It might have been good for us to ask, “Where should we ride?” (81)*

According to Eldredge, the tragedy came because he failed to say the right prayers and ask the right questions. If we don't stop to ask the right questions of God, if we are not thorough enough to ask adequate questions and listen for the answers, we can make horrible presumptuous decisions and end up in the arms of tragedy requiring surgery! Apparently God is able to give one-word hints about what He wants us to do, but is unable to providentially control events or prevent things from happening to His children. What kind of a “god” is this? **Quite simply, this is not the God of the Bible!**

Where does Eldredge's silliness stop? Why not ask how long to ride the horse, whether to water the horse before the trip, whether to wear the blue jacket or the red jacket on the ride, whether to take the left turn out of the barn or the right turn? How can someone expect to live in constant fear that they are making wrong, life-threatening, and potentially tragic decisions all because they failed to ask the “next question”?

Eldredge apparently assumes that all tragedy, or sorrow is not God's will and anytime it strikes it must be because we failed to ask the right questions, pray the right mantra, or read the signs God was trying to send to us. If only God could somehow communicate to us, get through to us and speak clearly! Oh how much

tragedy could be avoided! If only He were in control!

Further, Eldredge teaches that praying down the peace of Christ on the animals happens before every ride, so apparently it doesn't last, and we don't know how long it does last. The horses apparently slip out of the authority of Jesus Christ and out of His Kingdom.

Summary Conclusion

In *Walking with God*, Eldredge offers a subjective, emotions-based, unclear paradigm for hearing God's voice. This book is short on exegesis, theology, consistency, clear thinking, and filled with errors, bad theology, subjective impressions, and mystical, gnostic practices which undermine the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This approach to hearing from God apart from the Bible will only lead people away from the God of the Bible.

This becomes apparent when one looks at the theology of God presented in Eldredge's journal of walking with God. Eldredge's God cannot providentially control events, has a hard time communicating with His creatures, needs our submission and cooperation to accomplish His will, and is unable to keep calamity from occurring if we fail to go through the motions of listening for His voice. Eldredge's God speaks in one- or two-word answers, often incomplete sentences which are

mysterious at best and cryptic at worst. The communication offered by Eldredge's God bears **absolutely no** resemblance to the communications offered by the God of the Bible in the Bible. The "gospel" of Eldredge bears no resemblance to the gospel of the New Testament.

"It is a dangerous thing for us to make the whims of our brain instead of the clear precepts of God, the guide of our moral actions."

Charles Spurgeon

The spiritual warfare practiced by Eldredge by way of incantations, mantras, formulaic prayers, vexes, curses, and naming demons bears no resemblance to anything taught in Scripture.

Let the discerning reader avoid at all costs the pool of chaotic subjectivism, theological confusion, and uncertain divining of signs, impressions, and thoughts which Eldredge calls "*conversational intimacy*" and cling instead to the more sure Word to which we do well to pay attention (**2 Peter 1:19-21**). Who would trade the

clear Word of God for such stuttering impotent communication as Eldredge opts for? As the hymn writer has said,

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

Indeed! What more need He say?

Without Wax -

Jim Osman
Kootenai Community Church
www.kootenaichurch.org