

# Special Forces: Day Thirty-one

## Intermediate Training: Unit Two

### Personal Improvement

#### Measuring Growth

I will never forget when, in basic training, I was first able to knock out fifty pushups in a row. Considering my chosen lifestyle before enlisting in the Army, it was quite a feat! Years later, as a senior NCO and a student at the Defense Language Institute in California, it was nothing to roll out of my bunk early in the morning and knock out eighty pushups followed by eighty sit-ups. Through the years it had been necessary to reach higher and higher levels of physical fitness.

I can remember being assigned to a mountain detachment and how we practiced for the standard Army physical fitness test during morning PT. Practicing for the PT test itself wasn't the morning's PT session as one might assume, it was something we did *after* our normal regimen! It was a personal goal to be able to obtain a maximum score for my age at those sessions. Once I had grown to that point, the goal became the ability to obtain a maximum score for the age group below the one in which I was placed. In other words, there were clear ways to measure growth in the area of physical fitness against established Army standards.

While it is easy to set personal measurable goals for growth and improvement in our daily lives, it can be a bit more difficult to measure spiritual growth. What are the standards we can use to measure our growth? Where are the charts, numbers and scorecards? How do we know we are growing in His grace? Is it even possible for human thought to set standards for what can only be described as the work of the Almighty God through His Holy Spirit?

#### Key Verse:

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:22-26 (NKJV)***

Our faith walk is a spiritual thing, therefore it would be necessary to measure spiritual growth instead of something so tangible as physical development. To the extent that God's Holy Spirit empowers the above character traits in our lives, we are growing. While we can exhibit these character traits in our human nature, when we are driven and led by God's Spirit each of them transcends the natural and becomes supernatural. Our motives can change drastically – from *selfish* to *selfless*.

So how do we measure our growth? We can certainly examine our own motives for actions, but it sure is hard to build a chart or construct a scorecard! Is there such a thing as a spiritual standard that can be used as a measurement tool? I found one a few days ago that really caught my attention. Oswald Chambers, in a work entitled Disciples Indeed, wrote the following:

***“Measure your growth in grace by your sensitiveness to sin.”***

When I let that thought sink into my sometimes thick skull, all I could say was - **WOW!** It makes perfect sense! God is pure and Holy, hating sin but loving the sinner (me and you). Our

**human nature** exhibits a tendency toward sin. One could rightly conclude that our human nature is diametrically opposed to God's nature, which is the same nature of His Holy Spirit that indwells every believer. This principle of conflict is clearly illustrated in one of the Apostle Paul's letters to the early church:

***I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.***

***Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:16-21(NKJV)***

Just because we become Christians we are not rid of the desires of sinful flesh. In fact, when the Spirit of God takes up residence within us, the conflict between God's Spirit and our flesh begins! Things we once did without a second's thought, activities we engaged in and enjoyed freely, and even hateful emotions we considered 'rightful indignation' become uncomfortable for us. That discomfort is just the beginning of our growth in Christ. As we continue in the Word, fellowship and prayer the Spirit becomes stronger and the flesh becomes weaker. **It's a supernatural process!**

## **So What?**

As we grow in grace we become increasingly sensitive to that which is sinful. When we are truly in love with our Savior, we have a Spirit prompted desire to get rid of the sin in our lives. There are two basic approaches to the 'sin' issue we all face. We could undertake a 'search and destroy' mission to seek out and do battle with specific sin or sins, but I fear that is largely a 'fleshly' pursuit and subject to defeat and failure. The second approach is to allow the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus take hold in our lives and let the **supernatural process** kick into high gear. This is where continuing in the Word, fellowship and prayer applies.

A truly wonderful 'spiritual' PT test would be to pause for a time of reflection, consider your personal walk with Christ and actually prepare a list of the 'junk' that has been relegated to the 'garbage heap' since becoming a Christian. Odds are that such reflection would reveal sin that was dealt with very early in your faith walk and other 'stuff' that was tossed out later because its true nature was revealed during the growth process.

You may also discover that there's a lot of 'stuff' that is perfectly acceptable and even highly approved of by most folks around us while God has an entirely different opinion of the matter! Listen to God, agree with His opinion and yield to His perfect will. The inner peace and serenity is truly amazing! As you grow in grace and love be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul:

***And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:15-17 (NKJV)***