

UNLEASH
THE UNTAMED
FAITH WITHIN

THE BARBARIAN WAY

ERWIN RAPHAEL McMANUS



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To Mariah, my Sweet,
Who loves to live and lives to love.
From first breath you have brought to life
both celebration and adventure.
Compassionate and courageous.
Delicate and determined.
Tender and tenacious.
Lover of God and lover of people.
You are both laughter and tears.
In ancient times, you would be the warrior princess.
Always follow the steps of the One who is scarred.
May we always choose the barbarian way,

Dad

CONTENTS

1. The Barbarian Invasion	1
2. The Barbarian Call	19
3. The Barbarian Tribe	57
4. The Barbarian Revolt	107
<i>About the Author</i>	145
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	147

But then the worst thing happened
that could happen to any fighter,
you got civilized.

—MICK TO ROCKY,
Rocky III

THE BARBARIAN INVASION

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and *worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him.*

It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?"

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. (Judges 11:1-11 NKJV, italics added)

On our way to Belfast, Northern Ireland, we made a stop in Paisley, Scotland. My wife, Kim, my twelve-year-old daughter, Mariah, and I were on a Hollywood version of a spiritual pilgrimage. (If you walk into our living room, you will find hanging as a centerpiece an exact replica of the sword that William Wallace made famous to the non-Scottish masses through Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*.) I was standing in the middle of the Paisley Abbey where Wallace was educated

as a boy. I took my time as I looked reverently at the stained glass that remains a memorial to Wallace's heroics (he didn't look anything like Mel Gibson), yet it was a story about Robert the Bruce that struck me most and has stayed with me ever since.

Robert the Bruce was the Scottish noble whose character is most remembered for betraying Wallace, but he later rose up to lead Scotland to freedom after Wallace's execution. While we were standing in the abbey, Scottish pastor James Pettigrew shared a tale of Robert the Bruce that is a mixture of history and legend.

He died in 1329 at the age of fifty-four. Shortly before his death, Robert the Bruce requested that his heart be removed from his body and taken on crusade by a worthy knight. James Douglas, one of his closest friends, was at his bedside and took on the responsibility. The heart of Robert the Bruce was embalmed and placed in a small container that Douglas carried around his neck. In every battle that Douglas fought, he literally carried the heart of his king pressed against his chest.

In the early spring of 1330, Douglas sailed from Scotland to Granada, Spain, and engaged in a campaign against the

Moors. In an ill-fated battle, Douglas found himself surrounded, and in this situation death was both certain and imminent. In that moment Douglas reached for the heart strapped around his neck, flung the heart into the enemy's midst, and cried out, "Fight for the heart of your king!" One historian quoted Douglas as shouting, "Forward, brave heart, as ever thou were wont to do, and Douglas will follow his king's heart or die!" The motto of the Douglas clan to which the present duke belongs is even to this day simply, "Forward."

A TRIBE CALLED FORWARD

Although anyone who understands the heart of God knows that the Crusades were a tragic lesson in missing the point, the power of this story awakens within me a primal longing that I am convinced waits to be unleashed within everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ. To belong to God is to belong to His heart. If we have responded to the call of Jesus to leave everything and follow Him, then there is a voice within us crying out, "Fight for the heart of your King!"

Yet Christianity over the past two thousand years has moved from a tribe of renegades to a religion of conformists. Those who choose to follow Jesus become participants in an insurrection. To claim we believe is simply not enough. The call of Jesus is one that demands action. Jesus began His public ministry with a simple invitation: "Come, follow Me." His closing instructions to His disciples can be summarized in one word, "Go!" A quick survey of the modern church would lead you to believe His invitation was "Come, and listen," and His closing mandate would be summarized in the one word "No!" The tribe of Jesus, above all people, should rightly carry the banner, "Forward."

I know the imagery of this story is nothing less than barbaric, but maybe that's the point. The invitation of Jesus is a revolutionary call to fight for the heart of humanity. We are called to an unconventional war using only the weapons of faith, hope, and love. Nevertheless, this war is no less dangerous than any war ever fought. And for those of us who embrace the cause of Christ, the cost to participate in the mission of God is nothing less than everything we are and everything we have.

Strangely enough, though, some who come to Jesus Christ

seem to immediately and fully embrace this barbarian way. They live their lives with every step moving forward and with every fiber of their being fighting for the heart of their King. Jesus Christ has become the all-consuming passion of their lives. They are not about religion or position. They have little patience for institutions or bureaucracies. Their lack of respect for tradition or ritual makes them seem uncivilized to those who love religion. When asked if they are Christians, their answer might surprisingly be no, they are passionate followers of Jesus Christ. They see Christianity as a world religion, in many ways no different from any other religious system. Whether Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity, they're not about religion; they're about advancing the revolution Jesus started two thousand years ago.

This is the simplicity of the barbarian way. If you are a follower of Christ, then you are called to fight for the heart of your King. It is a life fueled by passion—a passion for God and a passion for people. The psalmist tells us to delight ourselves in the Lord, and He will give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). When Christianity becomes just another religion, it focuses on what God requires. Just to keep people in line, we build our own Christian civilization and then

demand that everyone who believes in Jesus become a good citizen.

It's hard to imagine that Jesus would endure the agony of the Cross just to keep us in line. Jesus began a revolution to secure our freedom. The new covenant that He established puts its trust not in the law, but in the transforming power of God's Spirit living within us. The revolution of the human heart would fuel the life and vitality of this movement. We would delight in God, and He would give us the desires of our hearts. With our hearts burning for God, we would move forward with the freedom to pursue the passions burning within us.

RAW LOVE

My daughter, Mariah, and I were eating Thai food in San Diego. We were getting some important dad-and-daughter time. There's nothing like one-on-one to create an environment for some real heart-to-heart conversation. After she reminded me that I was the only one between the two of us who liked Thai, she began to open her heart and bring me into her dreams.

"Daddy, one day I want to make a billion dollars, and I want to give it all away. I want to help the poor; I want to help the needy. I want to make a billion dollars, and I don't care if I have nothing, but I want to give it all to help people."

As I was listening to her dream, I thought, *I can fix this*. Because the dream was almost right.

But she kept saying, "I want to make a billion dollars and give it away and help the poor, and I don't care if I'm homeless or have nothing. I just want to give it away to help people."

I said, "Mariah, I want you to make a billion dollars and give to the poor and the needy, but it's not a good idea that you have nothing. Then you would be needy and somebody would have to take care of you and you wouldn't be responsible."

"I don't care if I don't have anything, Daddy," Mariah responded. "I just want to make a billion dollars and give it away. I don't care if I'm homeless. I don't care if I have nothing."

"But if you're homeless, our taxes would have to pay for you."

Looking at me as if to say, *Daddy, you just don't understand*, she continued, "I don't care if I have nothing. I just

want to make a billion dollars and give it all away. I don't care if I have nothing."

I thought, *Okay, I'm not really helping here.* I was trying to help her understand that she needed to keep something, restructure it, and reinvest it so that she could make another billion and help another group of people. I just wasn't able to help her with her dream. And I thought, *A metaphor—that will help.*

"Honey, let's say you're a large tree bearing fruit for people to eat because they are hungry, and you want to give all your fruit away because you want to feed everyone, care for everyone. But because of that, you didn't care about your roots, and so you said, 'I'm going to uproot myself. Who cares about the soil and the water? I just want to bear all the fruit I can.' And then you will die. Then the next year you won't be able to bear fruit. It's better to take care of your roots, too, so that you can keep bearing fruit year after year after year."

She said, "Daddy, what in the world do roots have to do with this?"

I knew I wasn't making progress. We left the place and went to the car. I unlocked it, and she got into the car quickly. By the time I slid into the driver's seat, she was sobbing, and

I didn't know what was going on. I asked, "Mariah, are you okay?"

Just drenched in tears, she looked at me and said, "Daddy, I want to change the world, but you can't appreciate my dream. I want to change the world." She continued, "I didn't say I would be homeless; I said I didn't care if I became homeless. I want to change the world. Can't you just hear my dream?"

I realized that instead of nurturing and unleashing the dream being born out of her heart for God, I was domesticating her dream and trying to civilize her raw and untamed faith, which was ironic since I was so excited that this was her heart.

"Well, honey, I am excited about your dream," I said. "Don't you think that we were a small part of trying to nurture your heart to have that dream?"

She said, "Yeah, but I don't think you're getting it."

I said, "Well, I get it now. I get it now."

It took me a little while, but suddenly I saw it clearly. I was experiencing a barbarian invasion. Mariah's heart was beating to the rhythm of the heart of God. And her dreams were way too raw for me. I didn't see it initially, but I was trying to civilize her instead of unleashing the untamed faith

within her. After all, I am her dad. It's okay if I live a life of irrational faith and breathtaking adventure. I want something different for her. I want her to have security and safety—you know, a predictable, boring, mundane life where I never have to worry about her again. In that moment I realized Mariah would have none of that. For her there is only one path. Even at twelve she has already committed to it. Be still my heart, but my daughter has chosen the barbarian way out of civilization. And it's for this simple reason that this book is dedicated to her.

OF WIND AND FIRE

Twenty-five years ago I was a part of the barbarian invasion. I knew little about God, but I wanted to know nothing else but God. I was overwhelmed that Someone as extraordinary as Jesus of Nazareth would have any interest or desire to embrace someone like me. Even before I knew what was written on the pages of the sacred text that we know as the Bible, I knew that I would give my heart fully to whatever I would learn was on God's heart. I was a follower of Jesus, and for me there was no turning back.

Over the years I have met perhaps thousands who have been a part of this barbarian invasion. From my brother, Alex, who swore allegiance to Christ, even though he had no idea that heaven existed; to my wife, Kim, who as a child growing up in a foster home cried out to Jesus that she would go anywhere He wanted and do anything He wanted her to do. In their unique voices they were committing to move forward and fight for the heart of their King.

Perhaps the tragedy of our time is that such an overwhelming number of us who declare Jesus as Lord have become domesticated—or, if you will, civilized. We have lost the simplicity of our early faith. Beyond that, we have lost the passion and power of that raw, untamed, and primal faith. Maybe John was alluding to that in the Apocalypse when he told the church of Ephesus that they had lost their first love (Revelation 2:1–4). God's command to Israel was simply, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:5–6). And when Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest of all the commandments?" and "How do I inherit eternal life?" His answer was the same, except to add

that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 10:17–19; 12:28–31).

The barbarian way is about love, intimacy, passion, and sacrifice. Barbarians love to live and live to love. For them God is life, and their mission is to reconnect humanity to Him. Their passion is that each of us might live in intimate communion with Him who died for us. The barbarian way is a path of both spirit and truth. The soul of the barbarian is made alive by the presence of Jesus.

As John the Baptist reminded us, the evidence that Jesus is the Christ is that He baptizes us in both Spirit and fire. Barbarians are guided by the wind of God and ignited by the fire of God. The way of the barbarian can be found only by listening to the voice of the Spirit. The barbarian way can be known only by those who have the heart of God. The steps of the barbarian are guided by the footprints of Jesus. Barbarians see the invisible and hear the inaudible because their souls are alive to God.

If I know nothing else about you, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, I know this without question: there is within you a raw and untamed faith waiting to be unleashed. When we come to the living God, He consumes who we are and gives

us life that is fueled by His presence. You have been recreated to live in a raw and primal spirituality. Jesus came to ignite a fire within you that would consume you and ignite you. Jesus the King came to fight for your heart. If He has won your heart, then to follow your heart will always lead you to follow the heart of God. He will always lead you to advance forward behind enemy lines to win the hearts of those who do not yet know Him or love Him.

A FASHIONABLE FIGHT

One of my favorite characters in *Braveheart* was the Irish guy who joined William Wallace in his crusade. Remember him, the crazy guy who talked to God? Appropriately his name was Stephen. His most memorable quote was this: "The Almighty says this must be a fashionable fight. It draws the finest people." Of course, any civilized Christian knows why he's crazy. Every devout believer—in fact, any person of faith from any religious persuasion, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or whatever—believes in prayer, but we all know prayer is supposed to be us talking to God. We get a little nervous when someone starts hearing from God.

What has the Almighty been saying to you lately? And when was the last time He called you to participate in a fashionable fight?

He's calling you to fight for the heart of your King. For some, doing this will be just way too barbaric, but for others, their only option will be to choose the barbarian way.

PRIMAL LEADERS

A barbarian invasion is taking place even right now. They are coming from the four corners of the earth and they are numbered among the unlikely. From the moment Jesus walked among us the invasion began. And just as with those who crossed paths with Him here on earth, those who are most religious will be most offended and indignant. Barbarians are not welcome among the civilized and are feared among the domesticated. The way of Jesus is far too savage for their sensibilities. The sacrifice of God's Son, the way of the Cross, the call to die to ourselves, all lack the dignity of a refined faith. Why insist on such a barbaric way? Why a reckless call to awaken the barbarian faith within us at the risk of endangering this great civilization we have come to know as Christianity?

Because Jesus did not suffer and die so that we could build for ourselves havens, but so that we might expand the kingdom of His love. Because invisible kingdoms are at war for the hearts and lives of every human being who walks on the face of this earth. And times of war require barbarians who are willing to risk life itself for the freedom of others. The irony, of course, is that barbarians are driven away in times of peace—they only disrupt our communities, traditions, and sensibilities. It is only in the most desperate of times—times of war or conflict—that these outcasts are welcomed or even invited to return.

Jephthah, the son of a harlot, was despised by his people and expelled from his tribe. Those who would later choose to join him were considered a band of worthless men, yet his story reminds us that the very ones who are unwanted and driven from among us are the ones we most need to lead in times of war. Barbarians can be counted as worthless when all is safe and secure, but dangerous times suddenly make them invaluable. We live in such times. And we are not ready for the great challenges set before us. We have not been prepared to take on any great quest, to battle any great enemy, or even to pursue the great dream for which we have been born. Instead,

Christianity has become our Shawshank, and our redemption will only come if we find the courage to escape the prison we have created for ourselves. Risking everything to live free is our only hope—humanity's only hope.

Jesus is being lost in a religion bearing His name. People are being lost because they cannot reconcile Jesus' association with Christianity. Christianity has become docile, domesticated, civilized. We have forgotten that there is a kingdom of darkness stealing the hopes and dreams and souls of a humanity without God. It is time to hear the barbarian call, to form a barbarian tribe, and to unleash the barbarian revolt. Let the invasion begin . . .

