

ERWIN RAPHAEL McMANUS

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF THE LAST ARROW

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THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR



AN ANCIENT PATH TO INNER PEACE



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To Kim

There is no one else I could dedicate a book called

The Way of the Warrior than to you, my Love.

*We have journeyed together for over thirty-five years, and from the days
of our youth we have traveled to unknown lands, walked into untold
mysteries, and chosen to live in absurd risk and unexpected adventure.*

You personify courage and strength.

You defied the odds of birth and status.

You rose out of poverty and hardship.

You refused to allow how your story began to determine how it would end.

You chose a path that no one had walked before you.

*You refused to surrender your dreams though no one
fought for you or with you.*

You had the faith of a child and the valor of a warrior.

*When you were afraid of the dark, it only made you walk
courageously into the light.*

*Yet you somehow knew that though you were alone,
you were not forgotten.*

*You carried your dreams with such passion and determination
that you were destined to live them.*

You believed in a future no one else could see or even fathom.

You fought for your future.

Now you fight for the future of those who desperately need a heroine.

*You journey the earth to find those who need to know that
they are not forgotten or alone.*

You fight for love, and love is your greatest weapon.

Your path is the way of the warrior.

It has been my joy to have walked it with you.

People search their entire lives for what I have found in you.

You are the better side of me.

Always.

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INTRODUCTION

The Code of the Warrior

It's probably not a good idea for a writer to reveal to his readers where his ideas come from, but in this case, I am making an exception. I could try to give you context, but I'm not sure I can fully explain what came to me—or maybe more precisely, *how* it came to me. I was driving through Los Angeles on a seemingly average day.

I should preface what I am about to say with the fact that I have a wildly vivid imagination that is informed by a lifetime of daydreaming. More often than not, I find myself in unexpected places, talking to people I'm fairly certain I have never met in real life but who feel very real to me. Sometimes I'm in the curious situation where my imagination takes the lead and I feel more like an innocent bystander.

So on that day as I was driving through Los Angeles, I suddenly heard a voice inside my head whispering a thought that had never occurred to me. I share it with you just as I heard it: *The warrior is not ready for battle until they have come to know peace. This is the way of the warrior.* What I heard felt like more than just an insight; it felt like an invitation. And this invitation, as strange as it sounds, was the beginning of this book.

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The words were not without personality. It was as if I somehow dropped into an ancient time. I could see the warrior's face and every wrinkle that defined a lifetime of both struggle and wisdom. In that moment, I had been transplanted to sixteenth-century Japan and was listening to the counsel of an ancient samurai trying to teach his young apprentice the difference between the way of violence and the way of the warrior.

It's easy enough for me to understand some of the experiences that had informed this moment in my imagination. Probably my favorite film of all time is the *Seven Samurai*, written and directed by Akira Kurosawa. The movie is set in sixteenth-century Japan, where farmers from a small village are being oppressed by a band of roving bandits. It's a story about how one retired samurai, long past his prime, gathers together six other samurai to help him defend this poor village. This film came out four years before I was born, and although I grew up without a knowledge of all the heroes written about in the Bible, it was stories like this one that placed within me a heroic narrative. Throughout my life, I have always admired the courage and honor of Kambei Shimada, the first of the seven samurai.

It was years later that I sat mesmerized watching for the fourth or fifth time the 2002 release of the Chinese film *Hero*. Through the breathtaking cinematography, I felt transported into the world of a hero whose name is literally Nameless. I had a similar experience only a year later in a theater as the only person who could not speak Chinese watching the premiere of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden*

Dragon. And I must confess that the year after that I was deeply impressed by the elegance and profundity of Ken Watanabe's performance as Katsumoto in *The Last Samurai*.

Each of these stories wove a heroic narrative within my soul and reminded me that there is a significant difference between violence and honor, between revenge and courage, between the way of war and the way of the warrior.

Perhaps these films and the endless number of narratives that have formed my imagination allowed me to hear the first line of this book as if it called to me from ancient times, but I know it was more than that. My thoughts were also informed by the realities that we face every day in our present times. We live in a world that seems to be marked and defined by senseless violence. We now have a generation whose only impression of human history is an era of global terrorism. Our children can no longer go to school with the assumption of safety but must now live with the imminent threat of a senseless massacre taking place on any given day. From Islamic extremists to white supremacists, hate seems to be the order of the day. I still struggle to grasp the kind of rage, hate, and violence that drives a person to walk into a school with more ammunition than a military specialist, senselessly taking innocent lives.

It seems pretty clear to me there is something terribly wrong in our world. I, like so many others, long for peace. I would give anything to see the end of violence. Where wars once seemed solely the concern of soldiers, we now know that the problem runs much deeper than places on maps "over there."

I have been asked many times over the years why the Bible depicts God as a God of war. You can't escape the fact that there are many battles recorded in Scripture. In the ancient world, the language of war was very common, and for many ancient peoples it was almost interwoven into the language of faith. I am always reminded that it is not God who created humanity to live in violence, but rather it is humanity that chooses violence. That is our history. That is our present, both as a species and individuals. We would have a history of even more wars if God did not exist. Our past is one of conflict, of division, of greed and power—a constant battle where nation rises up against nation, and brother rises up against brother.

This is not the history of God; this is the history of us. God is tainted by being part of our story, but the story of God is a story of peace. What does the story of peace look like when it's dropped into the middle of a humanity that knows only conflict and violence? The language of God as a warrior came to exist because he intervened for the defenseless. He heard the cries of a people battling slavery and came to set them free. So yes, it was a declaration of war against injustice, oppression, and inhumanity.

It was Cain who killed Abel. It was God who held Cain accountable and yet still protected him from further violence. It would be easy to blame God for what we have created and to impugn his character because he works to bring peace into our stories rather than manipulating every aspect of the story from the outset. I have become convinced that more than any of us, God understands the war that rages within and around us and longs to lead us to the end

of violence. We are people of war because we are a people at war. All the violence we see in the world is but a small glimpse of the violence that churns in us. This war that rages within us eventually boils over and sets the world on fire.

It is the war within us that is the focus of *The Way of the Warrior*. I choose this imagery because I am convinced that the only path toward world peace is inner peace. Even as I write this book, I am surrounded by an endless number of people—people I love, people I care deeply about—who struggle with inner demons that put them at daily risk. Suicide has become a global epidemic even among the educated and affluent. Those who would seem to have the most reasons to live can't even think of one.

Depression is at an epidemic level, and we can't seem to design medication fast enough to keep us from drowning in an abyss that exists within us. Otherwise talented, gifted, and extraordinary human beings are paralyzed by anxiety and overwhelmed by stress. And a growing number of young men and women who have never gone to war find themselves in a battle with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The sudden outbreaks of violence that have marked the history of our children can no longer be seen as an anomaly and must be addressed as a cultural state of emergency. I am tired of losing people I love. We cannot sit idly by, hoping that the problems will somehow self-correct. Maybe I can't bring peace on earth by writing this book, but if I can bring peace to one person, I will consider my job done.

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Our only hope for societal peace is inner peace, and inner peace will not come without a battle. The struggle is real. The battle lines have been drawn, and it is a battle for our souls. I chose the language of *The Way of the Warrior* not because I desire to romanticize war but because I hope to help us find a pathway to peace. This war must be won one person at a time, one heart at a time, one life at a time.

This, by the way, is the way of Jesus. This is how he came to bring peace on earth. While others hoped he would call out an army, incite a rebellion, and use his power to topple an empire, he chose a different way. He did not surrender to the status quo nor succumb to the inevitable rule of oppressive powers. He had absolute confidence that his revolution would prevail. He knew the way to peace. He understood the source of all wars. He knew it all began in the human heart.

It is the way of Jesus that is the ancient path to inner peace. In choosing to follow him, I have chosen the way of the warrior. Every day I find myself at war. Even after all these years there are battles that rage within me. But rather than losing ground, I find myself gaining it day by day. I am still fighting behind enemy lines. I have known all the enemies of the human spirit. I have known fear and doubt; I have known bitterness and anger; I have known jealousy and greed. They are all too familiar to me. And after many years of walking this ancient path, I have come to know this one truth most certainly: the world within you will create the world around you.

Inner peace does not come by accident, nor by desire. Inner

peace is a journey toward self-mastery. The way of the warrior is a discipline of the soul. It is a journey toward enlightenment. And ultimately it is the outcome of a relationship with the Creator of the universe. The world in which Jesus lived never knew peace, yet no matter how hard the powerful tried, they could never steal his peace. It should not surprise us that it was an act of violence that became for us our way to peace. The cross points the way, but we must choose the path. The Bible speaks of darkness and light, reminding us there is a war that rages within us all.

Have you surrendered to the darkness? Have you lost sight of the light? Have you found yourself exhausted by the struggle yet somehow you refused to give up on the fight? You are not alone. The battle that rages within you was never meant to be fought alone. And if you feel as if you are one breath from giving up, I hope somehow I can convince you that the God who created you is fighting for you.

You cannot give up on yourself when God considers you worth the fight. The cross upon which Jesus died will never be known as a symbol of defeat or a declaration of surrender. The cross will be forever remembered, long after time ceases to exist, not just as a declaration of the one who stands victorious but as a promise that in the end war will surrender to peace. It is the way of Jesus that is the ancient path to inner peace. His life is the way of the warrior.

CODE 1

The Warrior Fights Only for Peace

The warrior is not ready for battle until they have come to know peace. For all the wars that have ever been waged from the beginning of time were first born in a person's heart. We have a history of war because our souls are at war. We have conflicts because our hearts are conflicted. Every war, every conflict, every act of violence exists because our souls rage. Our only hope for peace is to win the battle within. Every war against another is a war that never should have been fought. It should have been won long before. It should have been won from within. This is our first battle. The war to end all wars is the battle for the human heart. This is the war we must win. To know peace is the way of the warrior.

It is impossible to ignore that God is often associated with wars. Certainly the people of Israel have a history of war as well as one of faith. We might conclude that the God of Scripture is a god of war,

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yet it is the opposite that is true. God is a god of peace. We are the ones who brought war to the human story. And since then, God has been fighting for us to find our way back to peace.

Solomon tells us that there is a time for war and a time for peace.¹ Our history betrays us though. Our past is marked by war, while peace has forever eluded us. Sadly, the story of humanity can be marked by the weapons we have forged. From stones to arrows to swords to bullets to missiles, our inventions betray our intentions. An outside observer might say that we are creatures of violence for whom peace is simply the language of poets and philosophers. Yet the way of the warrior is not about refining our skills for war; it is about choosing the path of peace.

I have chosen this language, but you may find it at first contrary to the intention of this book. Peace can come only when it is fought for. This is true for any and every kind of peace, whether it's peace on earth, interpersonal peace, or inner peace. It never comes to the passive. In fact, if you choose the way of peace, you will find yourself in a constant struggle and endless battle. The peace we seek must come from within, and this, you will discover, is the greatest of all battles. It was Job who uttered, "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."²

I am convinced his words echo in every heart: "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." It is a story that all of us can write. It is the struggle that all of us know, some more profoundly than others.

If precedent is an accurate predictor of the future, we should not expect we will ever know a world defined by peace. It is perplexing when I meet people who believe there is no God and yet still believe in peace. After all, peace is an ideal of which we speak, but it's something this world has never fully known. The human story is marked by envy, jealousy, greed, violence, and bloodshed. There will never be peace on earth until there is peace in us. This is why the way of the warrior must begin here. To find your strength you must find your peace, for the path to inner strength is inner peace.

This is where our journey begins. The way of the warrior begins with finding the missing *peace*. There are certain names that stand out throughout history as beacons of peace. Strangely, when you choose the path of peace in the midst of violence and rage, you are often simply remembered by a single name—for, example, Gandhi, Mandela, Teresa, Tutu, Buddha, and, of course, Jesus. Although each of them advocated for peace in the midst of violence, it is Jesus alone who claimed to actually be the peace our souls long for.

Jesus lived in a time of turmoil and conflict. He was born in a world where his people were oppressed by a foreign empire. While we think of Jesus as a man born free, he was actually born a slave. In fact, Jesus was a survivor of an infanticide ordered by a king who feared for his reign. All of Israel lived enslaved by the Roman Empire. Israel belonged to Rome. The Hebrews were the Romans' possession. As a man, Jesus was considered a subject to a Caesar who proclaimed himself a god with the right to rule over the lives of all mankind. If Jesus knew freedom, it was not because of his

circumstance. If Jesus knew peace, it was in contrast to the chaos that surrounded him. It is in this context that he spoke to his disciples and said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”³

Jesus’s words must have seemed both profound and perplexing to those who heard him. After all, they expected him to bring peace. Many who believed he was the Messiah thought that he would come to deliver them from the Roman Empire. The title *Messiah* had come to mean something very specific to the Jewish people. They expected that this Messiah would parallel the life of King David. It would be this Messiah that would lead his people to overthrow the greatest empire in the world. This Messiah would become their king, and the fulfillment of the promise would be found in their freedom. The coming of the Messiah would be the end of oppression.

The words of Isaiah had been passed on for generations: “Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”⁴

There was a very simple litmus test for the Messiah: if he does not establish peace, he cannot be the Messiah. It was his responsibility to bring them peace; he was the embodiment of true peace, yet the type of peace they had hoped for never came. His words must have seemed bittersweet. He spoke of peace with such certainty in

the midst of such chaos that it probably caused many onlookers to assume Jesus was a bit naive. There must have been many who wanted to look at Jesus and say, “As hopeful and poetic as your words may be, you need to get a grip on reality. This is not peace. If you came to set us free, to establish a kingdom of peace, then you are a dismal failure and a grave disappointment to all of us who have been waiting so long for the Messiah to bring about change.”

No one had quite the courage to speak so bluntly to Jesus, but there couldn't have been anything more frustrating for Jesus's listeners than a declaration of peace when their world was in turmoil. Even today, Jesus's words cut to the very depth of our souls and he seems to know our thoughts even as he speaks peace into our lives: “I do not give to you as the world gives.” It's almost as if in one quick phrase he indicts the history of human violence. The peace he brings will never come to us the way we had hoped or expected. This is not the way of the warrior, only the way of violence.

You might find it peculiar that I would describe Jesus as a warrior. After all, he is most commonly known as a man of peace. Yet you cannot properly understand Jesus if you do not grasp that his entire life's purpose was to win the greatest battle of the greatest war that has ever been fought.

God stepped into human history to fight for us. He did not hope for peace; he fought for peace. Sometimes the true mission of Jesus is misunderstood because he never carried a physical weapon in his hands. Yet if you want to see the true marks of a warrior, you need to look at the scars on his hands. In his death and resurrection,

Jesus took upon himself all the violence of the world so he could bring all the world his peace. That is why he is most profoundly and uniquely the warrior of peace. That is why we're pursuing his path.

The War Within

Jesus tells us, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”⁵ With simplicity and wisdom, he cuts between the two things that steal our peace, for the greatest enemies of the peace within are worry and fear.

All around me I find troubled hearts—men and women drowning in worry. We have become so adept at worrying that we have created an endless number of names to describe the nuances. Whether we use the language of stress or anxiety or find ourselves in the depths of depression or despair, worry is the source of so much of our hearts' troubles. Worry projects a negative view of the world around us. Worry projects a negative future. Worry is an act of faith. It is a deep-seated belief in worst-case scenarios. Worry is not rooted in reality but does affect our reality.

I've also found irony in these words of Paul: “Be anxious for nothing.”⁶ I know that what he means is that we should not allow anything to make us anxious, but the truth is that it is usually *nothing* that is making us anxious. Our anxiety, our distress, our worry—when stripped to its very essence—is rooted in nothing, or at least in nothing we can control. Paul's solution, of course, is to be

anxious in nothing, but in all things, through prayer, we should bring our thanksgiving to God.⁷ It seems he's telling us that anxiety comes when we try to control things that are out of our control. We become anxious because we haven't learned to trust.

It is interesting that in another place where Jesus speaks of peace, he brings up trouble once more. Here he says to his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble."⁸

This is an important contrast. First he says to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," but then he says to us, "In this world you will have trouble." We have no control over the reality that in this world we will have trouble, but we have control over whether we decide to allow our hearts to be troubled. He makes the promise that though there will be trouble in this world, we can take heart, for he has overcome the world. Our worry will steal our peace, and when peace is missing, we find ourselves drowning in anxiety and crumbling under the weight of life's pressures.

He also said, "Do not be afraid." If worry wars against our peace, fear is perhaps an even greater foe. When we live our lives afraid, it creates turmoil and chaos within us. Fear is the enemy of peace. While worry will rob our joy, fear will steal our freedom, for what we fear establishes the boundaries of our freedom. What we fear has mastery over our souls. When we are anxious, we lose our strength. When we are afraid, we lose our courage. When we have found peace, we have both the strength and courage to live the lives we were created to live.

Even in my own life I see the relationship between worry, anxiety, and the inability to control the world around me. Throughout my life I have had a fear of dogs. Even to this day I still jump when a dog moves in my direction, even though I love dogs. The root of this fear is not undiagnosable for me.

When I was around five years old, I saw my brother get bitten by a dog. It could have been either one of us, but as life would have it, he was the one the dog targeted. Oddly enough, my brother, who was actually bitten by the dog, never developed any fear of dogs whatsoever. My fear and anxiety were rooted in what could have happened and not in the reality of what did happen. It was as if for the rest of my life I kept waiting for what I feared to happen, even though to this day I have never been bitten by a dog.

For years I was afraid of roller coasters. Again, it was not rooted in something irrational. When I was around ten years old, the seat belt broke while I was riding a roller coaster, and I held on for my dear life. I remember screaming my guts out, trying to get the operator's attention, but he was too busy smoking to notice. I was never thrown out of the roller coaster, as I managed to hold on until it finally came to a stop, but out of that negative experience an enduring fear took over. I spent years watching other people ride roller coasters. But that's exactly what fear and anxiety do to you: they put you on the sideline watching life happen. I couldn't control the variables if I got into the roller coaster, so I stayed on solid ground to give me a sense of control.

It was years later when I finally determined to overcome that

fear. Without fully understanding the complex nature of fear and anxiety, I knew what I had to do was get on a roller coaster. I had to destroy an ingrained belief that if I got on the coaster I would die. Since that time, I have enjoyed a lifetime of extreme inclines and insane drops. I love roller coasters. I love the feeling that happens when my stomach drops. I love the illusion of free-falling and plummeting to my death.

Ironically, those two phobias in my life helped me establish a pattern of overcoming fears in multiple arenas. Every fear feels justified. One reason is that every fear has a seed of truth in it. But the thing is that you do not ultimately have control over your life. Peace does not come because you finally have control over your life; peace comes when you no longer need control.

If fear has a direct object, anxiety is fear without an object. We experience anxiety when we feel overwhelmed by life. In order to reduce our anxiety, we often create smaller and smaller boundaries to give us some sense of control over our lives.

The Strength of Peace

The warrior's strength is their peace. Jesus did not come to conquer kingdoms or nations; he came to conquer hearts and minds. If you are to walk in the way of Jesus, you must know that you are to enter darkness that desperately needs the light. In describing the path that John the Baptist would prepare for Jesus of Nazareth, these words were spoken about John at his birth by his father, Zechariah:

“You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”⁹

The path of peace only comes when we’re willing to walk into our own darkness and face our own shadows. We must face the very things that steal our peace from us whether they are born out of our fear or our doubts. The concept of “peace” is deeply rooted in the history that shaped the world and culture of Jesus’s day. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. The word *shalom* is layered, complex, and elegant in its nuances. At its most superficial level, *shalom* is basically used as a form of greeting. In many ways it can be compared with the English word *goodbye*, which is simply a part of our common language but is rooted in the phrase “God be with you.”

Shalom is a greeting with deep implications. It is most commonly translated and understood to mean “peace,” but the peace of shalom is rich in its textures. The word extends beyond meaning “peace” to meaning “harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility.”¹⁰ To experience shalom is to find wholeness. When we find peace, we are made whole. The ultimate goal of peace is that we not only are made whole within ourselves but also become part of the whole within all of creation. The very concept of shalom assumes that the original intention of God is for all things to be interconnected—that when there is peace, there is relationship and harmony between all things.

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The clearest evidence that we lack peace is that we all sense a tearing between us, a separation that divides us from God, from our true selves, and from others, and, yes, even creation. The evidence that peace is missing is the break between us and God, the violence of brother against brother, and our destruction of and irresponsibility with the creation we have been entrusted with. When there is peace, all these relationships are made right and everything is made whole. When we are broken, all we are left with are the pieces of our true selves.

As much evidence as there is around us that we desperately need to find our peace, there is even deeper proof within us of how peace has eluded us. When our hearts have not found peace, we become filled with the darkest expressions of ourselves. We're filled with not only fear and doubt but also greed and envy, anger and bitterness, loneliness and disconnection, despair and hopelessness. Each of these are external forces that war against our inner worlds.

We struggle with envy because we want the life that isn't ours.

We struggle with greed because we want to possess what is not ours to have.

We struggle with feelings of insignificance because we have made our worth dependent on the opinions of others.

We struggle with identity because we don't know who we are outside of what we do.

We struggle with loneliness because we are searching for love rather than giving it.

We will never know peace as long as we are slaves to external forces of the world and create our identities from the outside in. We

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will never know peace if we lose the present because we are trapped in the past and paralyzed by the future. This is in no small part why we live in a culture crippled by depression and anxiety. Depression is rooted in your past; anxiety is rooted in your future.

Depression is how your soul processes regret; anxiety is how your soul processes fear.

Depression traps you in your worst and most painful memories; anxiety imagines your worst and most painful future.

You lose the present when you hide from your past and run from your future. Depression and anxiety convince you that the past is your future and so the future must be avoided at all costs. Scripture tells us to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”¹¹

It was intended for us to be fully present in the moment. Only the present will free you from the past, and only the present will free you to your future. The path to freedom from your past and freedom to your future is the connectedness that comes from living this moment fully present. It may seem strange, but you connect to the transcendent only when you are fully present. When you experience God’s presence in the moment, the moment becomes eternal.

Be here right now.

The path of peace comes not from the outside in but from the inside out. Here’s how Isaiah described the path toward peace: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.”¹²

This is the path to mindfulness. This is the way to peace of mind. Not a journey to nothingness, but a journey to fullness. It is God who gives us perfect peace. More specifically, it is Jesus who has come to bring us this peace that our souls long for.

Forceful Peace

John the Baptist was chosen to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. His mission was “to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”¹³

The last thing anyone would ever say to describe John the Baptist is that he was compliant or even cooperative. John was a non-conformist in every way. His message was confrontational, and his very nature was forceful and powerful. Yet we are told that even his harsh tone and stark language were chosen for our own good. His purpose was to awaken those living in the darkness of the shadow of death and show that there is light and life available for all of us. It would be easy to see John as a man of war, yet his sole intent was to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Recently I heard my son, Aaron, explain that God goes to war only for the purpose of peace. Remember, John came only to prepare us for Jesus. To follow Jesus is to choose the path of peace. Everywhere he reigns, there is peace. When he was born, the declaration of the angelic beings was “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”¹⁴ Through the most violent instrument of death the world has ever

known, Jesus came to be our peace—yes, not to simply bring us peace but to be our peace.

When Aaron was in high school, I got a call letting me know that he was in danger of being expelled for getting in a fight. I had never known my son to be violent, so I was a little surprised. But when I discovered what was happening, it made perfect sense to me. Apparently, there was a cluster of kids who were physically abusive to a specific group of outsiders. Their hostility had become an everyday occurrence at Aaron's school. In this particular situation, there was a group of well-off white students bullying underprivileged Hispanic students.

One day Aaron felt he needed to intervene. He jumped into the fray to try to protect a classmate who was outnumbered and overpowered. More often than not, when you attempt to become a peacemaker, you become a target. After that day, Aaron became the focus of some redirected violence and anger.

The administration's stance was not helpful. Their advice for Aaron was that because he was the focus of the bullies' aggression, he would just need to fight back and defend himself. Yet when I asked what the consequences would be for taking such action, I was told that my son would be expelled if he fought back. You can imagine my confusion and frustration.

It's amazing how quickly you can go from peacemaker to having a reputation for violence. This is exactly the dilemma for God, who in the Old Testament is constantly depicted as a god of war and violence. The way it is told, he is both the creator of war and an instigator of violence. The reality is that we are the ones who intro-

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duced violence to the human story. We are the ones who carry war in our hearts. God has literally tainted his reputation by determining to bring peace in the midst of our violence. If the world were at peace, God would not disrupt it with war. It is because the world is at war that God disrupts it to bring peace. The only reason God is at war is that he is fighting for us. Yes, God is a warrior—he is a warrior of peace. God will always fight for the good and the beautiful and the true.

God is not a god of war; God is a god of peace. When we are at war, we live beneath God's intention for us. The wars of humanity war against God's purpose in the world. The God of peace will not sit idly by and watch us destroy each other. He will not lose us to our own violence without a fight. We often blame God for involving himself in the wars of men, yet the reality is that for him to engage in human history, he had to enter into our violence and fight for peace. And peace on earth is worth the fight.

Jesus knows the condition of the human heart and because of our condition we would always face conflicts and there would always be suffering. He knew the standards of this world had fallen far beneath the intention of God for all of humanity, so he called us to a new way. He called us to choose peace as our power.

Jesus went on to say, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."¹⁵ As if it were not hard enough to choose peace over retaliation, Jesus also wants us to return greed with generosity. It seems by now we would have learned that violence cannot be ended with violence, but I think few of us have ever realized that only generosity can overcome greed.

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Many times we feel powerless when someone has taken something from us. It's easy to feel that the only way to reclaim our power is to take what was lost and even more in return. Yet Jesus calls us to a different way. No one can steal what you freely give away. Live your life with open hands. Give away more than another can take from you. As Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles."¹⁶

He challenged them, "I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."¹⁷ This was not a call to be powerless but to find a greater power than returning evil for evil. It takes great strength to turn the other cheek. Turning the other cheek means you took the blunt force trauma of someone's worst and remained standing.

This is not the way of the weak; this is the way of the warrior. This is a call to rise above our most primal instincts, let go of revenge and retaliation, and not be fooled into believing that anger is a source of power. The warrior chooses honor and integrity and will not lower themselves to the standard of those who would bring them down to their level.

The imagery of turning the other cheek was abundantly clear to Jesus's first-century Hebrew audience. Often their Roman captors would slap them or strike them to try to elicit an angry response. If any of them actually hit a Roman soldier, it would have cost the captive his life. Only restraint would keep someone from falling into that sort of trap.

It takes people of great strength to show restraint and trust that God will be their protector. However, in addition to withstanding

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abuse at the Roman soldier's hand, Jesus's listeners had to be wary of their own people. Some of the first-century Hebrews who stood in alliance with the Roman Empire would wrongfully sue their neighbors for the purpose of financial gain. This created further division in a time of great discord, made enemies of their own people, and now Jesus was giving them an unexpected strategy to end the enmity between their own families and friends. Give away more than you're being sued for—this would've been an unheard-of strategy.

Perhaps the greatest indignity in that day was when a Roman soldier would force a young Hebrew to carry the pack that his horse could easily handle. The Romans often thought of the Hebrews as nothing more than horses or dogs. They were not seen as truly human. Legally, Roman soldiers were empowered to make Hebrews carry their packs for a mile. Afterward they would release them back to daily activities in humiliation. Jesus gives his listeners an unexpected way to claim their strength, to reclaim their power, to proclaim their freedom: "If anyone forces you to carry their pack one mile, you carry it for two." Choose service over obligation, servanthood over slavery. If they force you to work, then confound them with a greater wisdom. Never forget that you are always free to do more.

Know Your Power

The way of peace is not a call to passivism. The way of peace is not a call to powerlessness. The way of peace is a call to know one's

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power. Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple. We are told that he made a whip out of cords, overturned their tables, and drove them out. He would not allow them to leave with the money that they had gained.¹⁸

We rarely think of Jesus as physically imposing. He is most often depicted as a passive idealist rather than a warrior of peace. Yet in the cleansing of the temple, we are reminded that Jesus knew that peace would not come without a battle and it would not come without a cost. The way of peace is not for the weak or the weak of heart. The warrior knows their power, and they know their greatest weapon is peace. And with as many wars that will ever rage around us, the greatest battle for peace will always be within us. Every battle is first fought within. Jesus was never powerless. He was the epitome of controlled strength. While he was always meek, he was never weak. He knew his power but never abused it.

The warrior knows that peace does not come from control but from relinquishing control. Everything in life that you try to control that is outside your control will steal from you your peace. You must choose to take hold of what you can control and let go of what you cannot.

You cannot control your circumstances, but you can control your character.

You cannot control the actions of others, but you can control the choices you make.

You cannot control the outcome, but you can control the process.

The battle for peace requires that you both take control and relinquish control. Peace of mind does not come because you have eliminated uncertainty but because you have clarity about what is important. Peace comes when you stop trying to control the world around you and instead take responsibility for the world within you. Inner peace is interconnected to your confidence in future possibilities. In other words, peace is intimately connected to hope. Peace is lost when you are drowning in worst-case scenarios. Peace of mind is not about certainty but about hope-filled mystery.

The warrior has peace of mind because they know that there is always a way to light, even in the midst of the greatest darkness. They know that there is always hope to be found, even in despair. Peace can exist only in the midst of turmoil if you believe in the beauty of the future. Peace sees the beauty everywhere. When you walk in peace, you are overwhelmed by the wonder of the universe and the beauty of life.

The Battle Within

It was December 15, 2016, when my wife, Kim, and I sat in a doctor's office and heard him say that I had cancer. In fact, it was while writing my previous book, *The Last Arrow*, that we received this ominous news. I finished that book wondering if it would be my last. The weight of your words hits you much harder when you know that they may be your last.

On January 15, 2017, I shared publicly for the first time about

my personal battle, and I must tell you it's not easy to fight a private battle in the public eye. It all happened so quickly. For a long time I had known there was something wrong with me, but it didn't truly feel real until it was diagnosed. It's kind of ironic, if you think about it, that you could have cancer eating away your body and you're never afraid because you don't know it's there. Is it the cancer that is so terrifying, or is it the knowledge of it?

You never know how you're going to react. I certainly had no idea what those days would be like for me. It would be two days later, on January 17, that I would admit myself to Huntington Memorial Hospital and allow the surgeons to do their best to save my life. I remember sharing with my family that I was giving myself permission to feel whatever I needed to feel. There was no time to pretend and no reason to waste what might be my last days by hiding from my deepest feelings, which would in essence lock out those I loved the most. If you're not honest with yourself, you cannot be honest with anyone else. When we close ourselves off from our inner pain and struggles, we inevitably close ourselves off to everyone in our lives as well.

I decided that if I felt anger, I was going to be angry. If I felt afraid, I was going to feel afraid. I was just going to let myself be human. I felt certain it would be okay with God and that he would understand if I fell short of the expectations of others.

Yet the strangest thing happened: I never felt anger, I never felt bitterness, and I never felt fear. After all, how could I be angry when I have lived such an extraordinary life? How could I be bitter when

I have known far more than my fair share of goodness? Still, with all that, what surprised me the most was that I didn't feel afraid. I knew it would be perfectly acceptable—in fact, expected—to be afraid. I even began to wonder if there was something wrong with me because I didn't feel fear. My greatest discovery in facing cancer was that I had actually come to know peace. And while I can tell you with absolute certainty that the source of that peace was without question Jesus, I would be remiss if I did not also say that the process to finding that peace was not quite that simple. The way of the warrior is in large part the journey toward coming to know that kind of peace. I am convinced that many people have lost their faith in God because they have confused source with process. Yes, God is the source of all peace, and that source is available to all of us freely and without cost to us. The process, though, requires struggle and resilience and does not come without a cost.

Now, don't get me wrong. I felt a sadness of the potential loss, not of the loss of my life but of the things I would not get to share in. I wanted to spend more years with my beautiful wife, Kim. I wanted to watch my son, Aaron, get married one day, hopefully—please, God! I wanted to live long enough to watch him flourish and step into the full strength of his gifts of leadership. I wanted to watch his children grow up and bring him immeasurable joy. I wanted to be here to see my daughter, Mariah, and her husband, Jake, flourish in their careers; watch their music travel across the world; and hopefully one day watch them have kids of their own. There are so many things in this life that I love, and they would

have been hard to say goodbye to. But that's different than fear. Fear is crippling and steals your life from you. Fear is the enemy of peace.

The surgery was supposed to last two hours, but it lasted more than six. My surgeon explained that part of what took so long was the high amount of cancer and the unexpected work of removing a large amount of scar tissue from when my appendix had ruptured when I was a young boy. Imagine finding out forty-six years after the fact that your appendix had burst when you were twelve years old.

All I remember from being that age is turmoil. I remember being completely disconnected from the world around me. I remember when my parents, not knowing how to help me, found me professional counseling. I remember going in and out of both a psychiatric office and a hospital for a battery of tests that could find nothing wrong with me. They decided to do exploratory surgery. I was told that the cause of my pain was psychosomatic and, in the end, that there had been nothing wrong with me.

I never knew that two surgeries more than forty years apart would somehow be so interconnected. I spent the better part of forty years believing there had been nothing wrong with me, that the surgery was a waste of time, that the pain was all in my head. The surgery that was supposed to remove only my cancer also became the surgery that removed the scar tissue that had been there for more than four decades.

There was for me a strange irony in learning that there *had* actually been something physically wrong with me. I had always thought it was only psychological, but it turned out not to be all in

my head. I had lived more than forty years with scars that I did not know were there, yet those were not the scars that left me damaged. There were much deeper scars than could ever be caused by a surgeon's knife. Somewhere early in my life, way younger than should ever happen to anyone, my soul found itself in disarray.

I don't know when it happened, but early in my life, I lost my peace. Most of my memories of childhood are filled with nightmares, with an overwhelming sense of despair and anxiety. There wasn't really language for it back then, but I was in a fight for my life, as I was drowning in depression and hopelessness. So you cannot know how unexpected it was that in facing cancer, I felt none of those things that I'd felt so profoundly when I was much younger and more fragile. I can tell you that it is more than a theory and more than an aspiration. Not only can you know peace, but you can also be at peace. And while the world around you rages, the world within you can know a strange stillness and an unexpected calm.

Stand in Your Pain

It was around 9:00 p.m. when I was finally wheeled into my hospital room to begin my recovery after surgery. The surgical procedure had required that six holes pierce the area around my abdomen while a robot called "da Vinci" carved away the cancerous cells and ensured that it left all the healthy organs intact. It was almost precisely three hours later, at the stroke of midnight, that I woke up and

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decided I would take a walk. I woke up my wife and asked her to help me get out of the bed. She was uncooperative, to put it mildly, so I buzzed the nurse and informed her that I was ready to get out of bed and begin the process of rehabilitation.

Both my wife and the nurse insisted this was a bad idea—that I had just come out of six hours of surgery and needed to give myself time to heal. So I asked the nurse point blank, “Is there really any more damage I could do if I got out of bed and started walking?” She conceded that there was nothing harmful about walking, but it would be terribly painful. So I insisted, and my mind would not be changed.

Then the nurse moved to a second strategy. If she couldn’t keep me in bed, she at the very least needed to make sure I was medicated. She encouraged me to give her a few moments to get some painkillers into my system so I would not be overwhelmed by the pain. For some reason my mind was so clear. I looked at her and explained that the whole point was to feel pain—that I would not allow her to give me painkillers. I understood that this might be more pain than I could bear. I went on to explain that I knew that if I could bear this pain, I could bear whatever pain was ahead of me, so reluctantly the nurse and my wife helped me out of the bed.

I stood to my feet, and I think in this case it would be literal to say I wanted to scream my guts out. The first step was unbearable, the second step even more. The third and fourth steps were unrelenting, the fifth and sixth unforgiving. I wish I could tell you that God somehow intervened in that moment and made me oblivious

to the pain, but if anything, the gift God gave me was to make me more aware of it. I stood in the middle of my pain. I stepped into my pain. I walked through my pain. You see, one thing I was certain of was that on the other side of my pain, there awaited my freedom.

So many of us see pain as the boundary of our limitations. When we experience pain, that's when we choose to stop. We have confused knowing peace with becoming prisoners. The way of peace is not without pain. The way of peace comes only by walking through the pain.

I'll never forget walking out of that room with a catheter attached to my body and walking for a few minutes down that hallway until what once felt unbearable was now just a part of who I was. Three hours later I made myself get up again and walk farther than I had before. By eight o'clock in the morning, when I noticed that there was a nurse shift change, I got myself out of my bed, grabbed my clothes, went and took a shower, and dressed myself to leave. By the time my wife returned from taking a small break, I was dressed and ready to go. It took a lot of negotiating to get released from the hospital, since in the nurses' minds I was still a patient. But I would not be their prisoner. I had to walk through my pain, and I was ready to walk free.

Some time has passed since I walked out those doors, and frankly, when I write about having cancer, it feels as if I am talking about someone else's life. Since that time, I have met so many people who have gone through similar challenges far worse than my own.

And since my battle with cancer, I have had an endless number of battles of different kinds. This one thing remains true: right behind the battle that has just been fought, another battle lies in wait.

For every war that you've bled for and won, there is another war waiting to overtake you. There is no path in this life where you can escape those things that will war against your peace. Even Jesus, the Prince of Peace, knew that his path would lead him to agony and suffering. Even for Jesus, there was no escape from the war that rages within the human spirit. Yet in the most violent moment of his life, when he wore the sins of the world upon himself on the cross amidst brutality, he made the way for us to know peace. This is the way of the warrior—not that we run from our suffering, not that we shrink back from the sacrifices demanded of us, but that in the midst of it, regardless of what rages around us, we are at peace.

Jesus said there would always be wars and rumors of war.¹⁹ History has sadly proven him right. All around us wars wage—nation against nation, tribe against tribe, people against people, brother against brother. Human history is like a fire out of control. It seems that violence will always rage and that peace will always elude us. Yet Jesus was equally convinced that he knew the way to peace and that peace would in the end stand as victory.

For wars to end, there would have to be the end of violence.

For violence to cease, there would have to be the end of hatred and greed.

For hatred and greed to breathe their final breaths, forgiveness and generosity would have to take their places.

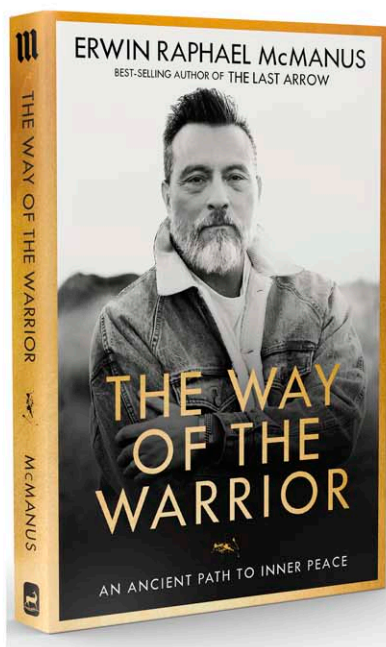
Where there is peace, there is no fear. Where there is fear, there is no peace. So then the journey for peace begins within our hearts. This is why we must face our fears, stand in our pain, and walk courageously into the uncertainty and mystery of a better future.

It may seem like a small thing, but when you get up in the morning and face your fears, you are participating in the redemption of the universe. When you refuse to allow yourself to be paralyzed by the uncertainty of tomorrow and set forth with courage and faith, you become part of creating a new world—a better world.

The peace that your soul longs for is the very peace the world needs. I cannot speak of peace and not speak of Jesus, for it is Jesus alone who leads us to the way of peace. The way of Jesus is the way of the warrior. It is Jesus who is the warrior of peace. There are not different kinds of peace, just different contexts where peace can be realized. When you have won the battle for inner peace, you now carry within you what the world desperately needs. It is only when you have inner peace that you can bring peace to a world at war with itself. The warrior fights for peace.

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