

HALO EFFECT

Years ago I learned about an avant-garde military technique used by the Special Forces described as HALO. HALO stands for "high altitude low opening." While parachuting of any kind is a risky enterprise, to add the feature of enemy fire shooting at you, picking you off like a sitting duck as you glide slowly to the ground, would make it more so. The sound of the airplane would inform the enemy that you are coming, and your slow descent would leave you helpless to defend yourself.

HALO had an answer to both problems. The plane would fly minimally at 25,000 feet and sometimes up to 40,000 feet where it was undetectable even by radar. When it was time to jump, your first instruction was not to open your parachute. You would literally move into a free fall. In a matter of seconds your terminal velocity would be 120 miles an hour, though you might hit speeds of up to 200 miles per hour. You open the chute at the last possible minute, with only enough time to save your life. With canopy deployment at 1,800 to 2,200 feet, there's just enough time to break your fall so that you land safely behind enemy territory. If you live, you get to fight the enemy.

I think this somehow is a more accurate metaphor of what it means to enter the kingdom of God, not to mention a far more dramatic picture of what it could mean to be born from above. When we become citizens of God's kingdom, we are of both heaven and earth. We become like God's HALO effect—high altitude low opening.

Paul told us that "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Just a few verses later he reminded us that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

It's as if at the moment of our conversion, we were lifted beyond time into eternity. Seated with Christ in the heavenly realms, we can't get much higher in altitude than that. But then created by God to do good, to fulfill His purpose in the world, to advance His cause, we are God's ground troops dropped from eternity back into history. In the same world where we were once at home, we are now strangers and aliens. Where once we were enemies of God, we are now behind enemy lines.

The procedure that God chooses is clearly a low open-

ing. After a moment of euphoria, we come crashing back down to earth, opening our chutes just soon enough to break our fall and allow us to land on the ground, advancing on enemy territory.

PRIMAL ATTIRE

Last year the men of Mosaic invited me to join them at an event set in the mountains called Highlander. In groups of twenty, the guys were divided into Scottish clans. I was a member of the one Irish clan, O'Hare (which, by the way, won the Highlander championship). On Saturday night I talked about the barbarian way. I happened to mention my admiration for the Celts. I pointed out that when the Celts went to war, they painted their bodies and wore only their primal attire—in other words, they were in the buff. You can only imagine what the Roman soldiers who warred against them, dressed in the finest battle gear, must have thought when they ran across those Celts. Maybe this reason and this reason alone explains why the Romans could never conquer the Celts. They didn't really want to catch them.

The point, of course, was for the men at the retreat to

shed their doubts, to shed their fears, to shed their timidity—not to shed their clothes. But in a study of missing the point, the next morning at the closing event, which happened to be a tug-of-war in the middle of a pool of mud, one of the men we now simply call “Nature Boy” showed up naked. Since it was a Christian camp, he was instructed to put on some clothes, so he threw on a shirt. I think once again he missed the point.

By the start of the tug-of-war, he was again unveiled in his full glory. One of my friends, John, was the first man in line on the opposing team. He is an attorney and a highly educated professional. You can only imagine what he was thinking: *Hold tight, pull hard, and keep your eyes up.*

Oh, and by the way, when Nature Boy’s clan saw their fellow tribesman choose the barbarian way, they stripped in his honor. You can only imagine the whelps that resulted from pulling rope against raw flesh. Fortunately what their clan had in boldness, they lacked in muscle. Soon they were covered in mud, their nakedness to be seen no more.

When David returned to Jerusalem exhilarated by the victories that God had given him at war, he disrobed and

danced before the Lord. But Michal, his wife, despised him. When she rebuked him for his inappropriate display of celebration and worship of God, David's answer was unwavering: "I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes" (2 Samuel 6:21–22).

I'm not saying that we should all go around naked, but I am saying that we need to find the courage and freedom to be ourselves. We need to let ourselves become the unique individuals that God created us to be. We need to stop trying to be what everyone else wants us to be and stop worrying about what everyone else thinks. Civilized people measure one another by their robes and signet rings. The barbarians measure only heart and actions. Barbarians live as if they are naked before God and naked before men. They have nothing to hide; they do not waste their energy pretending to be someone they're not. It was Nathaniel, whom Jesus saw while he was alone under a fig tree, that He described as a man without guile. God sees straight through to the heart and looks for those in whom there is nothing false. The barbarian hides nothing before God, and his tribe battles naked and unashamed.

WHEN TIGERS UNITE

Although the force of one person fully committed to God is tremendous, it pales in comparison to the force of God's people moving together. One barbarian wandering through civilization can be discarded as nothing more than an oddity. But when members of the barbarian tribe line up across the battlefield, side by side, something amazing begins to happen. Dark kingdoms tremble; the dungeons and prisons that hold men, women, and children captive crumble; prison doors open; chains unlock; and multitudes come to freedom. Whenever the barbarians of Christ pass through civilization, the oppressed and forgotten are soon found dancing in the streets.

When an opponent beholds one barbarian, he better be prepared, for we will return in force. We fight violence with peace, hatred with love, and oppression with servanthood. While never violating our uniqueness, we move together, united in heart and soul. Our greatness is unleashed in the context of community. When we move together, God is most perfectly revealed in us.

George Hunter in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* describes

one reason why the Roman civilization was able to advance its empire, but the Celtic tribes were not. He uses an analogy given to him by a zoologist: "A tiger will defeat a lion in battle; but five lions will defeat five tigers because the lions fight together and the tigers do not, so the five lions take on one tiger at a time. Each Celtic tribe was a formidable tiger in battle, greatly respected and feared. The Romans, with legendary strength in organization and coordination, were the lions in the lengthy series of battles against specific tribes to incrementally expand their empire" (p. 18).

From the first moment I read that, I recognized the dilemma. Barbarians are far more tiger than lion. I am convinced the old adage is true, at least in this case, that a tiger can never change its stripes. More than that, we do not want to domesticate the tiger. We don't even want the tiger to try to become more like the lion. But imagine what it would be like if tigers could learn how to move together, if tigers would choose to stand side by side and engage in battle as one tribe.

Again the Scriptures describe the movement of the church as an unstoppable force. The expansion of God's invisible kingdom is the result of those of us who are passionate followers of Jesus Christ moving together united in heart,

mind, and spirit. Jesus' description that "the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12) is a call for tigers to move together, not for our untamed faith to be domesticated.

CRASH THE FUTURE

A few years ago I took my kids to a wildlife animal park near San Diego. As we rode on a tram through the open terrain, a guide pointed out the unique features of the different species that we encountered. I suppose I always knew it in part, but I had not come to realize how most groups of animals have unique names or designations when they dwell together.

With insects most of us know that bees are called swarms, and ants are called colonies. Among ocean life, I was aware that whales are pods, and fish are schools. Cattle are herds, birds are flocks, and if you watch *Lion King*, you know a tribe of lions is a pride. If you grew up in the country, you might know that crows are murders. Maybe the most unnerving one is an ambush of tigers.

I was surprised to learn that a group of buzzards waiting around together to feast on leftover carnage is called a com-

mittee. Just this one insight is worth the price of the whole book. This explains so much of what's going on in churches—a lot of committees waiting around to live off human carnage.

Groups of flamingos are called flamboyants, which for some reason reminds me of TV evangelists. And groups of the less glamorous owls are known as parliaments. They do seem sort of British.

But my favorite of all is the group designation for rhinos. You see, rhinos can run at thirty miles an hour, which is pretty fast when you consider how much weight they're pulling. They're actually faster than squirrels, which can run at up to twenty-six miles an hour. And even then, who's going to live in dread of a charging squirrel? (Sorry—that was a bit off the point.) Running at thirty miles an hour is faster than a used Pinto will go. Just one problem with this phenomenon. Rhinos can see only thirty feet in front of them. Can you imagine something that large moving in concert as a group, plowing ahead at thirty miles an hour with no idea what's at thirty-one feet? You would think that they would be far too timid to pick up full steam, that their inability to see far enough ahead would paralyze them to immobility. But with that horn pointing the way, rhinos run forward full

steam ahead without apprehension, which leads us to their name.

Rhinos moving together at full speed are known as a crash. Even when they're just hanging around enjoying the watershed, they're called a crash because of their potential. You've got to love that. I think that's what we're supposed to be. That's what happens when we become barbarians and shake free of domestication and civility. The church becomes a crash. We become an unstoppable force. We don't have to pretend we know the future. Who cares that we can see only thirty feet ahead? Whatever's at thirty-one feet needs to care that we're coming and better get out of the way.

We need to move together as God's people, a barbarian tribe, and become the human version of the rhino crash. The future is uncertain, but we need to move toward it with confidence. There's a future to be created, a humanity to be liberated. We need to stop wasting our time and stop being afraid of what we cannot see and do not know. We need to move forward full force because of what we do know.

Yesterday Mariah was in a store with her mom. She saw a man working with fabrics, and for some reason he caught Mariah's attention. Mariah looked at Kim and pointed to the

man, and she said, "Mom, look at the man. He's the loneliest person I've ever seen." Mariah began to weep uncontrollably.

We may not be able to see what's at thirty-one feet, but we don't have to be blind to what's right in front of us. There's a world that desperately needs God, a world filled with loneliness, hopelessness, and fear. We have somehow become deaf to a cry that reaches heaven coming from the souls of men. But God hears.

WARRIORS OF LIGHT

God heard the cries of Israel when the people lived under the tyranny of Egypt. And then He spoke and called out Moses. As one man, he went to war against an empire. He followed the barbarian way—a coward became a hero; a murderer became a deliverer; a shepherd became a prophet; a wanderer became a leader; an adopted son of Pharaoh became an adopted son of God; slaves became free—but before they became a nation, they had to learn how to survive the wilderness. The land of promise was not a land free from dangers. The milk and honey they were promised awaited them amid a land of giants.

It is no different for us. As it was for them, freedom is a return not to Paradise Lost, but to a promised land that we must win. Like Israel, who longed for Egypt because the journey was more difficult than the people expected, we must be aware of the temptation to return to the captivity from which we were freed. There is but one path to freedom. There is no easy road made available. We cannot claim to know Christ and to honor Him if we refuse the path He calls us to follow. Do not insist on binding Him or associating Him with a domesticated or civilized faith. Do not dishonor Him by claiming that a life of faith is a life without risk. This war has no room for pomp or pretension.

Jesus leads us into the heart of the dark kingdom, into the soul of what is most evil. He takes us where mankind has chosen to live. He calls us to where the darkness has made those who wander there desperate for light. He leads us as warriors of light to risk our lives for the deliverance of others. Again, our own weapons are love, hope, and faith, and they are our only defense. Yet we above all know that they and only they liberate us and fulfill the deepest longings of our souls.

If you choose to live your life in this way, if you make the insane decision to live your life for the sake of others, if you

choose to follow the One whose barbarian path led Him to the brutality of the Cross, and if you embrace His invitation to take up your own cross and follow Him, then it has begun. If you dare allow God to unlock your primal spirit, He will unleash the raw and untamed faith within. Then you will know you have chosen the barbarian way out of civilization.

Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. "You are not going to get any inheritance in our family," they said, "because you are the son of another woman." So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where *a group of adventurers gathered around him and followed him.* [Judges 11:1-3 italics added]



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ERWIN RAPHAEL MCMANUS serves as lead pastor and cultural architect of Mosaic in Los Angeles, California. From the global center of change, Mosaic emerges as a reference point for the future church. As founder of Awaken, Erwin collaborates with a team of dreamers and innovators who specialize in the field of developing and unleashing personal and organizational creativity. As a national and international consultant, his expertise focuses on culture, change, leadership, and creativity. He partners with Bethel Theological Seminary as distinguished professor and futurist and is also a contributing editor for the *Leadership Journal*. Erwin's first

book, *An Unstoppable Force*, was a 2002 ECPA Gold Medallion Award finalist. He is also author of *Seizing Your Divine Moment* and *Uprising: A Revolution of the Soul*, which was the featured book and theme for the 2004 Promise Keepers conferences. He and his wife, Kim, have two children, Aaron and Mariah, and a daughter in the Lord, Paty.

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Stay off the paved road,

ERWIN