

## Broadway Books Readers' Guide

### Resilience

#### Reflections on the Burdens and Gifts of Facing Life's Adversities

By Elizabeth Edwards

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### Introduction

One of the most beloved public figures in the country, Elizabeth Edwards is no stranger to adversity. Many remember the strength she showed after her son, Wade, was killed in a car accident when he was only sixteen years old. She would exhibit remarkable courage again in 2004 when her husband, John, was running for vice president; days before the election, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. After rounds of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, the cancer went away—only to reoccur in 2007. She was in the news most recently when the very private matter of her husband's infidelity became public fodder. At every turn, Elizabeth found grace in the face of anguish.

With inspiring words for all who struggle to find peace despite overwhelming challenges, *Resilience* is source of strength. Unsentimental yet heartfelt, Elizabeth's words reveal the personal journey of a woman who has learned never to say never, and to face her worst fears with a combination of gentle soulfulness and steely willpower. In these powerful, pocket-sized pages, she provides moving testimony to healing in the wake of unspeakable grief. Whether you read *Resilience* with your book club, with your best friend, or in solitude, this little book is sure to bring great comfort. We hope that the following topics will enhance your experience of this stirring meditation on loss, and life.

### Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Elizabeth Edwards begins by recalling the day she was told her father was brain-dead and would never walk again. To what do you attribute his recovery? Throughout her life, what did he teach her about resilience?
2. Over a lifetime, how has Elizabeth's view of the world changed? Did her childhood make her worldview realistic, or idealistic (or both)?
3. Discuss the story of Toshiko. How did she adapt to her tragic circumstances? What did she teach the Anania family, beyond music?
4. Elizabeth is a lifelong lover of literature and has included many meaningful quotations throughout the book. Which ones made you pause, or even earmark? Which literary works have comforted you throughout your life?
5. Elizabeth writes that in the aftermath of Wade's death, she could not honor his memory until she first admitted that he had indeed become a memory. Her previous approach to adversity, steeped in logical solutions, no longer worked. What guidance does she offer for healing the heart when the mind cannot make sense of a terrible reality?

6. Elizabeth uses the metaphor of a blackboard to describe life and identity, recalling that after Wade's death she felt as if her "blackboard" had been erased entirely. How does this metaphor apply to your life story? Which people, roles, and events are part of it right now? What has been erased over the years?

7. Elizabeth came to the conclusion that "God does not promise us protection and intervention. He promises only salvation and enlightenment." How do you cope with the age-old struggle to understand God's role in adversity?

8. The author describes being in Hiroshima in the aftermath of unprecedented destruction, and watching some of her friends bury their pilot fathers, or die in battle themselves. What did these experiences teach her about mortality? What is the best way to introduce a child to the impermanence of life?

9. Chapter five features a story written by Skip Smeiska in response to his family's grief over the death of their son, Joshua. Revisit this story, considering the way the artist responds to being robbed. What does it take to go from wobbliness to "new invention," as he did?

10. How did Elizabeth handle the transition from being a maternal caregiver to being a patient who needed care?

11. What was your reaction to the passages in *Resilience* that deal with John Edwards's indiscretion? How would you respond if your spouse confessed to being unfaithful? How would you have fared with the added element of publicity?

12. *Resilience* concludes with a reference to cancer survivor Mark Gorman's fortune cookie, which read, "You cannot change the wind, but you can adjust the sails." What adjustments are described throughout this book? What does it take to become the kind of person who always finds a way to adjust?

14. Do you think there is much difference between the way men and women cope with adversity? Is one gender raised to be more resilient than the other?

15. Discuss the events in your life that have been the most challenging for you. What were the burdens and gifts of those experiences?

### **About the Author**

Elizabeth Edwards is a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of Law. She has worked in the North Carolina Attorney General's office and at the law firm Merriman, Nichols, and Crampton in Raleigh. She has also taught legal writing as an adjunct instructor at the law school of North Carolina University. She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.