

Before I knew it I was blurting out, "Don't do it. Please don't do it."

They all looked at me with the strangest expressions of confusion.

Well, it was too late for me to hide in obscurity, so I knew I needed to explain. I went on, "Don't go around the world and make our missionaries mentally healthy. You'll ruin everything. You'll totally mess up the cause. I mean you have, let's say, a husband and a wife from Kentucky and they have four kids and they believe God has called them to an obscure city in Central Asia. Suddenly they find themselves in the middle of two million people who don't speak a word of English, and they don't speak a word of Mandarin or Cantonese or any form of tribal dialect. And each morning they wake up excited and confident that somehow they're going to bring that entire city to faith in Jesus Christ. You go and make them normal, and they'll be on a plane back home the next day."

The board member making the presentation graciously responded, "Erwin clearly has a different view of professional counseling than we do."

These people have got to be crazy to do what they're

doing and insane to believe that it's possible, don't they? They are not insane, but they are crazy. One day they just got up and took the barbarian way out of civilization.

If you are a follower of Christ and you have allowed yourself to be domesticated, you have lost the power of who you are and who God intends for you to be. You were not created to be normal. God's desire for you is not compliance and conformity. You have been baptized by Spirit and fire. Asleep within you is a barbarian, a savage to all who love the primal and proper. You must go to the primal place and enter the presence of the Most High God, for there you will be changed by His presence. Let Him unleash the untamed faith within you.

### GOD-TAUGHT

At pentecost God unleashed His Spirit upon all who would declare Jesus their hope. In that moment a new tribe was born—a Spirit tribe. To all who would believe in His Son, the Lord God declares, "I will be their God, and they will be My people." This tribe would bear the evidence of His Spirit. They would be God-taught, God-moved, and God-inspired.

Our spiritual legacy is that we belong to this barbarian tribe. From the first human to the present, the history of God is one of conversation and transformation. The Scriptures are filled with stories of women and men who heard God speak and acted as if hearing Him were normal. Hearing God is not only to be normal, but also to be an essential proof of belonging to God. To be taught by God is one of the primal evidences that you have entered the new covenant ushered in by Jesus. In Jeremiah 31:33–34, the Lord declares:

“This is the covenant I will make with  
the house of Israel  
after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds  
and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.

No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.”

To study the Bible is important, but it is not a primal evidence that you belong to God. Anyone can study the Bible, but only those who know Him can hear His voice and are taught by Him. Although the barbarian may not be formally trained, she is always God-taught. Jesus expected that those who were His followers would hear His voice, know His voice, and follow only His voice, even as He calls us out by name and leads us on the barbarian way.

### HEARING VOICES

My son, Aaron, was probably five or six when he began asking me about the voice of God. He would often hear me talk about having conversations with God (most of us call this prayer), and it piqued his curiosity. On top of that, week by week he heard me teach and share mystical and miraculous experiences with God. I should have been prepared for the question, but it actually caught me off guard. When he asked me, "What does God's voice sound like?" I really didn't know how to answer. I guess when I think about it, God's voice sounds a lot like my voice. After all, the Spirit speaks to us through the conscience as well as through the Scriptures. Even

when I'm reading the Scriptures, the voice I'm hearing is mine reading the text. In my experience the voice of God is an intimate experience, but not an audible one. Or at least it's not a voice coming from the outside in, but a voice coming from deep within.

I can't quite remember what I told him. Keep in mind, he was only five or six. I think my response was something like, "That's a great question. Now go watch cartoons."

A few years later, after many other similar inquiries, Aaron went off to his first junior high camp in Big Bear, about two hours from Los Angeles. Somewhere in the middle of the week, one of the other pastors at Mosaic, whose daughter was also at the camp, decided to go up with me so we could see our kids.

I expected to find Aaron having a great time, growing in the Lord, and making new friends. Instead, he had gotten himself into deep trouble. Evidently on their first lunch break he was involved in a fight. But it wasn't really a fight; it was sort of a "prefight." You know, the stuff guys do before the fight because they don't really want to fight.

Anyway, some kid said something, and Aaron said something back. The tension heightened, the smack deepened,

and the next thing you know, Aaron's lunging at him and his friends are holding him back. By the time I got there two days had passed, and Aaron refused to ask for forgiveness. And if acting on his hostility wasn't bad enough, he had to go off and be the classic son of a preacher. In typical male form, he had to describe what he was going to do to his antagonist before he proceeded to do it. In short, he yelled out, "I'm going to beat the crap out of you." (In case you're wondering, *crap* is not an acceptable descriptive term used in our home.) I went to celebrate my son's spiritual pilgrimage, and I found myself in the middle of an all-out war.

I knew the Lord was working already because when Aaron tried to assault the other kid, his friends held him back. The other kid was huge and probably would have killed Aaron. We already had something to be grateful for.

When I confronted Aaron and asked him if the story I was given was accurate, he said, "Absolutely." He didn't deny anything. He also wasn't sorry for anything. I told him he needed to ask for forgiveness, and he told me that wasn't going to happen. He wasn't sorry, he would do it again, and upon reflection, he was sorry for only one thing—he didn't

get at least one good punch in before they brought him down.

Trying to understand what in the world could have made Aaron so angry, I asked him to tell me what motivated him to attack the kid. Aaron said, "Dad, I don't care what you say. He said something about Mom. Anyone who says something about my mom is going to have to deal with me."

You can imagine my response: "He said something about your mom? What did he say about your mom?" I have to admit, I was with him.

Anyway, I still insisted that he needed to make things right. He said he would not, and in fact, he insisted on being allowed to leave the camp. He reminded me that I had committed to him that he would never have to pretend or play the Christian game. I told him if that's what he wanted to do, he could leave. I also told him I felt it was a mistake. He insisted and asked me if I would help him pack. I said no, I wouldn't stop him from leaving, but I wouldn't help him leave either. So for the next hour he put together his stuff, dragged it up the hill, and pushed it into the car.

Just as we were about to leave, I asked him to sit with me and talk one last time before we drove away. We sat on two

large rocks in the middle of the woods. I asked him a simple question: "Aaron, is there any voice inside you telling you what you should do?"

He paused and then responded, "Yes."

"What's the voice telling you?"

"That I should stay and work it out."

I asked him, "Can you identify that voice?"

He immediately said, "Yes. It's God."

It was the moment I had waited for. I didn't expect it to come under those circumstances. Nevertheless, it was there. I turned to Aaron and said, "Aaron, do you realize what just happened? You just heard the voice of the living God. He spoke to you from within your soul. Forget everything else that just happened. God has spoken to you, and you were able to recognize Him."

I'll never forget his response: "Well, I'm still not doing what He said."

I explained to him that was his choice, but this is what would happen. If he rejected the voice of God and chose to disobey His guidance, his heart would become hardened, and his ears would become dull. And if he continued on this path, there would be a day when he would never again



hear the voice of God. There would come a day when he would deny that God even speaks or has ever spoken to him. But if he treasured God's voice and responded to Him with obedience, then his heart would be softened, and his ears would always be able to hear the whisper of God into his soul.

Aaron chose to stay, I'm grateful to say. If he had chosen differently, he would have begun the path toward domestication. Perhaps he never would have rejected the faith overtly. He might have even chosen to be a faithful attender at a church and been by everyone else's estimation a good man, but he would no longer be a barbarian.

### ENCOUNTERED

Years later when Aaron was about fourteen, I saw this so clearly. We were driving in the car together and had one of those gut-wrenching heart-to-heart talks. "Dad, I think that if I had not been raised in a Christian home, I would not be a Christian," he said.

You can imagine the rush of emotions going through me. It took all the restraint I had to not panic and stay calm. "Why

do you think that?" I asked as if his statement had no emotional effect on me.

Aaron continued, "I have way too many doubts and questions."

"Oh," I said, sounding as relieved as I could. "I have those too. So what are you going to do?"

I'll never forget Aaron's answer. It was one of the clearest confirmations that my son was not an unwilling member of a religion, that he, too, was a true barbarian. "Well, I've met God. So what are you supposed to do?"

I affirmed, "That's a dilemma, isn't it?"

So many of us have put our hope in teaching our children about God rather than guiding them into an experience with God. We essentially civilize our children rather than guide them to the barbarian way. I am concerned that there are many who have grown up in church and have been effectively Christianized but have never genuinely met Christ. In the days of Jonathan Edwards, he faced the same dilemma when the congregation of his time had a Halfway Covenant. The children of members were essentially Christians who had never met Christ. His classic message, "Sinners in the Hands

of an Angry God," was directed not to the unchurched, but to the church. Our goal must not be to populate the Christian religion but to bring people into a genuine relationship with God. We must make a clear distinction between the religion of Christianity and the revolution that Jesus began two thousand years ago.

### GOD-MOVED

A second primal evidence of the barbarian spirit is unleashed when you enter into covenant with God. Not only are you God-taught as a disciple of the living God, but you are also God-moved. God informed us that He has a strategy for reestablishing His reputation among the nations:

Say to the house of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among

the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, *when I show myself holy through you* before their eyes." (Ezekiel 36:22-23, italics added)

God made an emphatic declaration that He will prove He is God and He is holy not through His action but through the actions of His people. A civilized faith relates to right and wrong as a moral obligation. A barbarian faith loves good and hates evil. There is no obligation fueling the actions of His people. They are passionate about the very things that are on the heart of God. Their motivation is not external, but intrinsic. They are moved from the inside out. Speaking again of this new covenant, God described what this primal transformation will look like:

✠ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And *I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow* my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your

forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:26–28, italics added)

From the moment we become citizens of the kingdom of God, we become aliens and strangers in a world that chooses to live absent of God. From the first step taken to follow Jesus, we are out of step with the rest of the world. Once your life is in sync with the story of God, you become out of sync with any story that attempts to ignore or eliminate God. You are a stranger to them, an alien among them, a nomadic wanderer who, while refusing to be rooted in this life, seems to somehow enjoy this life most.

Probably motivated by movies such as *Men in Black*, Aaron once asked me if there really were aliens among us. I told him that of course there were, and that we had to register with the government to gain peaceful admission. A bit unnerved, he asked me if I was implying that I was an alien. I told him that while I had chosen to keep this confidential in the past, it was a good time to let him know the truth: I was an alien in this land. He said, "Prove it."

I pulled out my green card that had my picture and the declaration "Resident Alien." I tried to calm him down by

assuring him that he was still half human. It didn't seem to help. Okay, so I'm only from El Salvador. Not quite as glamorous as being Vulcan or Romulan, but an alien nonetheless. It's ironic that now our entire family is legitimately alien. Our citizenship is in eternity; history is our temporary residence. You are no different. Every one of us who hears the barbarian call of Christ and chooses to follow will become a foreigner and perhaps even an outcast in the time and place in which we live.

John the Baptist heard the voice of God and became an outcast among those to whom God was silent. His life was short, and if his death lacked anything, it was dignity; yet he was considered great in the sight of God. First pointing to him, Jesus then pointed to us. He promised that the least in the kingdom of heaven would be greater than even John. Jesus was pronouncing the coming of a tribe. Where there was one, there would soon be millions.

All who belong to the barbarian tribe are like Moses, who stepped toward the fire and heard the voice of God. For them the whole earth is holy ground. They do not separate between sacred and secular or real life and spiritual life. All of life is sacred; every action is spiritual. God is everywhere for them and in all things at all times.

## WATER GRAVE

One Sunday morning a young woman named Nicole and her friends introduced me to Dathan. Dathan is one of those guys who stands out in the crowd—built like a rock, big smile, charismatic personality. Dathan lives in Los Angeles and is pursuing a career as an actor. He's also in the process of preparing for tryouts, hoping to make it as a defensive back in the NFL. Having grown up in Philly, he had chosen the path of hard-core crime and violence, so it was strange that my first conversation with him was about fear.

He had just become a follower of Jesus Christ, and Nicole had asked him if he was ready to be baptized. Her question evoked an unexpected response. He was terrified. So they brought him to me so that I could talk him through it. After brief introductions, I asked him to tell me what the problem was. He explained that he was afraid of water. The baptism was planned for Dockweiler Beach, and he just didn't feel he could go through with it.

I asked him if he was just afraid of the ocean or if there was more to it. He went on to explain that he was terrified of sharks. Later I learned that when he was about eleven years

old, he was in the water and saw one of his friends being attacked. He was an eyewitness to a horrific and tragic event. It had been many years, but the memories of that event still haunted him.

I told him that there were other options. We could baptize him in a pool or even a Jacuzzi. That seemed to alleviate his concern a bit, and he began to relax. Then I added, "But that would sort of be the easy way out. You don't look like the kind of guy who takes the easy way out of anything." I went on, "What do you think is the likelihood you would get eaten by a shark the day you're baptized? I mean, the percentages have to be really low—like one in a million or maybe one in a thousand. Anyway, it's really unlikely that you would be attacked by a shark if you chose to be baptized in the ocean."

He nodded in agreement, but my comments clearly didn't help.

"Well, think of it like this," I said. "The likelihood is so low that you would get attacked by a shark, you would know it was God's will for your life if a shark did attack you." I don't know why, but the thought wasn't all that comforting to him. Then I added, "But if you live, if perchance no shark



kills you and you survive the experience, then you will know without a shadow of a doubt that God has kept you alive, that He has a purpose for you to fulfill." I closed our conversation by concluding, "I think the pool or Jacuzzi would be okay for someone else, but I think for you it's going to have to be the ocean."

I left him with a decision to make. Would he hear the barbarian call, or would he immediately choose to be domesticated?

It wasn't long before Dathan informed me that he was headed to the beach. He had an appointment with destiny. To facilitate his experience, I asked some of my friends to take him to a shark reserve so he could spend some time with his friends. On the day of his baptism, the waves were strong and the waters rough. One man walked on each side of him as he worked his way out deeper into the ocean. A wave hit him head-on and knocked the other two men into the water, but Dathan, determined not to go under until he had to, grabbed both and willed them back up.

After he was immersed in the ocean and worked his way to the beach, he threw himself into the sand and wept. I asked him later what overwhelmed him. He said it wasn't

fear; it was the knowledge that God had a purpose for his life.

Now you might be thinking this is a bit of overkill or even emotionally abusive, but if I've learned anything over the years, it's that it is a grave error to try to domesticate a barbarian. We live in a world of wandering barbarians who do not know God. They have no interest in civilized religion and no time for the games of the proper and refined. Dathan had acted on the worst of his passions, and nothing but a new passion would set him free. Dathan needed to understand that it was a life-and-death decision.

It shouldn't surprise us that Paul described baptism as a water grave. He chose this imagery to describe this sacred passage: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Only a few months after his baptism, Dathan landed a part in a movie pulling together a potential cast of Ed Norton, Nicolas Cage, and Taye Diggs. His, of course, was a smaller part, but in the midst of it he had to make a big deci-

sion. He was offered a scene that would be standard in the industry but was now beneath his standards. It would have been easy for Dathan to justify the fact that it's just the way of the civilized, but he chose to follow his barbarian call. He turned down a scene that could have helped establish his career and chose instead to establish his character. His decision wasn't about legalism; he was moved from the inside out to do what would bring God pleasure and honor His name. And like Dathan, all of us, if we are to follow Jesus with the passion He desires and deserves, must face the sharks and never submit to them.

We're all called to pass through the water grave. Yes, the way into the tribe of God is barbaric. You are joined with the death of Christ, buried with Him, and raised to live again. The barbarian has tasted death, has faced death, has conquered death. What do you fear when you have already died and you walked away? Your greatest fears are behind you, and you now go where only those once dead, yet alive, can go. It is here where the third primal expression of the barbarian spirit is born in every follower of Christ. The barbarian way is a path where we are God-taught and God-moved, but we are also God-inspired.

## GOD-INSPIRED

The prophet Joel described the catalytic effect of the barbarian spirit ignited by the new covenant:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.  
(Joel 2:28-29)

God's ultimate end for our transformation is to unleash the untamed faith within. When His Spirit is poured into our lives, we are inspired to an extraordinary level of living. Barbarians never exist simply to survive. Barbarians never just get through the day. Barbarians wake to live and live life fully awake. To be filled with the Spirit of God is to be filled with dreams and visions that are too compelling to ignore. Live or die, succeed or fail, barbarians must pursue and attempt such dreams and visions. The barbarian spirit dreams great dreams and finds the courage to live them.

The barbarian call confronts us with all we love and all we fear. We resist love to avoid pain and squelch our dreams out of fear of failure. For the Spirit of God to unleash dreams and visions within our souls, we must become free to risk and to fail. Every dream born of God is fueled by love. Every conversation to be had with God challenges the boundaries of our imagination. When we turn to God, His love transforms us and ignites a new passion within us. All that we have loved is consumed by the passions of a new heart. We discover the power and force of love in its purest form. At the same time, when we turn our hearts toward God, all of our fears are consumed by one fear. We are called to fear only God. There is an important reason for this. What we fear is what we're subject to; our fears define our master. Where there is no fear, there is no control.

When we fear God and God only, we are no longer bound by all of the other fears that would hold us captive. The fear of death, the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of insignificance—all of the fears that know us by name and haunt us in the dark of the night become powerless when we know the fear of the Lord. And if this is not enough, we discover that perfect love casts out all fear. Not even God will

hold us or control us by fear. When we fear Him, we in essence begin to live a life where we are fearless.

The freedom to love and the freedom from fear make the barbarian an entirely different species within the whole of humanity. This may be the most extraordinary mark of the Spirit of God within the heart of humanity: the freedom to live out dreams greater than ourselves. Yet if we were honest with ourselves, the church would be the last place most people would go to have their dreams nurtured, developed, and unleashed.

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### FESTIVAL OF LIFE

One of the great joys I've been privileged to experience as a result of writing *Seizing Your Divine Moment* has been receiving the stories of people from all over the world who have chosen to redirect their lives to pursue the dreams that had remained latent within them. As lead pastor of Mosaic, I regard this as an essential measure of spiritual health and vitality. When the church becomes an institution, people are nothing more than volunteers to be recruited. When the church is a movement, our stewardship becomes the unleash-

ing of our God-given gifts, talents, and passions. My goal is not to cast a vision that everyone buys into, but to create a visional community where everyone who enters in begins to have wild and God-sized dreams and visions. There is a price to pay, of course, when you choose this particular path; you end up with an unruly barbarian tribe. They keep getting called by God to do things you didn't expect or really didn't want them to do.

From our community in Los Angeles we have social workers in New Delhi; artists in Istanbul; an aspiring chef in Paris; a dancer, a film editor, a soon-to-be doctor, and a fashion designer in New York; businesspeople in China; a psychologist and educator in Lithuania; an environmental engineer in Morocco; and the list goes on and on and on. I cannot overemphasize how difficult these people are to replace. Yet as much complexity as this brings and as much instability as this creates, it pales in comparison to watching lives being wasted on careers and occupations that were taken on as a result of obligation or lack of courage to pursue the dreams that were waiting to be realized.

While modern man keeps hoping we will evolve into something that will be godlike, the barbarian way unveils that



our best future is found in our primal beginnings. Evolution is not the key to humanity's freedom; transformation is. There is a metamorphosis waiting to happen within every one of us. A part of this metamorphosis is discovering your divine destiny and knowing for the first time who you were created to become. When the Spirit of God comes to live within you, you strangely become aware of your inadequacy and your extraordinary potential. When you choose the path of a civilized religion, any change that is worth noting is at best incremental. It is only when you choose the barbarian way that the result is revolutionary.

Recently I heard an old Celtic proverb that says you should never give a sword to a man who can't dance. This couldn't be more true than on the barbarian way. Every mystic warrior finds his strength from his inner joy. This is what Nehemiah declared as he called God's people to rise up and face their impending challenge: "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

You have now joined a tribe of dreamers and visionaries,



and this is no small part of why you are passionate to bring others into this community of faith, hope, and love. You have found through the liberation of your soul that each barbarian walks a path that unleashes raw and untamed faith.

