

Special Forces: Day Thirty-two

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Personal Development

Mental Conditioning

Just about anyone who has undertaken an intense regimen of physical conditioning has also experienced and understands the value of the mental conditioning that is an essential ingredient for achieving physical goals. When those goals are part of a continuous certification process for remaining part of a special operations unit, mental conditioning can be even more significant. Among my fondest memories there is a particular twelve-mile stretch of terrain that included Ft. Devens, Massachusetts and the federal terrain that consisted of a large training area and live fire munitions ranges. Part of those twelve miles was a section known as 'Range Road'. It was asphalt and marked with telephone poles at regular intervals as it cut its path through the training area next to a series of firing ranges. That twelve miles, including Range Road, was the route used for an evaluated road march for which every soldier had to wear a 45 pound rucksack (minimum weight), load bearing equipment (LBE) and carry an M-16 rifle. Minimum completion time was 3 hours for the twelve-mile distance. The more competitive types went for such time goals as 2 ½ or even 2 hours. In any case, by the time Range Road was reached, it was necessary to forcefully focus one's mind on something other than aches, pains and hot, tired and sometimes blistered feet.

That's where the telephone poles proved to be invaluable. One could use them as focus points and concentrate on reaching one, then the next one, jogging between two and walking between two, whatever it took. Failure to refocus many times resulted in lagging behind, succumbing to physical exhaustion and even not being able to finish in the minimum required time. For the successful, the mental conditioning and focusing techniques were invaluable to their performance. That same sort of mental conditioning was even more critical in real-world situations. Most soldiers, if not all, have had similar experiences.

Mental conditioning is equally important for growth as Christians living in a world and culture that, for the most part, is self-directed instead of God-centered!

Key Verse:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV)

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2 (NKJV)

If our culture is based on individuals becoming 'self-actualized', while God's design for our behavior as Christians is based on **selfless love** for one another while serving as soldiers in His Kingdom, it's entirely reasonable to assume that most of what we are exposed to and therefore think about might not be in the best interest of our spiritual growth. The apostle Paul spoke to several early churches concerning the need to redirect our thoughts. His encouragement is no less

important today than two thousand years ago. In fact, this old soldier thinks it is more important now than ever before!

Consider for a moment the typical day. We spend a certain amount of time with our jobs, education programs, or other activities we could define as 'work' in which our thoughts are primarily focused on those activities. The rest of our day consists of social interaction, times of solitude, the pursuit of some sort of hobby or entertainment, or sleeping. Is there a time other than sleeping when we are not engaged in some sort of conscious thought? Even when we intentionally select activities that do not challenge us intellectually (require serious thought) such as television, movies, or loud and mind numbing music, there is usually some sort of 'thought' activity. Get the picture?

So What?

We are always thinking about something. So what? Does it matter what we think about? Yes, it does! Thoughts are a reflection of the heart. When Christ becomes the ruler of our lives, He changes our hearts. We have a desire for 'things above'. We do not however automatically redirect our thoughts upward. To a great extent we have control over our thought lives and therefore need to consciously refocus our attention.

Mental conditioning is critical to our spiritual growth. The world (our prevailing culture) wants to squeeze us into its mold. God desires to **transform** us!

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God .Romans 12:1-2(NKJV)

I must ask myself:

“Do I allow the world to squeeze me into its mold, or am I engaged in mind renewal and being transformed into who God wants me to be for Him?”

An honest answer would reveal both. The personal challenge that results from this little exercise is to identify the former (the squeezing) and intensify the latter (mind renewal). We have the responsibility of renewing our minds, and God will take care of transforming!

Here's a clue for engaging in the renewal process:

***Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:1-3***

Here's the result:

...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)