

Special Forces: Day One

Basic Training: Unit One

Mission Analysis

Decision Making

One thing I learned from serving in the military was the art of decision making. It was a subject that appeared at every level of leadership and career development training in the Army, at least before this guy retired. I am certain that decision making is among the hottest topics at schools in the other military branches as well. We had the decision making process down to a science; define the problem, develop solutions or courses of action and analyze each one, determine the best course of action, make a decision and go for it. Decision matrixes were even developed to assist in the process in which different courses of actions could be placed along with their good and bad points, numeric values could be assigned and a decision adopted based on the sum of values. To crusty old noncommissioned officers like me, much of it seemed to be common sense, but it was also good to have a process articulated so that it could be taught to those younger soldiers who were on a career path and not just doing their 'time'.

Key Verse:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16 (NKJV)

We can apply the same process to just about everything we encounter in our daily lives. The challenge many times is in sifting through all of the possible solutions to apply or directions to take. There are times however, when it is pretty clear. Take the familiar Bible verse, John 3:16. I was first exposed to this great verse as wee one in Sunday school and also from the stories told to me by my Mom. There are probably a lot of folks who heard this truth in the same way. There are others who might have just seen it flash by on a billboard at a sporting event in a stadium - perhaps just seeing the reference and not the words. No matter how one might have been exposed to this truth, one thing is certain, it presents a clear choice that requires a decision.

The Choice - Life or Death

The basic assumption here (the military always has a set of basic assumptions) is that this is a true statement. I can't remember not believing in God and have always accepted the written Word as truth. Having said that, notice the simple choice presented here - 'perish' or 'have everlasting life'. Without getting into what 'perish' or 'have everlasting life' really mean, everlasting life seems the logical choice. So how do I receive this everlasting life?

First of all, everlasting life is available to 'whoever believes', meaning that no person is on the ineligible list just for breathing, being a certain color, being of poor character or reputation, or having a bunch of Article 15's. Not even serving a life sentence in Leavenworth makes a person ineligible. So what's the decision here? You can either believe in Jesus, or not believe. To believe in Him is life, to not believe is death.

So What!

It's easy to be so involved with all the decisions to be made just to make it through the day that we forget about the single most important decision we can ever make - what to do with the

claims of Christ. To not confront the issue is to passively choose to perish in eternity. Think about it. To believe in Christ and choose to follow Him provides the opportunity to live an abundant life in the here and now and spent eternity with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10 (NKJV)

The decision of what to do with Christ is the most important decision you will ever make and will effect you entire life now and forever. Have you made your decision?

Special Forces: Day Two

Basic Training: Unit One

Mission Preparation 101

Mission Focus

In my years serving in military, it seemed like we spent most of our time training. We were either honing our skills or conducting training missions patterned after actual missions that we might be called upon to perform. Just about everything we did revolved around one specific mission or another. Real missions dictated how we trained, what skills we developed and sharpened. We focused on even the smallest detail. When we actually deployed, we were given operations orders, the first important line of which was the mission statement.

Key Verse:

"...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8, (NIV)

It is equally important for the Christian to understand the mission. The key verse has often been used to state the mission of the Christian in this present life. I would submit however, that it has been **often misunderstood** to mean that as Christians, we are merely to **'do' things** like attend church regularly, talk about God and Jesus, pass out literature, donate money to worthy causes, all the while reminding everyone around us that we are Christians in a variety of ways like leaving Bibles laying around and placing cute bumper stickers on our cars, etc. This verse is really not as much about 'doing' as it is about 'being'. Let's take a closer look.

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples just before the Holy Spirit descended to empower the church on the day of Pentecost. Jesus didn't tell them to go and do anything, but said that they would **be** His witnesses once they received the Holy Spirit. You could say that both 'being' and 'doing' are represented here. 'Being' in the phrase "you will be" and 'doing' in the word "witness." However, let's focus for a minute on the word 'be'.

One dictionary states that 'be' means 'to have an objective existence: have reality or actuality; to have a specified qualification or characterization; and describes 'being' as having the same connotation as 'symbolize'. Symbolize is further defined as 'to have identity with'. I would submit that to be a witness more closely means who we are and whom we represent. To those around us who know us as Christians by our own confessions, we symbolize or represent Christ. We either present a true picture, a false picture, or a distorted picture.

So What!

Our mission as Christians is NOT just to 'do' things but to 'be' the best possible representative of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to a fallen world. A well-known phrase in Army circles - 'Be all you can be!' - sums it up nicely. And yes, there are a many things to 'do' that present a witness to those around us. My own experience had taught me that when I focus on 'being', the 'doing' takes care of itself. But don't trust me; trust the Holy Spirit who gives to us both the desire and power to act. Listen to how the Apostle Paul encouraged one of the early churches.

"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." Philippians 2:13, (NIV)

When you feel tired, weak or discouraged from trying to 'do' in your own strength, let go of yourself, refocus on the mission, let God empower you to 'be', and witness in His strength, not yours! I guarantee that you will really enjoy the 'doing' empowered by His Spirit and resting in His grace.

Special Forces: Day Three

Basic Training: Unit One

Mission Preparation 102

Attitude Check

I met Wally while attending the Defense Language Institute in California. He was an Army helicopter pilot attending a Spanish course while I was trying to learn Polish. I met him in church and he and his wife sort of adopted me, since I was there without my family members, who remained at my home station in Massachusetts. We spent quite a bit time together, and became really close as a couple of guys and brothers in faith. We did a lot of things together over the several months we were students at the language school. I have several stories about Wally, but this is the one that still remains indelibly in my memory.

Key Verse:

"Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again." Matthew 27:27-30 (NIV)

The Pastor of the small church we attended in Monterey asked three men to share for a short time during one Sunday evening service. Wally was one of those who volunteered. I will never forget what Wally shared with us that evening. He was the last to share that evening, but I am sure his message made the deepest impact on all that attended the service.

When his turn came to bring a short message to the congregation, Wally quietly took two chairs and placed them in front of the small congregation, facing the front row. He sat down in one and asked us to try and picture in our minds what he was about to describe. He then told us how he saw his life as a Christian. He, Wally was sitting in one and Jesus, his Lord, was sitting in the other. Jesus was wearing the crown of thorns and had already suffered derision and scorn. In front of Jesus there were the responsible soldiers, standing quietly in a line, as if waiting for something to happen or a command to be given.

Wally then talked about sin, specifically, sins that are committed by well meaning Christians. With tears in his eyes, Wally spoke of committing a sin and a Roman soldier stepping up to Christ and spitting in His face. He named another sin we sometimes commit so lightly and another soldier stepping up, this time pushing the crown of thorns deeper into our Savior's brow. Wally went on, naming sins and after each one another soldier taking his turn, another, and another - by that time barely able to speak. When there were no more words, Wally quietly stood up, picked up the chairs and walked away.

So What!

So what's the point? It's not about a guilt trip, or about deciding to never sin again. To say I will never sin would be a lie. It is all about attitude - my attitude toward sin. Do I sin, ask forgiveness and go about my way, with a halfhearted vow to refrain from that particular sin? After all, God knows we will never be perfect and has already paid the price for our sin. Or do I see sin in my

life as an insult to my Savior, another Roman soldier stepping up to take a turn at spitting or laughing, or pushing the crown of thorns deeper? What's my attitude?

I believe all those who have come face to face with their own sinfulness and the price that was paid for their redemption can identify with Wally's attitude. I also believe that a heartfelt sorrow sometimes fades over time and rationalization takes over. The result is a defensive attitude or one of 'It's not a problem, God will forgive me.' I've been down that road more than a few times.

What I need is the ability to live continuously with the proper attitude toward sin. So how can I do that? Since my human nature is still tainted by the very sin I should despise, I suppose I need to give up trying by my own strength and live more closely in tune with the Holy Spirit, who dwells inside me. Besides, it's probably the least I can do because of what He did for me. One Apostle encouraged a young church at Rome with the following words.

"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." Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

With the proper attitude toward sin, Christian service is eagerly entered into, sort of like a young Special Forces type running an extra 3 miles every morning to get to the mandatory physical training session just because he loved it! HooYa!

Special Forces: Day Four

Basic Training: Unit One

Overt Tactics

Called to be Peacemakers

Have you ever wondered what your purpose or calling in life is? I know I have. All through high school and some college (before money dried up), I had goals of some sort and thought I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I joined the Army to jump out of perfectly good airplanes and thought that would be it. A Special Forces recruiter showed up at basic training one day and then I knew I had found my calling! Then, some years later, God invaded my heart with his love, called me back to himself and I was wondering all over again. There seemed to be more questions than ever.

Well, I don't have all the answers but I have learned to trust what I do know. If the specific answers I want don't seem to be there, I can apply a principle. The Army is full of principles - principles of war, principles of leadership, and on and on. God has also given us key principles through the scripture. For instance, I know that if I have accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord I am a new creation. I have a fresh start! I can forget the junk I left behind and start over. But that's not all, my friend!

Key Verse:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." 2
Corinthians 5:17-20a (NIV)*

What is awesome to me is the principle of reconciliation. God sent his own Son to live a perfect life and be a sacrifice for Dan Cartwright's (and your) sinful nature. And then he gave us 'the ministry of reconciliation'. After God brings us home he wants us to somehow be instrumental in showing others the way home. That is AWESOME!

So What!

I don't know about you, but realizing what God wanted me to be sure took off a load of stress. I know that no matter what my particular station or situation in life is, I've been appointed to an ambassadorship with a divine purpose, to help others come home. While I live and breathe, whether I am a leader or a follower (Private, Sergeant Major, Lieutenant or General) my purpose in life doesn't change. I don't have to get wrapped up running after promotions, prestige, or whatever the producers of motivational tapes and infomercials consider 'real success'. Instead, God says he wants me to just be his representative wherever I live or whatever my circumstances.

I believe this is God's calling for all of his children. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ. This doesn't mean placing 'Honk if you Jesus' bumper stickers on our cars or wearing WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) stuff. Then everyone's watching you like a hawk, just waiting for you to

be guilty of non-Christian behavior. We can never be perfect and God doesn't expect perfection. However, we can learn from his Word, let his Spirit and love fill us and spread it around as we go about our daily walk. The rest will take care of itself. Then we can agree with one of Christ's greatest ambassadors, the apostle Paul:

"...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Philippians 4:11 (NIV)

Special Forces: Day Five

Basic Training: Unit One

Covert Tactics

Escape and Evasion

I remember a certain training exercise in Denmark during which being captured at least once was almost inevitable due the sparse foliage and the 'enemy' having some very good search dogs. I learned a lot about paranoia when, after having been captured and having been released in the middle of nowhere, I had to find my way to a predetermined link-up point to rejoin my detachment. It was necessary to travel during daylight hours which was difficult enough, and the sound of barking dogs seemed to be everywhere! They were mostly dogs hunting game animals with their masters, but I assumed they were enemy search dogs after me. Well, I made the link-up and our team continued to the next mission target. What a sense of relief!

Key Verse:

"...and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"" Genesis 3:8b-9 (NIV)

The scene of our key verse is the Garden of Eden. The apple has been eaten and sin has taken up residence on the earth and in the hearts of God's most precious creation, Adam and Eve. Knowing they had disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, they actually tried to hide from their creator among the trees of the garden. Fat chance! Unlike the search dogs in Denmark, God knew exactly where they were and even called out to them. One could easily picture an angry God nailing Adam and Eve to the garden floor like an angry 1st Sergeant dealing with an AWOL soldier who has been caught. Somehow I don't think that's an accurate picture. Adam and Eve were the crown of God's creation. As their creator, God's loved them greater than we mortals can even imagine.

We see another, earthly example of a parent's love in the book of 2 Samuel:

"The king is grieved for his son." And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Samuel 19:2b-4 (NKJV)

King David's son had turned against his father and had been bent on taking over the kingdom of Israel. Fierce battles had ensued and Absalom had been killed. Instead of finding satisfaction in victory, David grieved deeply for his lost son, with no thought of Absalom's apparent hatred for his own father.

The similarities are crystal clear - the creator grieving over his precious children and the king grieving over his lost son. Let me take it one more step and really bring it home. Imagine loving parents losing a child to a senseless, violent auto accident. It's not possible to describe the heart wrenching sorrow.

So What!

For me, it's intensely personal in more ways than one. I clearly remember being raised by parents who loved me, Sunday school, church, catechism classes, and even my first communion. It was at that first communion altar that I first felt the love and presence of God so intensely that I would never forget that I belonged to Him. I also remember deciding to leave the church to run my own life after graduating high school and leaving home. I went AWOL and was in an ODF status for a lot of years (Out 'Dere Flappin'). I left the church but not get away from His love. When I finally decided to just let God take charge of my life it was a matter of just letting go of my own reins. I had an overwhelming sense of God having been there all the time, patiently waiting and grieving with a father's heart.

To whoever is reading this, I probably don't know you, but I know God does. And he loves you with a love words cannot describe. He loves you know matter what, whether you have walked with him all your life, have once know him and turned away, or if you have denied him and never accepted his love. So no matter who you are or where life has taken you, just take a moment to think about it. If you are on the run, just give up. You can't outrun God's love. God is not an angry 1st Sergeant waiting to slap an Article 15 on you or try and send you to Leavenworth.

Listen to the words of Jesus, who bled and died because he loves you:

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17 (NIV)

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:10-11 (NIV)

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they know me." John 10:27 (NIV)

Listen to his voice. He's calling you.

Special Forces: Day Six

Basic Training: Unit One

The Ultimate Goal

Pass in Review

As military folks, I think we have all found ourselves on an open parade field at one time or another, sharply dressed in our uniforms, proud to be serving our country, maybe listening to our commander speaking to and encouraging the troops. On the other hand, it might have been a hot, humid summer day and we might have been just waiting for the 'Pass In Review!' command because that would mean it was almost over and we could go home. We might have been in the stands watching. It can certainly be a grand occasion with the formations of troops, the marching band, flags flying and all the pomp and circumstance. I wasn't among the marchers at my all time favorite parade field ceremony. I was watching my son marching past at his graduation ceremony from MP school. A little fatherly pride showing here, I'm afraid. But this isn't about me.

Key Verse:

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands." Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

Revelation, chapter 7, gives us a glimpse of a scene in heaven. The author, the apostle John, living in exile on the island of Patmos was on a supernatural reconnaissance mission to heaven, escorted by a mighty angel. I guess you could call Revelation his written 'after action report'. I'm just sharing a few verses that really catch my attention.

Try and visualize this great multitude, robed in white, palm branches in their hands, before the throne of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. What an awesome panorama! The members of the multitude represent every tribe and nation on earth and stand before the throne in heaven because they received Christ as Savior and Lord while still mere mortals. However, they are not just standing silently, as we might be at that change of command ceremony. Picture this heavenly formation, countless voices raised in unison, their cry echoing across heaven...

*"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the lamb!" (v.10)*

And that's not all! All the angels were also around the throne, maybe like the commander's battle staff in our ceremonies. They don't just stand there at parade rest either....

"They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying:

*"Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and
honor
and power and strength*

*be to our God for ever and
ever.
Amen!"*

So What!

For me, it's almost like a Paul Harvey experience. I remember pictures of Armageddon, the final battle, plagues and seals, blood, fire and smoke, but not much else. Now I know 'the rest of the story', and wanted to share. I hope you encouraged by this glimpse at this great gathering in heaven, knowing you have already secured your position in the ranks.

My friend, if you haven't or are not sure, investigate the claims of Christ. He's not just sitting on a throne in heaven, he lives in the hearts of many and has sent his Spirit to empower us while we serve him down here on planet earth. Know that he loves you and patiently awaits your homecoming. Not only that, he's getting heaven ready for you! As he told his disciples before he went home to his Father.....

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." John 14:11-4 (NKJV)

Special Forces: Day Seven

Basic Training: Unit One

Navigation 101

Land Navigation

In my younger days on a Special Forces detachment specializing in warfare in mountainous terrain, we actually carried small altimeters that, when set properly, could help us maintain a level traverse along a mountainside. Existing paths were rarely used. We could actually navigate along the brown contour lines that were only seen on military maps. With map, compass and a good altimeter we would chart our course through rugged terrain. Navigation became more challenging at night. When the weather was clear we might have some moonlight, depending upon the current moon phase, and of course we had NOD's (Night Vision Devices). Travel at night and rest during the day was an ironclad rule, violated only when absolutely necessary to accomplish the mission.

Key Verse:

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105 (NKJV)

When the Psalms were first written, the only tool for finding one's way in darkness was the light of a lamp, most likely an oil lamp. Walking in darkness requires knowing where each step is being placed, as well as light along the path being traveled. You don't want to injure a foot or ankle and you need to see where you are going. God's word is both a lamp for each step and a light along our chosen path. The writer had a lot more to say about God's word in this Psalm, so this is just a taste!

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."

I will seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands."

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." v. 9-11

"Your word, or Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." V. 89

"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." V. 97

"Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The entrance of your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands."

V. 129-131

So What!

As Christians, we also have tools to help us chart the course of our lives; chapel and church, Christian fellowship, uplifting music, and the written Word, just to name a few. Of those tools, it is this man's opinion that the Word is by far the most important. Not only was it written through the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God has given us the same Holy Spirit to live inside us, making his Word even more precious to us. We can but read it with an open heart and the Spirit causes us to want to obey. It's not a hard thing, but a heart thing. If I say I am His, I have a heart to read His word. If I read His word, He gives me a heart to obey.

I'm not going to talk about all of the darkness that bombards us constantly as we live our daily lives. It could take up reams of paper. Just Listen to the words of our Savior.....

"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." John 8:12 (NKJV)

What a promise! My friend, make it yours today!

Special Forces: Day Eight

Basic Training: Unit Two

Tactics

Targets of Opportunity

The scene is at night around a warm fire in a forest clearing somewhere in Pennsylvania. The entire team is there, relaxing in the base camp after a day of practicing patrolling skills. It's a peaceful environment, free of hostile enemy, hence the warm fire. The team medic, John, started asking me questions about some things he had heard from a girl from Boston he had been dating. It sounded to me like she had been telling John about the church's and some of its doctrine. Anyway, I was able to answer his questions because I was very familiar with the teachings of that particular denomination. However, my discussion with John was just the tip of the iceberg!

Key Verse

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction." 2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit opened another door that evening, faster than a SWAT team blowing the doors off a room full of bad guys'. What started out to be a friendly discussion around his questions turned into an opportunity to present to John the simple Gospel of God's love through Jesus Christ, without all of the man-made denominational trappings. That's not all! There were at least six other men in that base camp, some of whom could not help but overhear my discussion with John. Being eager to share the Gospel and being prepared with a knowledge of God's plan of salvation led to an opportunity to present that precious Gospel both actively to John and passively to other team members!

That isn't the end of the story. If God engineered the situation, and I just happened to be hanging around willing to be used as an instrument, I am sure that more followed in the hearts of the men who listened that night. I may never know exactly what, but I'll just leave that up to God. As the Apostle Paul put it...

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it Grow." 1 Corinthians 3:5,6 (NIV)

So What?

As soldiers we were well trained and ready to engage targets of opportunity on the battlefield. I firmly believe that is all God asks of us - to be well trained and ready. He doesn't want His precious message of salvation forced down anybody's throat. You don't have to stand on street corners handing out tracts and asking passersby where their souls are headed when they die. He just wants us to grow in grace and be ready. He has given you: a heart to share what He has done in your life; His word in order to learn more and more of his grace; and He presents opportunities for you to share what he is doing in your daily life.

God has chosen us, his children, to plant seeds for his Kingdom. I'm sure God is more than capable of manifesting his love and power without us. That makes his choice of using us pretty astounding. By the way, there's is historical precedent here, straight from the Bible.

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled men (not pastors or chaplains), they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13 (NIV)

If you're living for Him, and have shared the Gospel with someone you care about but haven't seen results, don't worry about it. God's working! If you desire to share the Gospel but can't seem to find an opportunity, don't worry about it. Ask God to open doors and just be ready. God's working! It wouldn't surprise me one bit if now and then God even shows you the increase!

Special Forces: Day Nine

Basic Training: Unit Two

Fitness Training

Pain Builds Character

This was a favorite saying of an "A" team operations sergeant I once worked with. I was on his team. We mostly heard it uttered in the middle of rigorous physical training, heavy breathing and lots of sweat, not to mention the body aches. The training was hard, but it was worth it in both physical and mental terms. Our team sergeant was teaching us the art of self-discipline. He was also helping us to learn that this lesson comes with a cost. After we had paid that cost, the result was that we were prepared physically and mentally to handle any mission!

What a contrast between the picture above and the multitude of media commercials advertising great bodies with little or no impact, and certainly no pain in the process! Effortless machines, miracle diets and magic pills, and even electric belts that you wear to stimulate muscle activity while you watch your favorite television program. It must sell, because they keep advertising! What's the goal? A beautiful body for the time being that's eventually going to get old and wrinkled anyway!

Key Verses

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." 1 Corinthians 9:25 (NIV)

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11 (NIV)

When I look at all the 'Christian' programming we have available, I see the same thing at work. It's sad, even tragic, that so often we want our Christianity the same way - no impact. We can hear about salvation without repentance, the love of Jesus without having to admit your true condition as sinners. We can throw God's money away in the direction of those who would tell us how to receive our miracles and how to claim our rights as king's kids. We can shop for churches down the street like we shop for shoes, trying them on until we find the one that fits our chosen lifestyle; one that helps us feel good about ourselves and call it spiritual growth.

So What?

True athletes are the ones who endure the pain and discipline of hard training and maybe even emerge one day in the Olympics. Those athletes know the value of hard training and discipline, whether it's initiated by their coaches or from the wellsprings of internal dedication. It is the same for us as Christians. We can welcome discipline from the Master and hardships on the road of life as valuable lessons on the path to the 'crown that will last forever'.

Now that we have settled the attitude question, we need a coach. I can recommend a great coach - the Bible!

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16,17 (NKJV)

Be encouraged, brothers and sisters! Let God give you the desire to reach for the prize and listen to the coach!

Special Forces: Day Ten

Basic Training: Unit Two

Unit Cohesion

The Buddy System

For as far back in the military as I remember, all the way to basic training in fact, there was some sort of buddy system in place. We didn't have formal 'Battle Buddies' like today's Army basic training but the system was definitely in place. There has always been a buddy system in Ranger and Scuba schools, we had a system in Special Forces training, and we always operated in pairs on the battlefield or in hostile territory. A 'Lone Ranger' mentality had no place and 'solo' missions were extremely rare. Maybe that's why I have a problem with the current advertisements that tell prospective recruits they can be an "Army of One".

If you think about it, it makes perfect sense for any number of reasons. You can watch each other's back, help each other get through tough situations, test each other's skills, treat each other's wounds, not to mention be each other's companion on and off the battlefield. In the world of Special Forces, there were always two men with the same primary specialty on an 'A' team. A 12-man team was capable of operating as a pair of equally qualified 6-man teams, with three two man teams on each split detachment.

Key Verse:

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out two by two..." Luke 10:1-2a (NIV)

"For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them." Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

The same buddy principle is important for Christian men and women. My experience is that I have always walked my best Christian walk when I had at least one solid brother in faith to walk along with me. In contrast, I have made my worst mistakes and stumbled most often when I tried to walk alone. Having a 'buddy' helps keep you 'sharp' as a Christian in a variety of ways. We seem to walk much closer to God when we hold ourselves accountable to another person. We have someone with whom to share our successes and failures, our joys and sorrows, our cares and worries.

According to the book of Luke, the buddy principle was also good enough for the Lord himself! The Master didn't just choose the big twelve we are so familiar. He appointed others and sent them ahead of him to every place he was going to visit, sort of advance teams. Luke tells us they healed the sick and told the local citizens the kingdom was near. It sounds like these advance teams were to begin harvesting and prepare things for the arrival of Jesus. And don't forget prayer teams!

So What?

I remember Georg (no 'e'), Daryl, Juan, Wally, Kingsley, and other men whose names I can't even remember at the moment. In addition, there are some mighty fine Chaplains that have helped me along the way.

Who has been your companion as you have walked your Christian path? Have you had a 'buddy' or two? If you haven't thought about it lately, stop and reflect for a moment. Also reflect for a moment on the quality of your Christian walk when you had a 'buddy' and when you tried going solo. Did that special companion come along as a result of direct prayer on your part, just show up in a time of need, or did God just plant him or her in your path when you were doing your best Lone Ranger imitation. I've seen them all. Each one has been a blessing and a 'sharpening stone'.

Where are you today? Are you flying solo or with a 'buddy', a personal 'sharpening stone' and fellow laborer? My prayer for you today is that you are not walking alone. If you are, my prayer is that God might send someone to walk alongside you!

Special Forces: Day Eleven

Basic Training: Unit Two

Nutrition 101

Proper Diet

We all know the proper diet is important. Moms take great pains to provide their children with the right foods that contain all right vitamins and minerals. I remember food groups from health class and the balanced diets placards in the school cafeterias. When I was a young single soldier living in the barracks and eating in the dining facility, a well-balanced diet was again available to me. I think all of the military services provide the troops the opportunity to have a well balanced, low cost diet.

To remain fit for SF and maintain the high state of physical fitness required to remain among the 'elite of the elite', I learned to really watch my diet. Over time, when I saw the results of maintaining a proper diet mixed with regular rigorous physical training, I actually developed a stronger desire for all the right stuff. Good eating habits resulted from setting personal performance goals. As a result, I could really tell when I was "off my feed."

Key Verse:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16,17 (NKJV)

"Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV)

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42 (NIV)

As a Christian, I need the proper diet from the right food groups. We also need good self-discipline in order to maintain our 'spiritual' diet. I suspect that we all have a tendency to go for cake, ice cream and all sorts of unhealthy food. We 'eat' the wrong stuff and forget about what we really need. Without a conscious effort on my part my spirit could starve! Friends, I've been there and done that!

So What!

In the above verses I underlined what I consider the three main spiritual food groups: scripture, prayer and fellowship with other believers. I need to read God's word and learn from it, I need to have frequent conversations with my Lord and I need the fellowship and companionship of other believers.

As Christians we're all sailing in the same boat. The same Holy Spirit lives in all of us and gives us a desire to eat right. To remain fit for Kingdom service, we have the same needs. So I pause and ask myself, "How am I doing?" If I do not have the desire for scripture, prayer and fellowship, I must realize that there must be a reason! Guess where I will find that reason? In what I eat!

Friend, how are you doing?

Special Forces: Day Twelve

Basic Training: Unit Two

Leadership 101

The Example of Others

One of the main subjects taught at military leadership schools revolves around leadership traits and principles. When I was struggling through university level studies for a management degree we discussed leadership from the private sector corporate perspective, with all the latest buzzwords and techniques. At one point we had a homework assignment to think of someone we considered a leader and be able to share our thoughts with the class at the next session. I listened quietly during my classmates' offerings of familiar historical figures then took my turn.

"His name was Paul,," I began. "Paul who?" I was asked. In reply, I talked about a man I read about who traveled around Asia and parts of Europe, starting churches just about everywhere he went. Not only did he start churches, he followed up on their progress after he left town and wrote letters back to those churches as sort of a progress check. I love the way Paul would say something good to folks to lift their spirits before he eased into areas for improvement. NCO School taught me the same thing!

Key Verse:

"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. In him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you." 1 Corinthians 1:4-6 (NIV)

"My brothers, some in Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you." v.11

This chapter of Corinthians continues with Paul's advice to the church concerning a lot of problems they were having. Paul fearlessly spread the Gospel, planted churches and helped them grow. Some of his letters were written from prison! He never lost sight of his mission, and never quit!

So What!

The Bible is full of practical wisdom for daily living, along with examples of real people in real situations, successes and failures, struggles and triumphs. The Apostle Paul is just one example. From Christian hater to dedicated missionary - what a biography!

It seemed natural to discuss Paul's leadership skills with others in the classroom. I talked about someone I admired and planted some seeds at the same time. Who knows, maybe someone was inspired to read more of the Bible for themselves!

More than that, what is my attitude about sharing the Gospel? Am I eager to share things of God and the wisdom of scripture, or do I hesitate for fear of what others might think? Can I truly agree with Paul?

"...I am eager to preach the gospel to you are at Rome." I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." Romans 1:15,16 (NIV)

Special Forces: Day Thirteen

Basic Training: Unit Two

Communication 101

Getting past the Filters

Why is it that you can discuss just about anything, including some religions, but if you talk about the one true God, folks seem to get upset?

I remember attending an advanced leadership school that required the students to present an information briefing covering a non-military topic. At the time I was reading a book about the Biblical flood (remember Noah?) that was prefaced with traditional tales from a wide variety of cultures relating different flood accounts with certain similarities. I tried to be objective as possible, mentioning God or 'a god' as a central figure in the stories and the Bible as a 'source document'. Well, three students walked out during the briefing, the heated discussion about bringing 'God' into the classroom lasted forty five minutes, and the NCO who was next for the podium asked to be excused because his topic was Greek Mythology!

I have encountered the same phenomenon at other times and in different circumstances. Well, I have an opinion about why this happens.

Key Verse:

"...what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 1: 19,20 (NIV)

You see, we can try to deny the existence of God all we want, but we already know that he exists! God has planted that knowledge in each and every one of us! Therefore, if I am trying to live my life apart from God, I am rebelling against my creator. And guess what? If I am living in rebellion against what I know deep in my soul, I don't want to hear the truth! It makes absolutely no difference if I want to forget God altogether or just keep him at a distance once in awhile while I roll around in the mud. The result is the same - extreme discomfort when his Spirit starts nudging me.

So What!

For one thing, if I am uncomfortable with God at any level, I need to conduct some serious self-examination.

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10 (NKJV)*

For another, if I talk about the things of God with a sincere heart (not judgmentally) and others become uncomfortable or angry, I shouldn't take it personally. It could be that the Holy Spirit is at work trying to lead them home!

Special Forces: Day Fourteen

Basic Training: Unit Two

Security 101

Guard Duty

I hated guard duty and don't remember many soldiers that didn't feel the same way. Walking in endless circles around the commissary or "PX" (Post Exchange) wasn't anyone's idea of being a 'real' soldier, especially in miserable, cold rainy weather.

It's January 30, 1988. I was at Ft. Bragg, NC for a Special Forces operations and intelligence school. My friend Georg (no 'e'), an instructor at the SF (Special Forces) engineer school and long time close friend, took me to a lunchtime prayer meeting and Bible study at the 82nd Airborne Division chapel. You see, Georg was an on-fire for the Lord sort of soldier and was always plugged into a prayer meeting or two or three.

I met another brother that day named John Royeton, an 82nd Airborne soldier, who shared a bit of scripture with me that gave me a much different perspective of guard duty.

Key Verse:

"I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night.

You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth." Isaiah 62:6,7 (NIV)

Soldiers standing guard over the walled city of Jerusalem, ever vigilant and with open lines of communication to the Commander in Chief. I can see Christian and women in uniform, praying for their families, friends, other men and women in uniform, for a closer personal walk with the Master! Can you see a similarity here?

So What!

I see this as a powerful call to prayer. I also know there are a lot of times I've been caught sleeping on guard duty. That means this is also a time for personal repentance and a renewed sense of vigilance.

I am not to rest, and it won't bother God one bit if I bombard the gates of heaven until the day I die, or the Second Coming, whichever is first! What an honor! I also agree with the Apostle Paul, who wrote in a letter to a young Timothy.....

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service." 1 Timothy 1:12 (NIV)

Special Forces: Day Fifteen

Basic Training: Unit Three

Training for Success

Dare to Succeed!

'Dare to Succeed!' - Words in big bold print at the top of a brochure that arrives in the mail. Infomercials with good looking motivational speakers telling us how to buy property for a buck and change and sell it for thousands. Endless junk email, with get rich quick schemes of some sort or another. Success is all about how much money you can make and how much time you can spend lounging around the pool in your backyard while you effortlessly make money following their methods. They lied!

Key Verse:

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
Joshua 1:7-8 (NIV)

These are God's words to Joshua as the mantle of leadership was passed down after Moses' death. Joshua was to lead the Israelites into the promised land and conquer the enemies within. Note that Joshua's success is directly dependent upon His obedience of God's law. Kind of tough though, wouldn't you agree?

"Just keep ALL of my law and you'll be a success, Josh."

Yeah, right! Sound impossible, doesn't it? Just the big ten is rather intimidating, so I won't get into all the rest of the laws given the Israelites. Having said that, here's the good news!

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
Matthew 22:35-40 (NIV)

Throughout Jesus' ministry, testing him with trick questions was a favorite hobby of some of the opposition. I love his answer to this one! I think it takes care of all of the big ten. Love - directed above and directed to those around us.

So What!

How do I set my standards of behavior? Do I focus on all the do's and don'ts, or do I focus on loving God and my fellow man? I do know that if I focus on the law of love the rest has a way of taking care of itself. Now that's encouraging!

Special Forces: Day Sixteen

Basic Training: Unit Three

Focus Points

Eyes on the Goal

Twelve-mile rucksack marches were just a part of our periodic certification. We had to carry a minimum of 45 pounds in our "rucks", plus weapons and load bearing equipment. A 3 hour completion time was a mandatory goal and 2 ½ hours was my personal goal. There were times along the route that it was necessary to suck it in, pick a spot up ahead along the road like a tree, telephone post or hilltop and just press on. Our team maintained our certification and I even hit my personal goal a few times. Focusing on something and tuning out the pain really helped.

Key Verse:

"Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,

And to open its seals;

For You were slain,

And have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:8-10 (NKJV)

Life is tough. As Christians it can get tougher, especially with all of the pressures to conform to the world around us pushing at us from every side. We are tempted to give up, and some of us do, becoming lukewarm and pretty much useless as soldiers of the King. Just like those grueling rucksack marches we need something on which to focus to wipe out the pain, cause us to see the shame of our sin and fire us up again.

Jesus paid for me with his blood. I picture my Savior on the cross, bruised and beaten, blood dripping from his hands onto the ground. If I look closer I can see each drop of blood, almost in slow motion. What's that? I can see names - my family, friends, co-workers! Look! Right there! It's Dan Cartwright! Hey, that's me...

So What!

There's not much more to say right at this moment. Words are kind of tough. I just have a question. Do you have a focus point, perhaps a few favorite passages of scripture that inspire you when times seem tough?

If not, just keep reading. They will come!

Special Forces: Day Seventeen

Basic Training: Unit Three

Field Manuals

Which One is for Me?

Every branch of the military has a ton of manuals. In the Army we had Field Manuals (FMs) for training and war, and technical manuals (TMs) for technical specialties. I like to think of the Bible as FM-1. There are several good translations to choose from. Which Bible translation should I read? Which one is the best? There are some folks out there with lots of letters after their names that argue about this issue! And what about all the foreign language Bible translations?

When I was in Polish language school I performed an experiment. I investigated one particular scripture that seemed to say (in my American 20th century brain housing group), slightly different things in different English translations. Well, then I became even more curious. I looked up the same passage in German, Spanish and Polish Bibles. I compared them all with the original language with the help of a local pastor and discovered that the Polish Bible had the most accurate translation! So I won't answer the question. I will let the Apostle Paul help us out.

Key Verse:

"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! Galatians 1:8 (NIV)

Friends, it's not about reading different translations. It's about listening to a different gospel! I have found that the Holy Spirit seems to cut through to my hard heart more efficiently from certain translations, but that's not the issue here.

Not long ago I was getting a cup of coffee in the wee hours of the morning in the Colorado Springs airport. Another gentleman just happened to be there doing the same and just happened to put his briefcase on the small table next to where I was getting cream. He just happened to be the Vice President for Outreach for the International Bible Society. To make a long story short, we just happened to discuss Bible translations and shared his answer to the question. Which one is the right one?

"All of them," was the gentleman's answer. The assumption here is that we are talking about honest attempts to correctly translate the Bible so that the reader can easily understand it. I guess it makes perfect sense that if God wrote it, the Holy Spirit can cut through any translation and reach us!

So What!

If the Holy Spirit can 'reach' me through different translations, it's up to me to be 'reachable'. My prayer for all of us is that we read with an honest heart to know more of God and become more like Christ. Paul also encourages us with words he spoke in a letter to one of the churches he founded.

"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. Colossians 3:16

Special Forces: Day Eighteen

Basic Training: Unit Three

Joint Operations

Multinational Forces

My last overseas assignment was at a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) headquarters in Naples, Italy. Armed Forces South (AFSOUTH) had representatives from several nations, and from all military branches within those nations. I learned a lot about multinational corporations while working on a college degree and have received first hand experience since retirement from the Army. We have seen UN (United Nations) and NATO operations across the globe. Forces from some nations seem to have majority representation in these kinds of operations and seem to be doing most of the work.

As Christians, we are members of a multinational organization that has greater potential than anything mere governments and world powers can dream up!

Key Verse:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

Interesting words from Jesus to his disciples. He didn't tell his closest followers what they could be, but what they were. I guess you could say that Christians are members of God's Salt and Light Company (GSLC, Inc.) That's quite an honor!

However, Jesus also told them that it's possible to be the sort of salt that is only good for melting ice on an icy sidewalk, and hidden candles that don't help anyone else see. How and why we become useless salt are worthy topics I won't talk about right now, but I will ask a question we all have probably asked at one time or another. Where am I supposed to be this salt and light? I think I'll let a passage from Luke's gospel provide us with a clue. A couple of groups of federal employees asked John the Baptist.

Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"

So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." Luke 3:12-14 (NKJV)

It looks to me like the preacher told them to act right in their current professions. Sometime later Jesus even commended a Roman soldier for his faith, but didn't say anything about needing to change jobs!

Check out Luke 7:1-10 for the rest of that story.

So What!

Jesus said that I am a 'GSLC, Inc.' employee whether I want the position or not, and wherever I hang my hat or earn a paycheck. My saltiness and brightness depends on how well Jesus (the REAL salt and light) expresses himself through me.

Special Forces: Day Nineteen

Basic Training: Unit Three

Training Preparation

Prerequisites

Since my retirement from the military I've been employed by technical businesses in their training departments. It was a natural extension of my military career but now I get to carry a business card that says I am a 'Training Engineer'. I think I have either been involved in being trained or training others for most of my adult life. Having said that, I am reminded that there always seemed to be a list of prerequisites for attending most types of training. Certain test scores had to have been achieved, skills had to have been mastered, specific schools attended or career levels attained. In retrospect, it was a very sensible and efficient way to produce qualified soldiers with the minimum expenditure of training dollars. Is there anything familiar to you here?

From what I have read in the Bible, God doesn't seem to use the same system. I, for one, am certainly glad that he doesn't.

Key Verse:

"...the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart..." 1Samuel 13:14 (NIV)

There was time in the history of Israel when the nation's people decided they wanted a king rather than the prevailing system of judges and prophets. The prophet Samuel told God about their desire for a king. God told Samuel to tell folks it could get real ugly, with a massive military draft, huge federal employment system and lost of taxes. When they wanted a king anyway, God had Samuel anoint a fellow named Saul, who seemed to have a set of good credentials and had demonstrated the prerequisite leadership skills.

To make a long story short, Saul was anointed king, proved himself in battle, and even did pretty good in the popular polls. Some time later however, Saul was guilty of insubordination to God and it cost him his kingdom. God wanted a 'man after his own heart'. A shepherd boy named David, who didn't seem to meet any kingly prerequisites, turned out to be God's man – 'a man after his own heart'. I remember once having a mental picture of a comical looking fellow with a lopsided crown chasing after a cartoon heart with God's name on it because he wanted to make it his own.

Moving along through history, there was another fellow named Saul who was on the road to a town called Damascus with the express intention taking prisoner anyone who happened to be a follower of Christ. This Saul was the very last person one would think God would choose to start a bunch of churches! Well, God chose him for that very purpose, changed his name to Paul, changed his heart, and turned him into the most dynamic missionary to ever walk upon planet earth! You can read about his conversion in Acts, Chapter 9.

So What!

These are great stories, but what about here and now, in the 21st century? I will let something the apostle Peter wrote to Christians everywhere during his day that still applies to us.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

I know for a fact that I certainly didn't qualify for that one! And if never committing a sinful act or having a sinful thought were prerequisites for keeping the job, I would have been fired a long time ago! God knows me through and through. Still he wanted a royal nation and holy priesthood. So he did what we humans could never do. He sent his very own Son to take care of the prerequisites.

All I can say is WOW! All I can do is let Him have control of my life and try to walk worthy of this high calling.

Special Forces: Day Twenty

Basic Training: Unit Three

Personal Hygiene

Sweet Aroma

There is a certain hotel in Cupertino, California (Greater San Francisco Bay Area, alias "Silicone Valley") that has an elevator with a very unusual characteristic. When entering this elevator, in the early morning hours, I became surrounded by the distinct and wonderful smell of breakfast! I noticed that the elevator was located quite some distance from the ground floor lobby, dining room and kitchen. As I exited I noticed that this tantalizing aroma was absent from the hallway! I think they must open a can of "Fragrance of Breakfast" intentionally pipe it through the elevator vents so that guests will be enticed to partake of the fare in the hotel dining room at fifteen dollars a head.

To a hungry guest (on a diet, living on the third floor, and using the exercise room every morning) the aroma of eggs, sausage and bacon sure is sweet! It reminded me of a verse from Scripture that talks about what aroma God considers pleasing.

The concept of a sweet aroma to God actually can be traced all the way back to Noah, who built an altar after being saved from the great flood.

"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma..." Genesis 8:20-21a (NIV)

We can see the same sacrificial system in the priesthood that was established after the Israelites were delivered from bondage. There are over forty references to sacrificial offerings being a 'sweet aroma' to God in the Old Testament, mostly in Leviticus and Numbers. The Old Testament system of continuous animal sacrifices as a payment to God for sin established God's requirement but gave way to the 'once for all time' sacrifice of his very own Son in the New Testament.

Key Verse:

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 (NIV)

It is amazing the power that an odor can have. When operating in the combat environment we know that the odors of an opposing force can sometimes arrive before a first sighting. In our current society we go to great lengths to remain odor neutral or wear a fragrance that is (hopefully) pleasing to those around us.

As believers, it is important to recognize that we will also have an aroma! It will be offensive to those who are perishing and will be sweet to those who are being saved.

So What!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as sinful humans we are not now, nor could we ever be a sweet fragrance to God. Christ, who lives within us and expresses himself through us by the work of

His Holy Spirit, is forever our fragrance. We are a sweet smelling aroma because we have been washed clean by the Holy Spirit because of Christ's blood sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary!

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:4-7 (NIV)

The question is how do we remain clean and what part do I have in maintaining this personal hygiene? How can I know if I have an aroma or if I just smell? The Apostle John tells us:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." 1 John 1:7-10 (NIV)

Here is our part of the hygiene process: "Confessing our sins." God's part is cleansing us. How do I know if I am clean (aroma or smell)?

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. " 1 John 2:1-6 (NIV)

Special Forces: Day Twenty-one

Basic Training: Unit Three

Battle Ready

All the Way, Sir!

It was a greeting delivered along with the salute required when enlisted soldiers passed officers anywhere on Smoke Bomb Hill, the home of the Army Special Operations Command and Special Forces school at Ft. Bragg, NC. When rendered proudly, 'All the Way, Sir!' was more than just a greeting. It was delivered with a turn of the head, eye-to-eye contact, two soldiers of different ranks, united in purpose and dedicated to the SF motto "De Oppresso Liber!" – "To Liberate the Oppressed!" It conveyed an attitude of the spirit of the SF soldier, well trained and ready to carry out whatever mission necessary, whatever the cost, no questions asked.

In case you are thinking that not every enlisted soldier or officer engaged in the above scenario saluted with true respect or spoke from the heart, you are probably right. What I do know is that after my initial SF training, once I had earned the coveted Green Beret, I meant them. I was still really in the infant stages of a long career and had much more to learn, but I meant those words. I was ready to give it my all, to do whatever it took to carry out the mission!

Now that I have entered the private sector I have seen countless motivational phrases and cute mottos plastered everywhere from car bumpers to corporate office walls.

Key Verse:

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9b (KJV)

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. Luke 22:42 (KJV)

Early in Jesus' ministry, when the disciples asked him how to pray, he gave them what is probably the most familiar prayer in the history of Christianity. We hear it often in church services and gatherings of the faithful. Nestled in the verses of that prayer is what should be the 'All the Way, Sir!' of my life as a Christian. The words '**Thy will be done!**' should be uttered with even more conviction and purpose of heart than the words spoken long ago as I greeted officers on Smoke Bomb Hill at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

A few years later Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing the cross, and for a moment cried out for relief. Our Savior was about to die, to fulfill His mission, to pay the ultimate price for the sin of all mankind, **for my sin**. Faced with certain death, Jesus was face with a conflict of wills, a very human will to live, and God's will that he go to the cross and will the battle for the souls of all mankind.

Our Lord's answer to the Commander in Chief?

"All the Way, Sir!" - "Thy Will Be Done!"

In case you are thinking that it was easy for Jesus because He was after all, the Son of God, hear the account of a man named Saul (later to become the Apostle Paul):

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Acts 9:1-6 (KJV)

After literally 'seeing the light', and submitting to the will of God for his life, Saul became Paul and the rest is history. He became the greatest evangelist that ever walked the planet'

So What!

My 'Basic Training' as a soldier in God's army was completed a long time ago. I have been equipped to carry out the mission of believers everywhere, that of being a 'reconciler', or 'peacemaker', within my personal area of influence (where I live, work and breathe).

Occasionally I have been sent on specific missions. I have not always answered with a resounding **"Thy Will be Done, Sir!"** For that, God's Spirit within me grieves.

However, I am greatly encouraged because He loves me greatly and I can be forgiven for my slackness, take up the charge once again, look My Lord in the eye, salute, and earnestly proclaim...

"All the Way, Sir!" - "Thy Will Be Done!"

I would in turn encourage who are reading this, whoever and wherever you are, reflect on your own life and ask yourself **"How am I Doing?"**

Have you been well trained? Are you ready for the mission, whatever the cost? If so, then let's go with a song in our hearts...

Lead on, O King eternal,
The day of march has come;
Henceforth in fields of conquest
Thy tents shall be our home:
Thro' days of preparation
Thy grace has made us strong,
And now, O King Eternal,
We lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King Eternal,
Till sin's fierce war shall cease,

And holiness shall whisper
The sweet amen of peace;
For not with swords' loud clashing,
Or roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy
The heav'nly kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King eternal,
We follow not with fears;
For gladness breaks like morning
Where'er Thy face appears;
Thy cross is lifted o'er us;
We journey in its light:
The crown awaits the conquest;
Lead on, O God of might.

-Earnest W. Shurtleff

Special Forces: Day Twenty-two

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Force Planning 101

Doctrines and Principles

In the military, much is said about doctrine and principles, in just about any format imaginable! Adequate training and preparation for war fighting is critical. Because of this the United States Army, in 1973, created the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). Their intent was to consolidate Army combat development activities and formulate doctrine to be used throughout the Army. These war fighting principles, defined within this body of doctrine, form the building blocks for training soldiers and are key to success on the battlefield. Setting aside or forgetting sound principles often has disastrous results.

Experience has taught me that the same is true in the life of a Christian. Walk into any Christian book store and you can find entire sections devoted to principles for Christian living, for just about any age group, topic, profession, or walk in life. A glance at the bookshelves in my home would reveal, to the casual observer, that I have purchased my share.

With all that help, why does my Christian walk seem to me to be so wishy-washy at times? Why do I seem, to myself at least, to be so inconsistent? What have I forgotten, or what am I missing? I don't know all the answers, but I do know that a large part of the solution revolves around what some have said is the first word of the Gospel - REPENT.

Key Verse:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matthew 3:1,2 (NKJV)

*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Matthew 4:17 (NKJV)*

So they (the disciples) went out and preached that people should repent. Matthew 6:12 (NKJV)

The above verses record some of the initial words of John the Baptist, Jesus and even the newly commissioned disciples. There seems to be a certain critical emphasis on the term 'repent'. I cannot immediately recall seeing a recently penned book on the subject, nor can I remember repentance being a subject of a church sermon or Christian media discussion. But then again, I may not have been looking in the right places.

Nevertheless, I respectfully submit that that the principle of repentance is crucial to the doctrine of true salvation and deserves some consideration. The original Greek word for 'repent' is defined by Strong's exhaustive concordance as follows:

1. to change one's mind, i.e. to repent
2. to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins

Personally, I prefer the second of the two meanings because it seems to be more complete. Within it lies the real key to my being able to actually repent of my sin - a hatred of sin - otherwise defined as agreement with God concerning sin. Repentance requires that I admit that I

am wrong, something my flesh doesn't like very much. Being in agreement with God, on the other hand, is something his Spirit in me loves, and therefore, my new nature in Christ loves!

So What!

Hating sin can be difficult in a world where we are constantly being bombarded with material in many ways. It comes in forms that not only fail to call sin 'sin', but actually idolize and celebrate as beautiful much of what God abhors and calls unclean. Furthermore, we still have our old fleshly nature existing alongside our new nature in Christ. What can I do? How can I bring about true repentance in my own life? I can begin with another principle from scripture.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2 (NKJV)

I can begin by feeding my new nature and starving my old nature. I can learn to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let my new nature grow in strength and stature. It works! What does this have to do with repentance and hatred for sin? By feeding the Spirit and starving the flesh, a hatred for sin, and thus true repentance, will supernaturally develop in the heart of any believer.

Friend, my challenge and encouragement to you is to feed the new nature and starve the old nature! When you have a choice of 'food', make the right choice! The results are guaranteed!

At the same time, we can be comforted that when we become casualties of sin, we are not condemned, but.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

True repentance leads to confession and confession leads to forgiveness and cleansing. What an awesome promise!

Special Forces: Day Twenty-three

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Team Building 101

Maximizing Skills and Talents

During the early stages of Special Forces training, I was asked what SF specialty I wanted to pursue in Phase II of my SF training. I could become a medic, radio operator, engineer (demolitions), light or heavy weapons specialist, or junior operations and intelligence (O&I) specialist. Since the path to eventually becoming an SF Team Sergeant and running my own 'A' Team (the most prestigious position in SF) required being O&I qualified, O&I training was my first choice.

Well, since a review of some of my earlier Army test scores revealed to the SF cadre that I had nearly 'aced' the test for evaluating natural talent for Morse Code, the ultimate decision for my specialty training was made for me, and I became an SF radio operator.

Being a radio operator meant that while the rest of the team was involved in more dangerous and exciting activities, I was often near the top of a mountain or hill with my communications equipment, banging out Morse Code messages, encrypting and decrypting messages, fine tuning my antenna system, and trying not to be spotted by enemy aircraft (commo sites were at the top of the enemy target list).

Doesn't sound very exciting, does it? Maybe not, but we also had a saying "If you ain't got commo, you ain't got nothin'!" It's the truth - whether it's simple Morse Code or sophisticated, high speed, digital communications over satellites and computer systems. As the team's communicator, I also had the responsibility of cross-training other team members in the skills I had mastered, while other team members such as the medic, demolitions expert and weapons expert trained us in their skills. All of our separate skills were equally important to the cohesiveness and success of the team!

Every talent and every skill is important. It's not much different in the Christian community, the body of believers that is the church, the precious Bride of Christ. As individuals we have been blessed from birth with natural gifts and talents. Likewise we are provided with various and differing spiritual gifts when we are born into His Kingdom that have critical places in ministry, all of which God wants to develop within us for His Glory, none of which is more important than the other.

Key Verse:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love,

may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4 11:15 (NKJV)

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NKJV)

We sometimes have a tendency, when we think of or try to define ministry, to focus our thoughts on that which we see and hear most often, the most visible elements of ministry. That can mean our pastor, chaplain or church leaders, books we might read by well-known teachers and authors, music we listen to and even that which the visual media brings to us. I would submit that there is greater potential for ministry right where we live and work and breathe.

Jesus never passed out a tract, cut a CD, organized a crusade, published a book, or televised a sermon. Being God, he probably could have preached a sermon from on high that could have been heard across the planet and put all of our modern technology to shame! He didn't. He became man to walk among the masses, touching, healing, loving, and offering grace and truth. In walking among us, Jesus provided the greatest example of what we should be doing in our everyday lives, with our talents and gifts, filled with His Holy Spirit, as we walk 'among the masses'.

Paul, in speaking the churches at Corinth and Ephesus, provides a glimpse of the real source of skills, talents and gifts – **God**. I guess that means we don't own them anyway. Paul also provides a several glimpses of their purpose and emphasizes that they are provided from the same source for **God's purposes**.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12: 11.

So What!

I might be soldier, sailor, airman or marine, cook, clerk, or combat warrior. I might be a private or sergeant major, lieutenant or general. While there may be perceived degrees of importance or prestige associated with our jobs or the particular rung of the career ladder upon which a foot might rest, the truth is we need them all! I find it comforting that God places no degrees of importance on our station in life, or where we might be in our careers. Quite the contrary...

The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ. Now we each drink from that same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:12 (Contemporary English Version)

Not only are we equal members of the Body of Christ, he provides us equally with talents and skills, along with whatever spiritual 'tools' we need for ministry wherever we live, no matter

what we do for a living or where we are on the pecking order. One of my favorite musicians, Rich Mullins, was in the habit of signing autographs with two words - **'Be God's.'** God just wants us to be His – available for His service right where we are, with whatever skills, talents or gifts we might possess.

Now that's ministry!

Special Forces: Day Twenty-four

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Selfless Service 101

Whose Life is it, Anyway?

Bob was a remarkable, young and single SF soldier. Not only was he good at his job, he continuously sought opportunities to become a better soldier, such as attending and graduating from the Special Forces HALO school. HALO stands for High Altitude, Low Opening, or parachuting at altitudes higher than radar can detect and opening one's parachute lower than radar normally detects. He was also a dedicated Christian, who sought opportunities to present the Gospel to his fellow comrades-in-arms. I can remember one day entering the barracks building where Bob resided and watching him begin to share the gospel to another single soldier, as we were walking up the stairs to the second floor. Later Bob told me that he had asked God for some sort of a sign that it was His time and I walked into the building. He took my entrance as his sign since he knew that I would support him, if needed.

Bob was 'Uncle Bob' to my young son Danny, since he would frequently visit our home and spend time in fellowship with us and laughing and playing with Danny. When Bob was killed as a result of a parachute malfunction, a tragic occurrence while being inserted into a training operation, it really hit hard. I was angry at God for taking one of His front line soldiers, one of the few soldiers I knew who made sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ life's number one priority. I just couldn't understand why God would let such a thing happen. The events that followed answered my thundering **"Why, God?"**

I was part of the same training operation, running the communications operation at the battalion's forward operating base where the commander and his staff were located. Since I had known Bob, I volunteered to meet with a local minister that would be presiding at a memorial service for Bob at our field location. I met with the minister and we just talked about Bob and his life as a soldier and as a Christian. The minister came to our field site and walked into a very quiet small room filled with soldiers, the battalion commander and his entire staff. The expectation of the attendees of similar memorial services is to listen to a short memorial to a fallen soldier and go about their business. What was heard that day was a clear presentation of the precious gospel, the very truth that had been the apex of Bob's life! The minister shared the fact that Bob, while he lived on earth, had decided to follow Christ and now rested in eternity with God. There was not a person in that small room that did not come face-to-face with the reality of 'eternal values' and the need to make a decision that would last forever.

After the service, I remembered Bob having told me once that he wanted everything in his life to be used for the glory of God. It was at that moment that I realized the significance of that small memorial service in the field where an entire battalion staff with its support personnel received one of the clearest presentations of the gospel of Jesus Christ I have ever heard! It was then I understood that God had used Bob's death for His Glory! Bob had lived for opportunities to spread the precious gospel of Jesus Christ. Even that small memorial service served to that same end – an opportunity to share the gospel.

Key Verse:

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”. Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3 (NKJV)

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Romans 6:11 (NKJV)

We live in a culture that worships the god of ‘self’. All one has to do is turn on the radio, glance at a magazine rack in the supermarket, tune in to just about any syndicated television, or view advertisements in just about any format for just about any product out there. It’s mostly about satisfying ‘self’ in one form or another. Our schools, from elementary school to institutions of higher learning, preach self-actualization, self-esteem, self-empowerment, self-pride – just to name a few. The cult of self has even invaded the church, as evidenced by a plethora of teaching that takes God’s precious promises and turns them into mechanisms for us to ‘demand’ things from God, often under the guise of ‘claiming’ our ‘rights’ as children of the King.

If a preacher or speaker said to an audience “Jesus calls us to follow Him,” very few in that audience would argue. In fact, in some churches, the “Amen!” corner would strongly voice its approval. On the other hand, if the speaker announced: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die,” I wonder just how many would agree. One of the great martyrs of the church, Dietrich Bonhoffer, not only said it, he believed it to the extent that he left comfort and safety in England during WWII to return to his German homeland and serve with the persecuted church, ultimately being arrested and later executed by the S.S. Black Guards. Was this young Lutheran pastor right? What did Jesus himself have to say about it?

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. Mark 8:34,35 (NKJV). See also Matt. 16:24–27; Luke 9:22–26

If the authors of three separate gospels record the same statement of Jesus in almost identical words, who am I to even try and argue the point? Furthermore, the picture of having passed from death to life is seen over and over again in the New Testament when describing the difference between a Christless existence and our new life in Christ. I have often observed a contradiction between what God has declared and what my life demonstrates. I might even have some company here. My desire to please myself goes down kicking and screaming at times, but that does not alter the truth that “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

So What!

The question “Whose life is it, anyway?” sort of blasted its way into my brain housing group one morning a few weeks ago while I was sucking wind on an exercise machine in a small gym facility. It wasn’t the first time I was too tired to interrupt what God was trying to get through my thick skull. The question keeps coming up. Other questions seem to follow. “Whose time is it, anyway?” “Whose money is it, anyway?” Who really owns our family homestead at 914 Candlestar Loop in Fountain, Colorado?”

I don’t know about you, but I need the occasional reminder of God’s truth. He has declared me dead to sin and that my life “... *is hidden with Christ in God.*” That means that my part is to

agree with God, let go of my highly regarded 'self' and yield to the Holy Spirit so that Jesus Christ is free to live His life through me.

Our Lord does call us to die, to let go of ourselves and become lost in Him to the point that, like my friend Bob, all that we are can be used to share His love and grace.

So I am left to ask myself one more time: **“Whose am I, anyway?”**

And I ask you today, **“Whose are you?”**

If we say we are His and really mean it, we can share these prayerful words by Frances R. Haveregal from his hymn, "Take my Life"...

Special Forces: Day Twenty-five

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Improvised Demolitions

Breaching Walls

This morning I was listening to a song about breaking down walls and I couldn't help but think about all of the walls I encountered in my SF career. Walls outside and inside of buildings; walls I had to climb up or rappel down; walls of brick, wood, plaster and ice; walls we had to blow through and walls with doors we could move through. Believe me when I say that we knew lots of ways to deal with walls that impeded the mission. It was also quite normal for us to have to use whatever explosives we carried along with common materials to construct the demolitions charges required to breach walls that needed to be gotten through. The point here is that walls had to be destroyed in the normal course of the mission.

The same is true with life in general. If you think about it, walls are everywhere. Not only physical walls, but walls between people, families (I've been there), countries, religions and churches - just to name a few. Volumes have been written, seminars conducted, international conferences convened, and monies appropriated for the purpose of tearing down walls that divide people and nations.

I submit however, that all of the above measures are for the most part useless unless what I term the **Wall of Walls** is first breached. I am referring to the wall of sin that separates us from God because of that long ago fall of Adam and Eve at the dawn of creation. There is one essential difference between this wall of sin and others I have encountered. I am totally powerless to tear it down. God, however, dealt that wall of separation a deathblow by sending his Son to die on a cruel cross in order to give us a door – a pathway through the wall.

Key Verse:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20 (NKJV)

Mankind's sinful condition did not disappear because of the cross, but God provided a door! Not only did he provide the door, he only asks that we open that door. It seems that the door can only be opened from our side. Once we open the door, Jesus says that he will come in to us and dine with us. We don't have to walk through to him, but he will come through to us and live in our hearts!

If this is true and I sense walls or obstructions that hinder my walk as a Christian in service to the King, they must be 'Danmade' walls. The sad truth is that through the years I have built some walls that have either delayed or prevented the accomplishment of what I have accepted as God's mission for my life of service in His Kingdom. I won't go into detail, but I will call them 'Danmade' walls of sin and rebellion. The bad news is that I built many of the walls. The good news is that the walls can be totally demolished.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Once the walls are down, we can ‘dine’ with Jesus. I don’t know what picture that might bring to your mind, but I think of a fine restaurant, white linen tablecloths, bright shiny silver, fine china, and carefully prepared exotic dishes. There are no fast food chain restaurants here!

So What!

Ignoring walls in my life won’t make them disappear. If I really want a continuous ‘dining’ experience with Christ, there are actions that I can take to assist in their destruction.

- I must **recognize the sin** that traps me and hinders my progress. This is at times easier said than done. There seems to be a lot that is described clearly in FM-1 (Field Manual 1, the Bible) as sin and abhorrent to God that is no longer considered sin, even by some supposedly Christian organizations. The Bible has to be my final authority. God wrote it and His Holy Spirit will enlighten me as to it’s truth.

- I must **agree with God** about my sin, **earnestly confess** my sin and **truly repent**, turning away and not picking it up again, no matter what others might tell me or what my lying sinful human nature might have to say.

- I must realize that in some cases it might be a short firefight while at other times it could be a longer, protracted engagement before I see final victory. It can seem like only having a hammer to bust through an obstacle when dynamite or C-4 is needed.

- The final battle has already been won. Armed with His Grace and Power I have the mission of conducting ‘mop-up’ operations that include bringing down personal ‘Danmade’ walls and being a peacemaker or reconciler wherever live, work and breathe.

Having said that, I must remember that God is the master tactician here. His ways are not my ways. As I walk in obedience to his Word and his Spirit, I can trust by faith that God will bring it to pass, that walls will come tumbling down.

Special Forces: Day Twenty-six

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Strategic Principles

Force Multiplication

Special operations forces (SOF) are sometimes called ‘force multipliers’ because they can turn small numbers of military or paramilitary fighters into larger numbers of well-trained soldiers. The types of missions that result in force multiplication date back at least to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in WWII, when small numbers of operators infiltrated into areas controlled by Nazi Germany to train existing underground forces. The awesome impact of a small group of men that has the capability of literally training a small army has caused enemies of the United States to dispatch very large numbers of troops to try and capture a few well trained and effective ‘force multipliers’. This same principal of force multiplication is prevalent today around the world where Special Forces is involved in training other countries’ forces for a variety of missions.

In reading the Bible, one can see a certain similarity between the force multiplication principle for military purposes and Christ’s great commission to his disciples. In fact, I personally find the similarity fascinating! When Jesus commissioned the twelve disciples and finally sent them on their mission, he didn’t tell them to build buildings, establish programs, package the Gospel according to current marketing techniques, pass out tracts on street corners, or establish denominations. They were sent out to be ‘force multipliers’. Listen to what Jesus told the disciples when He appeared to them after his resurrection.

Key Verse:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)

Jesus told the first disciples to go out and duplicate themselves. By definition, a disciple is a pupil, student, learner, and follower. As Jesus had taught the twelve, they were to teach others. Just as Jesus brought new life to his followers and instilled his character in them, they were to present the Gospel and then teach the principles of new life in Christ to their world. Those new disciples, when trained and ready to be sent, could in turn make more disciples in their own worlds, or areas of influence. And on and on and on.....

I am not saying there is anything wrong with new buildings, programs, tracts, denominations, or being culturally relevant with the ways we present the Gospel. They all have their places in ministry. What I am saying is that they are not the main focus of ministry, the number one mission, which is ‘force multiplication’ for the Kingdom of God. The potential impact on our world and on our own areas of influence is staggering!

So What?

I believe that God has called all of us who name Christ as our Savior to a ‘force multiplication’ mission for His Kingdom. How we undertake that mission with the talents and gifts that He has given us may differ, but the mission is the same. It is a mission that we all are able to perform where we live and work. Perhaps that is why I have been involved with the Christian Military Fellowship (CMF) organization for so many years. I fell in love with their mission statement...”To Win...To Disciple...To Equip...To Win”!

One could argue that the ‘making of disciples’ is just for a select few that are involved in full time ministries or have had a lot of training or formal schooling, but is it? Listen to the observation of listeners to two of the original twelve, after they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The Apostle Peter, in a letter to Christians of his day, challenged them with these words...

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13(NKJV)

Peter and John had ‘been with Jesus’ and were empowered by Holy Spirit boldness. No Bible college or seminary, but they had been with Jesus. The master himself had taught them. There is certainly a place and a need for formal education, however we all are called to the mission. How many people do you know that would not set foot in a church or chapel, attend a crusade or Christian concert, or even consider accompanying you to a Bible study? My uneducated guess would be a number that far exceeds those who might accept an invitation. There are places you have been or will be where a chaplain or pastor will never have the opportunity to set foot. Think about it. Who is God’s man or woman in those places and situations? We are!!!!

Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter as he encouraged and challenged Christians of his day...

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2:9,10 (NKJV)

I don’t know about you, but I want to be a disciple, not just a pew warmer one day a week. I take the words of Jesus to his disciples as a personal mission. I confess that I am not always faithful to that mission. However, when I am reminded by the words of Peter of the magnitude of what God has done through His Son, and who He has called me to be, I am ashamed of my slackness and both encouraged and compelled to continue with the mission!

My friend, ‘force multiplication’ is our mission. How are we doing?

Special Forces: Day Twenty-seven

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Leadership Principles

The Commander's Open Door Policy

I can't remember when I first became aware of an 'open door policy', the mechanism by which a soldier could express concerns or grievances directly to a company commander. Open door policies were designed to provide direct access to unit commanders when using the normal chain of command or established policies and procedures did not seem to be operating properly. Prior to such policies, soldiers rarely, if ever, had direct access to their unit commanders. The commander's open door policy served to encourage the chain of leadership to operate smoothly, as well provided a 'last resort' in case of a leadership or procedural breakdown. Although in my 28 years of service I only remember going directly to my commander a couple of times in order to resolve issues, it was comforting to know that such an avenue for solving problems existed, even though the commander's door was open to anyone and everyone only an hour or two during a normal week. After all, commanders are very busy persons and really cannot afford to be available to anyone and everyone all day, every day.

Similarly, after the children of Israel were led out of Egyptian bondage and God passed the Law down through Moses, God established the policies and procedures required to approach Him or enter into His presence. An entire system of sacrifices to atone for sin and proper protocol for priests was put in place, with dire consequences for violations of established procedure. Only members of the priesthood were allowed into the very presence of God and then only at certain times, in order to represent the common people, present sacrifices to God and receive atonement for the sins of the Israelites. After the required sacrificial ceremonies, which were repeated over and over again on behalf of the Israelites, the priests would bless the common folk.

Then came Christ.

Key Verse:

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.
Hebrews 9:11-15 (NKJV)

If you read the Old Testament book of Leviticus, you will find that the rules and regulations surrounding the offering of sacrifices are quite lengthy. Failure to abide by those rules often resulted in death, such as when two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, offered 'profane fire' and were killed (Leviticus, chapter 10). Access to God was very limited and highly regulated. An

understanding of those limitations and regulations greatly enhanced this man's appreciation of our access to God through Jesus Christ.

Our Lord became the 'once for all' sacrifice for the sin of all mankind, past, present and future. Through the death of His beloved Son, God provided for our salvation and established His own 'open door policy', giving us 24/7 access to the throne of grace!

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that He is the door...

Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." John 10:7-9 (NKJV)

Jesus said to him (Thomas), "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 (NKJV)

The apostle Paul also described our access to the Father, as well as how we should use our freedom of access.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:18 (NKJV)

So What?

This is not a criticism of liturgical church services, nor is it meant to discourage corporate worship and fellowship. Rather, it is intended to cause the reader to consider the awesome nature of God's 'open door policy' and encourage an honest evaluation of how we use our 24/7 direct access to the Father through His beloved Son. God has provided us with the ultimate 'open door', but it's up to us to use it effectively.

- Do we approach God lightly, or with a sense of awe, wonder and humility that His goodness and holiness demand?
- Do we commune with God mostly on Sunday mornings and sporadically during the week as the need arises?
- Is our communion with God mostly about what we want Him to do for us, or is it a real two-way conversation in which we make our petitions known but also listen with open ears and eager hearts for His instructions to us concerning our quality of service to Him?

These are good questions, and we certainly need to consider them. However, our ability to enter the very presence of God through His Son anytime we want or need to is just part of the equation. The apostle Paul provides us a glimpse:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)

In these few words I see the possibility of living in constant communion with the Father! Jesus died to give us access. The Holy Spirit dwells within us to allow us to live moment by moment in communion with God! We don't have to limit our communion with God to certain times - we can live in His very presence!

Easier said than done. This old soldier is living proof of that fact. The first step, however is to accept the possibility. The rest is about letting go of self and surrendering all that we are to Him. A favorite hymn sums it up rather nicely:

Take My Life -Frances Havergal

- 1 Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord to Thee; Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise. Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2 Take my hands and let them move At the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet, and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee; Swift and beautiful for Thee.
- 3 Take my voice and let me sing Always, only, for my King. Take my lips and let them be Filled with messages from Thee, Filled with messages from Thee.
- 4 Take my silver and my gold, Not a mite would I withhold; Take my intellect and use Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose, Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose.
- 5 Take my will, and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine; Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne, It shall be Thy royal throne.
- 6 Take my love—my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure store; Take myself—and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee, Ever, only, all for Thee.

Special Forces: Day Twenty-eight

Intermediate Training: Unit One

Protective Armor

Kevlar and Faith

Kevlar is the trademarked name of *poly-para-phenylene terephthalamide*, a nylonlike polymer that was first produced by Du Pont in 1971. Kevlar can be made into tough, stiff, high-melting fibers and is five times stronger per weight than steel. That's pretty impressive. Kevlar has a wide variety of applications, the most familiar use being protective clothing, particularly the Kevlar helmet and vest used by military and law enforcement personnel.

Indeed, as body armor Kevlar is a very strong material and can stop all sorts of harmful projectiles that could otherwise cause serious injury or death. I would much rather pick myself up from the ground, bruised but not broken because my body armor stopped a bullet, rather than take up residence in a pine box. I doubt that anyone would disagree with me.

I can, however, think of several significant limitations of Kevlar. It won't stop everything that might be thrown at you, it only protects what it covers. In order to have a certain amount of protection and allow the wearer to remain mobile, body armor is designed to protect from the neck down to the groin area. The theory is that a good marksman would aim for center mass of a human target. That leaves portions of the body unprotected. In fact, I remember a promotional film that was done for Kevlar in which the round fired at the brave human training aid missed hitting the subject's vest and resulted in a leg wound. I kid you not! Talk about bloopers and blunders! There are some situations where body shields are used with or without body armor, but guess what? Those shields won't stop everything either, only protect what they cover, and are only useful in useful in certain situations.

What does Kevlar have to do with faith? The obvious conclusion is that one must have faith in the protective properties of one's body armor to maintain maximum aggressiveness and effectiveness in a combat situation. While that is certainly true, there's more.

Key Verse:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:11-16 (NKJV)

While many books have been written and even more sermons delivered concerning the 'whole armor of God', this writer offers a few brief points for the your consideration.

1. While man-made body armor and protects only against external projectiles and cannot protect against every type of onslaught, our faith can protect against **anything** that is thrown at us! That includes **external** hostile forces and that which arises **internally**, out of our own selfish and sinful human nature.
2. Our faith is available and effective at **any time** and in **any situation**, no matter how severe the onslaught from our enemy (principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness) might appear. There is absolutely **nothing** our adversary the devil can throw at us that our faith cannot overcome.
3. Not everyone is issued Kevlar body armor, nor can everyone find it or even purchase it if it is available commercially. **Everyone has access** to God's armor, including the shield of faith, but **no one can afford it**. The price is too high. It is ours for the asking, but only available because of God's love and the price paid at Calvary.

So What?

Body armor can save a soldier's or law enforcement officer's life. It's useless when left behind in an equipment locker or armory. With our faith, we are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. The operative terms here are 'can' and 'are able'. It's greatly comforting to know that we as Christians have at our disposal a faith that can overcome any onslaught of the enemy.

As soldiers of the Cross, we are hit with all sorts of hostile projectiles fired from a variety of weapons ranging anywhere from water pistols to rocket launchers (an understatement?). A relatively harmless bit of water for one person could seem like an anti-tank round to another soldier in the foxhole. Regardless, we are all in the same foxhole of life and our faith *can* truly **'quench all the fiery darts'**.

Do we always overcome? This guy doesn't, that's for sure. Hopefully, as time passes and as long as I grow in my faith, my combat losses become fewer and fewer. The challenge is to continue growing! The excuse 'The Devil made me do it!' is a lie. Just in case you aren't sure that we can withstand anything with our faith in Christ, listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to the early church at Ephesus...

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NKJV)

A verse from a favorite hymn comes to mind...

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God!

R Kelso Carter, 'Standing on the Promises'

Special Forces: Day Twenty-nine

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Verifiable Intelligence Information

The Human Factor

One important Special Forces mission has always been intelligence gathering. Intelligence reports from the field have their own specific format and include ratings for the reliability and verifiability of the information. The most trusted sources of information received high reliability ratings. Verifiable information is that which can be verified by multiple sources, including human eyes ‘on the ground’. In many cases, human intelligence, (HUMINT) is the **only** reliable and verifiable information! As an example, consider a requirement to positively identify enemy forces and positions on the ground when both enemy and friendly forces use a lot of the same weapons, wear the same sort of clothing and have no distinctions discernable from aerial surveillance. It is in just such a case that there must be ‘eyes on the ground’ verification.

Just as we are able to receive intelligence information from many different sources, we receive information about God, Christianity and how to live God honoring lives from different sources including the Bible, church sermons, Christian books and media broadcasts, just to name a few! When we receive the same spiritual information or teaching from multiple sources it could even be considered to be ‘**verified**’ information.

Here again, however, the ultimate verifiability is obtained from a human factor, or eyes ‘on the ground’. When we apply what has been received or learned to our lives it becomes real for us as Christians. When others can observe the light of Christ in our lives, when our Christian confession is lived out before them, whatever they may have heard or learned about becomes real for them (**verified intelligence**). In other words, after all of the evangelistic crusades, pulpit sermons, Bible studies and fellowships, what is truly verifiable is what is seen of Christ in Christian lives.

Key Verse:

Jesus, speaking of his own death on the cross said...

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:31 (KJV)

The disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit and sent into their world gave testimony (provided intelligence) concerning what they had seen and heard. As they lifted up the Jesus they knew and loved, and the Light of Life shone through them, men and women were drawn by the Savior to Himself.

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Acts 2:32 (NKJV)

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Acts 4:20 (NKJV)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 1John 1:1-3(NKJV)

Likewise, as we lift up Jesus with our lives, He draws men and women to Himself.

Near the end of my ODF (Out 'Dere Flappin') years the one thing that caused me to finally pick up my Bible again was the 'light of life' I observed in my beloved bride. She had gone to visit relatives in St. Louis, received the Gospel message and become transformed. The transformation was undeniable. I saw a light that I couldn't extinguish and decided to start reading the Bible again, which led to my 'homecoming' to Christ. It was seeing the light of Christ in her that made it real for me.

Some time later, during one of our tours in Massachusetts, our next-door neighbors asked us where we attended church, apparently because they had observed our lives, the openness with our faith and liked what they 'saw and heard'. What was observed in lives made an impression.

Then there is my long time friend Georg (spelling is correct), who as a listener and observer 'saw and heard' one soldier sharing his faith with another and experienced his own 'homecoming'. It is now many years later and Georg has left the service, lives in Pennsylvania with his family and regularly teaches and preaches in his church.

Consider the words of the Apostle John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. John 1:1-5(ASB)

Mortal humans are not the light, but can be 'light bearers' as the life of Christ is expressed through them and as the Gospel is truly 'seen and heard'. When the light of Christ is seen in the lives of believers, the Gospel of Christ becomes 'A1' information, totally reliable because 'eyes on the ground' have verified it.

So What?

It's one thing to attend church, fellowship groups, and hang out with other Christians. It's easy to be 'light bearers' in the friendly territory of our spiritual 'base camps'. It's quite another to carry the torch high in hostile territory, which is just about everywhere else. We risk not being popular, not fitting in, and often feel alone on the battlefield. The light of Christ in our lives sometimes becomes dim or cannot be 'seen and heard'.

On the other hand, the closer we walk with Christ, the more we 'see and hear' of Christ, the more we become like the disciples who could not help but tell it! The more the light of Christ fills us, the more the light of Christ shines through us! The Gospel truth that maybe has only been heard becomes real for someone God is drawing to Himself!

Listen to the words of Jesus and be encouraged!

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16 (NKJV)

Special Forces: Day Thirty

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Relentless Pursuit

You Can Run but You Can't Hide

During the war against terrorism, that began after the New York World Trade Center disaster, the U.S. Defense Secretary was reported to have considered the use of American Special Operations Forces (SOF) to capture or kill terrorist leaders outside of their 'home turf'. Whether the relentless pursuit of an enemy as a tactic is necessary or could even be successful in eliminating the threat might be a matter of debate. However, the message to terrorists clear, they can run but they can't hide. A terrorist on the run without safe haven anywhere on the planet would have reason to be more than a little paranoid. Life becomes rather uncomfortable for that individual, to say the least.

No matter how efficient American SOF might be, they cannot be everywhere at once, nor do they know the specific thoughts and intents of the enemy. Although Special Operations Forces may be extremely efficient, they have limitations. Nevertheless, this author would not want to be the enemy knowing who might be on my trail!

God, on the other hand, knows no such limitations. Listen to the words of the Psalmist David:

Key Verse:

*Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.*

Psalm 139:1-5, 7-8 (NKJV)

David knew that it is totally useless to try and hide from the living God. He also realized that the God's ability to see and know everything about him was not a bad thing. David knew that God was leading and guiding him. Note his attitude:

*If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*

*Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!*

Verses 9-10, 14, 16

It is significant to note that while God pursues His children and knows all about them, His desire is to capture hearts and give life, not to incarcerate or destroy. Hear the words of Jesus to the disciples.

The thief (Satan) does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. John 10:10 (NKJV)

So What?

If God just wants what is best for us, what's to worry about? Like one song says, "Don't worry, be happy!" There's another side to this coin. While God is always my friend I might not always be His friend:

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? James 4:4-5 (NKJ)

If I am a Christian, His Spirit is dwelling within, leading and guiding. If my priorities in life revolve around whatever I can get to be successful, richer, more popular, etc. (selfish materialism), I will face inner conflict with what God's Spirit desires. The Spirit's yearning to draw me closer to God will either make my life uncomfortable, or cause me to rejoice knowing He is leading and guiding me into true peace and happiness.

If I am uncomfortable there is a simple solution – quit running! Sound like a tall order with all the pressures around us? Not really! Here's a key from scripture:

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 12:2 (NKJV)

Just like my computer, it's a matter of selective input! It's the old 'garbage in, garbage out' principle. I can't control all of the garbage, but I can certainly be involved in the transformation and renewal process by reading the Word, having frequent conversations with my Lord, continuing in fellowship with other believers (more than warming a pew one day a week), and making God honoring choices for the conduct of my personal and social life.

Remember, you can run, but you can't hide! If you are running, be assured that what you are running toward only wants to squeeze you into a mold that will never bring true peace and happiness. Realize you are running and respond:

- Give up, life will be a lot easier and you will find real peace and happiness!
- Be transformed – take out the garbage and initiate renewal!

And remember – God does want what is best for you!

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10b (NKJV)

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)

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)

Special Forces: Day Thirty-three

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Personal Development

Radical Change and Special Needs

I have the privilege of participating in a weekly fellowship lunch in one of the dining facilities on Ft. Carson, Colorado. From the outside, the building containing the facility looks exactly the same as it did when constructed, probably more than fifteen years ago. Internally, however there have been many changes through the years. What amazes me is the number of choices the modern soldier has concerning cuisine! There are two different hot food lines (real food on one side and fast food junk on the other), a complete soup and salad bar, a cold sandwich section, beverages of all sorts, as well as a variety of desserts. Indeed there is something for everyone - or is there?

What about the person whose dietary needs are so unique that the dining facility cannot fulfill them? Typically, there must be sufficient demand to justify the cost and preparation requirements. Therefore, while the majority can be more than adequately served, there remains a small minority that simply must find alternative ways to satisfy their unique dietary requirements. Simply put, what some folks might need, the typical military dining facility cannot provide.

Similarly, a Christian in today's culture, or any culture throughout history, is like that person who has special dietary needs and cannot eat what everyone else eats without certain risks, and possibly serious physical harm. The child of God, born of the Spirit, needs to feed the Spirit within in order to be spiritually healthy as well as to grow strong and become an **effective** soldier for the Kingdom of God. Just as the average military dining facility caters to the menu desires of the majority of its clientele and cannot provide special food for special dietary needs, the culture we live in caters to the selfish desires of the masses and does not provide food for the Spiritual diet of the born-again Christian.

Key Verse:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:5-6 (NKJV)

Jesus, speaking to the Jewish leader Nicodemus, emphasized the need for a **total rebirth** in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Note Jesus' comment concerning flesh and Spirit. Jesus seems to be saying they are two separate issues, not complimentary character traits. Listen to the Apostle Paul's description of the contrast between our natural selves and new life in Christ.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 (NKJB)

Paul, speaking to the early church, calls the contrast between human birth and spiritual rebirth, the difference between ***death and life***. Without Christ, we live by the rules of the one who controls our present world system and we are by nature concerned primarily with pleasing ourselves. When we acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord ***we actually pass from death to life!*** In more practical terms, we have been reassigned from a life where we by nature lived to serve ourselves to a life where we are called to ***selfless service to the King of King and Lord of Lords!***

Can you grasp the enormity and significance of God has done through Christ? I pray that you can, because I cannot find words that can adequately express this awesome miracle! What I do know and can express with utmost certainty is that in order to live the life of service to the King we desperately need a drastic change in 'diet'. The Apostle Paul agrees:

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 12:2 (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. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-2 (NKJB)

So What?

Our new birth in Christ is, to put it mildly, a radical change. Think about it. ***Death to life. Darkness to light.*** In order to grow and become strong in our faith, we need a change of 'diet' that is equally as radical. We are in charge of maintaining the proper spiritual diet. The environment and culture in which we live and conduct our daily lives is like that dining facility at Ft. Carson that offers cuisine designed to appeal to just about any appetite. We are continuously offered a multitude of products, services, entertainment venues, opportunities for quick riches, and other 'stuff' designed to help us 'self-actualize'. Like the dining facility that does not and indeed cannot meet very specialized physical dietary requirements, ***a Godless culture and value system does not and cannot meet the spiritual dietary needs of new life in Christ.*** We can by choice consume whatever we choose, but an improper diet is hazardous to our health!

Here's the bottom line. Our old nature (dead in trespasses and sin) does not just disappear when become Christians. We are however given a new nature (alive in Christ). Our modern culture feeds, almost exclusively, the dead person. I don't know about you, but I've never seen anyone place a steak dinner at a gravesite!

If we are constantly being fed Happy Meals for the dead man, where do we get the right stuff? Jesus, speaking to Jewish leaders of His time said:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. " John 6:35, 56-57, 63. (NKJV)

Jesus is the bread of life. The world (our culture) has nothing of real substance to offer.

What does that mean in practical terms? How can we overcome the disastrous effects of all the junk food?

I'm so glad you asked? Here's a start:

Don't go to the junk food bar. (No rocket science there!)

Eat the right stuff! Begin with daily hearty helpings of the major spiritual food groups:

The Word of God - disciplined study.

Prayer - communicate with the Master.

Like minded fellowship (hang out with other Christians).

Don't forget healthy snacks between your main meals. The music we listen can fit in this category. I am sure you can think of others.

Food for thought - How's your diet?

Special Forces: Day Thirty-four

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Mission Preparation

Understanding the Task

Mission: At 150335Z Mar ODA-315 will infiltrate operational area Tiger, move to the selected target, a communications facility located at 32TUT31957328 and destroy both the main radio transmitters and the broadcast antenna tower. Target will be destroyed no earlier than 180200Z Mar but not later than 180400Z Mar.

A typical Special Forces mission statement; brief, concise and leaving no doubt what the detachment was tasked to accomplish and when the objective had to be hit. The actual mission preparation would include planning the infiltration, movement to and reconnaissance of the target, detailed assault plans and exfiltration method. The operation would require detailed infiltration and exfiltration planning, logistical and communications support, extensive rehearsal of actions at the objective and significant staff and logistical support. The detachment would have to brief the unit commander in order to demonstrate their readiness to execute the mission. When the commander was satisfied they were prepared for success, they would launch.

No matter how extensive the preparations or how difficult the task, one thing was always certain. The mission statement was clear, leaving absolutely no doubt what had to be accomplished and when. We also knew instinctively that our small but important mission was a tiny piece of a bigger puzzle; essential to the master plan.

If only God would be so brief and concise with His mission statements to us! I don't know about you, but I cannot remember ever receiving an audible or written order from God to share the Gospel with this person or that person, to join a particular Christian organization, or to accomplish any specific task. But that doesn't mean that we don't hear from God or receive clear guidance concerning how we are to live and even how we can serve Him in specific ways as we travel down the path of life with Him. God has spoken very clearly in His word, the Bible, through the very circumstances in our lives and He deals with our hearts.

Key Verse:

Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name." But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not. Jeremiah 20:9 (NKJV)

One of God's Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah, was the object of mocking and derision when he carried God's message to the nation of Judah. At one point Jeremiah became weary of delivering an unpopular message, but *God's word burned so strongly in his heart*, Jeremiah could not hold it back!

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:20 (NKJV)

When the disciples Peter and John were commanded to stop speaking about Jesus their reply to the authorities was that they could not help but tell of the things they had seen and heard. *They were so excited about their experiences with Jesus that they couldn't keep quiet about it!*

Both Jeremiah and the disciples had heard from God. Jeremiah was given a mission to carry an unpopular message to a nation. The disciples had actually experienced Jesus; they walked with Him, talked with Him, watched Him minister to ordinary folks like you and me, and learned from Him. The result was such a burning desire to share what they had seen and heard that no authority, arrest or jail time could stop them! While Jeremiah had a specific mission to a specific location with a prophetic mission, the disciples simply spoke of what they had seen and heard - they shared their experiences with Jesus with others.

While we may never hear an audible word from God or receive a specific mission statement or operations order, He speaks to us through his Word and touches our hearts. When God speaks to our hearts, the result should be simple obedience.

Two short examples:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6 (NKJV)

A person might read this, acknowledge divine truth and suddenly think of a friend that has not discovered this truth. There is a heartfelt desire to somehow share that truth. Desire turns to prayer for an open door to present the Gospel and a receptive heart for God's message of Salvation. God answers prayer and schedules a 'divine appointment' to share the Gospel with a friend, a neighbor, or maybe a total stranger. A seed is planted and another soul is ushered into the Kingdom!

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32 (KJV)

A person reading the Bible would learn that Jesus was speaking of His crucifixion. If this old soldier happened to be that person and, at the same time, he was also seeking guidance for spreading the gospel there might be a heartfelt urging to allow Jesus to be 'lifted up' or demonstrated by letting His love and grace shine through my life to others. *And if I 'lift up' Jesus with my life, He will draw others to Himself.* Not a specific task, but a principle for living from God's heart to mine. The desire of the heart becomes to learn how to let the light of God shine through one's life. The practical application might be increased devotion to God's word, study and discipleship to become a more effective soldier of the Kingdom.

So What?

God might not issue such detailed specific orders to carry out missions for His kingdom, but He never leaves us without a purpose in His Kingdom. If the object of our salvation was just to make it to heaven when we die (fire insurance), why are we still here? Could it be that since we are still knocking around this old planet that we have been left down here for some divine purpose?

The manner of service, the specific work we do for Him might be described as a matter between the heart of a perfect and holy God and the hearts of imperfect humans. Our immediate task is to yield to His will and become available. Furthermore, *God will never send us on a mission that He cannot handle, nor will He neglect our preparation for the task.*

You might be reading these words as a new believer; you might be a seasoned soldier; you might be in one of God's training camps and eager for the day of God's calling for a specific mission. You might have an inner compelling to serve God in some specific way and at the same time wonder why God would choose you. Regardless of where you are in your spiritual walk, *know*

that you have been chosen for service. If you wonder why God would choose you, be encouraged by a bit of wisdom from Oswald Chambers:

"We say, 'It seems out of all proportion that God should choose me - I am of no value'; the reason He chooses us is that we are not of any value. It is not a question of our equipment, but of our poverty; not what we bring with us, but what He puts in us; not our natural virtues, our strength of character, our knowledge, our experience; all that is of no avail in this matter; the only thing that is of avail in us is that we are taken up into the big compelling of God and made His comrade."

The big question: Are you available?

If your answer is "Yes", there will be more opportunities for 'divine appointments' and service than you can imagine! Trust me!

Special Forces: Day Thirty-five

Intermediate Training: Unit Two

Operational Readiness

Rapid Deployment

Just about anyone who serves in military combat units has had the privilege of participating in a unit operational readiness test of some sort. It might have slightly different names in different branches of service, but the goal is the same - to assess the ability of a unit to meet deployment requirements in the event of war. Some units, such as special operations and rapid deployment forces are required to deploy from home stations more quickly than others. One of my fondest memories involves being alerted in the wee hours of the morning and being on an aircraft within a matter of hours, headed for a distant drop zone and knowing that we would not receive the exact details of the mission until we had reached our destination. Such is life in the world of special operations. Maintaining a posture of constant readiness for immediate deployment was routine.

The same state of readiness should be the order of the day for followers of Christ. We should stand ready to be used of God. I would also dare suggest that while the above example had a short time fuse, God's mission requirements might even have more severe time constraints! Of one thing I am certain. The blood bought Christian living in a fallen world has already been deployed. No infiltration plan is necessary. We are already in the combat zone, but are we ready for whatever mission or task God might assign? Assuming we have declared our availability to our Lord, how can we maintain our readiness? History's greatest evangelist and church planter provided a clue in his counsel to a young preacher.

Key Verse:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 2 Timothy 3:16 - 4:2 (NKJV)

Paul first declares the authority of the inspired word of God and then instructs young Timothy to preach God's word and to be ready to respond whether or not there was an opportunity (in season, out of season); whatever the need of the moment, to rebuke, teach and encourage, with all patience and sound doctrine. Notice that the task wasn't to find a pulpit opportunity and then figure out what to preach. Also note that Paul didn't tell Timothy to have an opinion poll about the word and suggest applying it, but to be ready and just preach it.

I know what you're thinking. Timothy was called to be a preacher. Most of us are just regular people living everyday lives. Are you sure about that? Listen to something the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians dispersed throughout Asia during the 7th century that still applies today.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous

light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NKJV)

I submit to you that Paul's challenge to young Timothy reveals both a *principle for living that cannot fail* and a *challenge to all believers everywhere for all time*. The principle is this: Scripture, God's revealed word to His children, contains everything we need to live and grow individually as Christians, as well as to serves others.

The ultimate example of being ready with God's word has to be Jesus Himself when he was tempted in the wilderness. Three times he was tempted by the devil and three times he replied "It is written....." The very Son of God, when tempted by the devil, quoted scripture! Need I say more? The account of Jesus' wilderness temptation can be found in the fourth chapters of Matthew and Luke.

So What?

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

The same Spirit of God that inspired the Bible and gives it life and power is the same Spirit that indwells every believer! A love for God's word goes hand in hand with genuine faith. When we read the Bible with an open heart and sincere desire to hear from God - guess what happens? **We hear from God!**

Does that mean that when we prayerfully read the Bible we have opened a direct line of communication with our creator? You got it!!!! Over the years I have discovered that when I begin the day reading God's word, in communication with our Lord, I seem to **'be ready'** for just about any challenge that may come my way. I am better prepared on a personal level - I can be a brighter light and saltier salt. I am also far more likely to step through any doors God opens to share His Gospel.

I would be a liar if I told you I have always been faithful to tried and true principals. If I wanted to discuss the various reasons why I have not been always faithful it could be a very short conversation - SIN. If I am in physical circumstances that don't allow for turning on a light and reading I can still commune with God through prayer. Scripture I have read and memorized somehow fills my mind and invades my heart. I just have to have an open heart. Sin can block communication with God better than an eighteen-car pile-up can stop traffic on the freeway. Trust me on that one.

How can we restore communications?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

You might be surprised how quickly our heartfelt confession and God's forgiveness can blow open clogged lines of communication! But then again, maybe you wouldn't be surprised at all because you've 'been there and done that'.

So pause for a moment and perform a 'readiness check'. How good is your communication link? Are you limited to a jammed up 56k analog dial-up connection or do you have a high speed, digital 'always on' broadband hook-up? Are you satisfied or is it time to upgrade?

A few words of encouragement from Psalm 119:

*Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the Lord!*

*Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!*

- Verses 1-2

*Oh, how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.*

- Verse 97

*How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

- Verse 103

*Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.*

- Verse 105

Special Forces: Day Thirty-six

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Professional Development

The Power of Motivation

During a period of United States history known for peace, love, and flower children a particular song hit the top of the charts, and remained there for five weeks in spite of the fact that didn't fit the pop culture mold of the times. The song was The Ballad of the Green Berets. While this skinny kid from San Antonio loved the song, becoming one of 'America's best' was not even on the radarscope of human possibility. After the skinny kid enlisted an SF recruiter hit Ft. Polk, Louisiana, one thing led to another and about a year and a half later a skinny kid from Texas became a Special Forces soldier. To say that a high degree of personal motivation was involved in the process might be an understatement. Motivation became a passionate self-determination and that determination to become one of 'America's best' eventually prevailed. The same principles of motivation and self-determination toward success are at work to some degree in the life of anyone who enlists in any branch of military service or pursues a career anywhere in the civilian world. The degree of success a person achieves can be directly related to that person's level of passion for his or her chosen endeavor.

Assuming the above is true for success in one's chosen career or profession, do motivation and passion apply to serving our God as a Christian in a fallen world? If so, how do we receive that passion for Christian service and how can we best put that passion to work?

Key Verse:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world

cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. At that day you will

know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. "John 14:16-17,20 (NKJV)

Before he was crucified, Jesus promised his disciples that although he would leave them, another would come who would never leave. Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit. A result would be that his followers **would know** Him because He will dwell inside of them. This Holy Spirit of truth was to print indelibly on their hearts the eternal truth of all that he had taught them! Well, Jesus' words certainly aroused the disciples' curiosity. What did Jesus mean? When was 'that day'?

The disciples were together in a room in Jerusalem when the promised day came:

When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit... Acts 2:1-4a (NKJV).

What a day that must have been! In an instant doubts and fears vanished and Jesus disciples **knew. They knew!** A street ministry spread throughout Jerusalem as the disciples, led by Peter

and John, spread the Gospel with Spirit empowered Holy energy and without fear. That energy and drive did not go unnoticed by the hearers of their preaching.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (NKJV)

The same Spirit that filled, motivated and empowered the early disciples is available, undiminished, to every believer - every soldier, sailor, airman, marine - who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Divine motivation and enabling power is not reserved for a select few who are called to be preachers, evangelists, chaplains or some other 'full time ministry'. ***We have all been called to full time ministry***, to be bright lights in a world darkened by sin.

Everyone who enlists in military service does not become a medic. However, it's a basic training requirement for every soldier to learn how to apply direct pressure to stop the bleeding of a wounded comrade. A sterile compress is a required item to be attached to pistol belts and equipment harnesses. Each member of a Special Forces 'A' team might carry an IV bag and knows how to use it. The specially trained medic cannot be everywhere a soldier is wounded or dying on the battlefield. In like manner, we live in a battlefield where souls destined for eternity are at stake and the preacher, evangelist or chaplain cannot be everywhere.

So What?

So how do we become motivated? Here are a couple of examples:

A young soldier realizes the need to share the Gospel but wants a real burden from God - call it divine motivation. He doesn't want to just go through the motions because it needs to be done. He prays, picks up his Bible and reads:

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written:

"As I live, says the Lord,

Every knee shall bow to Me,

And every tongue shall confess to God." ***Romans 14:10b-11 (NKJV)***

In his heart and mind he sees people he knows kneeling before the judgment seat of Christ and acknowledging the King of Kings for who He is before having to turn away to face eternal separation from God because they never made a decision for Christ before they died.

A young woman attends a small group fellowship and Bible study at an Army chapel.

Someone in the group shares the following scripture passage:

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. Psalm 126:5

The young woman becomes excited. "That's it!" she exclaims. The rest wonder what she means. "I lost my weep," she explains. She then applies for some time off work in order to spend time with God in fasting and prayer in order to renew her burden - to recover her 'weep'.

The similarity is clear. Passionate motivation is essential for success in our careers and effectiveness in God's Kingdom. The difference is ***the source of the motivation!*** I suppose that leaves us with a couple of questions:

Do you 'know'?

Are you motivated?

Ask yourself these two questions. If you have doubts, listen to the words of Paul to the members of the church at Ephesus.

...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:18b-21 (NKJV)

The word 'be' here means to keep on being continually filled and is not a one-time experience and something merely 'get'. Let God do the 'filling' and divine motivation will follow. Not only might your taste in music change, you will have a burning desire to share what '***you know***'. Trust me.

Special Forces: Day Thirty-seven

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Principles for Success

Carrying the 'Right Stuff'

A Special Forces team preparing for a mission calculates the precise amount of explosives necessary to destroy a specified target. The team infiltrates enemy territory to carry out the mission. A mission support site (MSS) is established where at least two team members secure and guard any equipment and materials not essential to the target hit. The team travels by foot under cover of darkness to the target site, where a two-man surveillance team is waiting. The operations sergeant is updated on enemy activity at the target while the other members of the assault team await final instructions. A whisper travels from a team member through several team members to the operations sergeant.

"I forgot the demo." is the message passed between team members. The exact words whispered in the operations sergeant's ear are a bit more 'flowery' but convey the message. A decision must be made whether to continue the mission with whatever weapons the team carries or to return to the MSS, retrieve the explosives and return another day. There might be a possibility to still inflict damage with small arms, but there is no possibility of accomplishing total destruction of the target required by the mission statement. Regardless of the final outcome, someone forgot the demolitions need for maximum effectiveness!

Could it actually happen? The above scenario actually played out during a training operation. Good thing it was just training! A similar scenario can and does play out in the lives of Christians who, although knowing Christ as Savior, occasionally *'forget the demo'* .

Key Verse:

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. Galatians 5:16-18 (NKJV)

In a letter to churches in a region of what is now Turkey, Paul urges Christians there to live their lives empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than returning to the system of rules and regulations that governed their lives before they received salvation through Christ and the precious gift of The Holy Spirit. While rules and regulations have a necessary place in society and are useful for conducting civilized business, God has provided a much better way to live out our Christian faith. If we turn the Holy Spirit loose in our lives, we are no longer bound by a system of a long list of 'thou shalts' and 'thou shalt nots'. This is not to say that there are things we should do and things we should not do, but we need a better way of getting the job done. That's what the Holy Spirit does for us - provides a better way. Some would call this a severe paradigm shift. Read Paul's description of the contrast between life controlled by the flesh and life lived through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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... Galatians 5:19-21a (NKJV)

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. Galatians 5:22-25 (NKJV)

To put it simply, when we march in step with the Spirit of God, the rules and regulations take care of themselves. We're carrying the 'right stuff'. The Holy Spirit doesn't misbehave. We are called to adhere to a standard of Godly behavior and a life of obedience to God's Word, but not by the power of our own strength. Here's the key:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

The same God who provided for our salvation through the death of His beloved Son, fills us with His Holy Spirit and provides the compelling motivation for our behavior that transcends anything that is attempted by human power or strength or will!

So What?

A Christian trying to 'walk the walk' in the strength of human flesh is like that SF team member that *'forgot the demo'*. Since even after our rebirth we still have our flawed human nature along with our new nature in Christ, it is not a difficult thing to slip back into lots of rules and regulations. We even have help from well meaning Christians at times.

How can one know who's in charge and running things in the behavior department? One way that has worked for this old guy is to occasionally ask myself, "Self, how's your Christian walk? Are you focused on a list of what's right or wrong behavior, or does it seem to come naturally out of a love for your Lord and desire to please Him? If it seems to come naturally and produces joy in your heart, it's a good sign that you didn't 'forget the demo'.

The principle applies in our personal walk as well as when we are engaged in service and work for the Kingdom. We can go through the motions and check off the stuff on our 'to do' list, or we can let the Holy Spirit drive the train.

Why not take a few moments to check yourself out? How are you doing right now? Are you 'forgetting the demo'? If so, head back to the MSS, *'get the demo'*, and continue on the mission!

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen". Hebrews 13:20-21 (NKJV)

Special Forces: Day Thirty-eight

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Mission Survival

Rally Points

A Special Operations team has been inserted into enemy territory to locate and provide surveillance on suspected enemy missile sites and to assist in bringing in friendly fighter aircraft to destroy those targets. This team could be U.S. Army Special Forces, U.S. Marine Force Recon, British SAS, or men from any another country that is part of a Joint Forces operation to defeat the enemy. Once on the ground, this team must travel anywhere from 10 to 20 kilometers to the surveillance location. At strategic points along the carefully planned route there are rally points to be used in the event the team is split up or compromised and must regroup to decide whether to continue the mission or request extraction. Multiple rally points are selected during mission planning and each team member commits their locations to memory!

As Christians we already living in enemy territory, surrounded and pressured by an enemy most appropriately described as sin - an enemy that has many faces and is a master of deception. Along our patrol route through this life, we also need rally points where we can 'regroup' and continue the mission. Please note that I did not mention requesting extraction. Fellow warriors, our is to continue the mission until our Commander in Chief decides it is time to leave our assigned AO (Area of Operation).

Our rally points along the way can be attending a church service, being involved in a Bible study with our comrades, or maybe listening to Christian music that glorifies God. I am sure you could name other types of 'rally points'. Each of us engaged in the 'good fight' might even have our personal favorite 'rally points'. With all the possibilities available as effective rally points, one is especially unique in that it can be available at any time, doesn't require transportation, and doesn't need to be switched on is the Bible; specifically, memorized scripture verses or groups of scripture that have a theme.

Consider for a moment an 'enemy ambush' that might have me doubting my very salvation! It happens. When the attack comes, if I have committed the following scripture to memory, I can use them as a rallying point to prevent injury to my faith and drive away the enemy.

Key Verse:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. John 10:27-29 (NIV)

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:38-39 (NIV)

We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has

not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:9-12 (NIV)

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Pet 1:3-5 (NIV)

The above verses are actually the assurance of salvation verses from a Christian Military Fellowship DTO (Discipleship Training Objective). CMF DTO's are excellent lessons for Christian growth and can be found at the CMF Web site (www.cmf.com). The first time I memorized them I actually typed them on paper using small enough typeface to be able to cut the verses into strips and tape them to 3x5 cards. I was technologically deprived at the time but it was well worth the labor!

Just committing scripture verses and groups of scripture with a central theme is powerful enough in itself, but we have a significant bonus here. That bonus is the indwelling Holy Spirit that lives inside of each and every Christian. God wrote the book! His Holy Spirit inspired the authors long ago and at the same time that self-same Holy Spirit works inside us today to lock the truth in our hearts! When the truth of God's word is locked in our hearts, the enemy can be driven away!

So What?

If this sounds like a simple principle, it just might be. What is not so simple is the scripture memorization part. It's easier to head to some 'rally point' to hear someone else preach an uplifting sermon, participate in a small group bible study or turn on a radio or CD player and listen to Christian music. So let me ask a couple of questions. How often is it possible to attend a church service? When and where are the Bible studies you can plug into? Do you always have access to radio, tape or CD player? Is there a Christian radio station where you are right now living? Consider the answers to these questions then consider this fact:

"No matter where you go, there you are!"

I heard that one the first time over thirty years ago. It was a favorite expression of an SF team sergeant from my past. I have heard it many times through the years from several sources. If you think about it, it's true! You will always be right where you are! ***If you have God's precious word locked in your mind in your and heart, you will always have a 'rally point' when the enemy attacks and a weapon to defeat the enemy!***

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; Ephesians 6:17 (NKJV)

Scripture memorization is invaluable as a tool for personal growth as well as a vital ingredient for effectively sharing the Gospel with our friends and colleagues. My challenge to you, the

reader, is to undertake a systematic scripture memory program, if scripture memorization is not already part of your Christian growth. Whether you learn single verses to apply in certain circumstances or groups of verses around a central theme, the results will be awesome!

Special Forces: Day Thirty-nine

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

The Combat Operations Order

The Commander's Intent

US Army Field Manual 100-5, 14 June 1993, states that:

The commander's intent describes the desired end state. It is a concise expression of the purpose of the operation and must be understood two echelons below the issuing commander . . . It is the single unifying focus for all subordinate elements. It is not a summary of the concept of the operation. Its purpose is to focus subordinates on the desired end state. Its utility is to focus subordinates on what has to be accomplished in order to achieve success . . . and to discipline their efforts toward that end.

I remember at least one former SF commander that included the commander's intent as a mandatory short paragraph in combat operations orders. Not only did its inclusion provide us a snapshot of our commander's overall intent, it provided a *purpose* for combat excellence above and beyond the simple destruction of a bridge, power plant or capture some enemy VIP. We weren't just hitting a target; we were serving our commander and *his* goals!

Key Verse:

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21(NKJV)

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. " John 3:16 (NKJV)

"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." Luke 9:5 (NKJV)

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." John 10:10 (NKJV)

So what are God's goals? What is God's desired 'end state?' The first thing that comes to mind is an eternal home in heaven. When we know Jesus as Savior and Lord, an eternity in God's presence certainly is the final end state for us mortals. There's a distinct difference however, between the commander's intent described in FM 100-5 and God's plan. No amount of soldierly discipline and effort can secure the eternal objective! Sin has so corrupted God's original creation that we don't even have it in our human nature to seek Him on our own!

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:44 (NKJV)

But wait. There's more to this than just making it to the pearly gates. Jesus died so that we might live in **His** abundance in the here and now! We're not talking about lots of money, fancy cars or big houses - don't get me wrong. He died so that we might live lives free from the sin that so easily tempts us and to which we so easily succumb in our flawed human nature. And that's not all. He wants to work through us while we're still walking around on this old earth. He wants to

show Himself through us to everyone around us! We are to discipline our efforts with a new focus - to let Him shine through us instead of running after all the 'stuff'.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)

So What?

Friend, how are you doing with the Commander's intent? Are you certain that your name will be called at the great manifest call around God's throne on the last day? If there is any doubt, I invite you to receive Jesus Christ as the sole remedy for all sin for all time. If you've checked the manifest and know you're on the list, take a few minutes to check your focus. Are you seeking Him first and letting Him meet your needs according to His abundance or are you chasing the 'things'? Sometimes we just need to recalibrate our spiritual eyeballs. The calibration tool has three parts - prayer, the word, and fellowship. These are moving parts, mind you, and God provides the critical movement! His Holy Spirit moves when we pray, read His word, and fellowship with other believers. Let these words of the Apostle Paul be an encouragement to you today:

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." Ephesians 5:8-10 (NKJV)

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV)

Special Forces: Day Forty

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Positive Principles

Remembering our Roots

I'll never forget the day, when after having completed the rigorous year long training program, I finally won the coveted Green Beret! Talk about a sense of pride and accomplishment! Then I was assigned to a real SF unit and became the 'baby' on an SF 'A' Detachment. It didn't take long to realize that the real work had just begun. There was a career ahead of me filled with more schools, more training, more sweat and more pain. Looking back from the present with my 20/20 hindsight I am not at all certain which was the greater challenge - two years of intense training to make the cut; or the dedication and effort it took to remain 'in the game' for the next 25 years. So what's my point? The point is simply that it took a lot of hard work - work to make the cut and work to stay in the game. What a huge difference between the world of Special Operations Forces and the Kingdom of God!

Key Verse:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: John 1:12 (NKJV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." John 5:24 (NKJV)

John, one of the original members of the Lord's 12-man 'A' Team, records that all it took to make the cut and join the family of God was to believe in His name' - to believe that Jesus was God in human form and sent from God to be light in a world of darkness, the Light for all men for all time. (Dan's paraphrase of the previous eleven verses).

The Apostle Paul, in a letter written to a church he had established some 40 years earlier, thought it important to emphasize that salvation was solely an act of the grace of God and had nothing to do with any works. It is so easy to slip into a mindset that somehow we 'did' something, even if that was making a decision to follow Christ. I confess that I thought my great decision to finally give up and let God run things was something I accomplished. God even let me get away with it for a while! Then He brought me following scripture and straightened things out for me!

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;" John 6:44a (NKJV)

It was even an act of God's Holy Spirit that brought me to Him!

Finally, Jesus Himself summarized it rather nicely by stating that our belief in Him results in having everlasting life in the present. As believers, our eternal life is *now*! And to remove any doubt whatsoever, Jesus said specifically that we would not come under judgment at some time

in the future! Lost in our sinful state we were dead spiritually. Not just sick mind you - we were DEAD! Our new lives began at the moment of our belief in the Savior!

So What?

It's 42 years later than that long ago graduation day and half a dozen years since I retired from the Army. Stories of tough rigorous training and the exploits that followed are many, shared by comrades at annual reunions and picnics. I don't know about you, but I find such times of reflection somehow special. Of course it's not good to *live* in the past, but a quick glance in life's review mirror or occasionally sharing the 'good old days' with friends can usher in pleasant thoughts and memories.

It's the same with our spiritual walk. In fact it might be more important to pause now and again on our journey and remind ourselves that it was the blood of Jesus and God calling us to Himself that brought us into eternal life. We NEVER could have been 'good enough' to make the cut. Not only that, but it is God's wonderful grace that keeps us 'in the game'.

Does that mean our lives don't change; that it will be 'situation normal'? Certainly not! Listen to the Apostle Paul:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Romans 6:1-2 (NKJV)

Stay tuned, my friend...

Special Forces: Day Forty-One

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Positive Principles

Power to Obey

As of this date I am in Kirkush, Iraq serving as one of about twenty drill sergeants for the New Iraqi Army (NIA) training program. Without going into great detail, I must confess that I am beginning to think that nothing short of a miracle will instill a spirit of willing obedience into the hearts of our trainees. The trainees here with prior experience in the old Iraqi Army have even informed us that obedience is just not in the nature of the average young Iraqi male.

In all honesty, there is no difference between the men here in Kirkush, Iraq and basic trainees in the United States (or anywhere else, for that matter). Obedience to authority is not a character trait inherent to human nature. By nature we seem to be all about pleasing ourselves. All that 'self-actualization' stuff is just a flimsy cover for that innate selfishness. Obedience to anything outside of our 'self' is a learned trait. If you don't believe it just observe the growth of an infant for the first year or two!

Well, if we have a hard time obeying those in authority whom we can see, how then can we, as Christians, truly live a life of obedience to God, whom we can only see with eyes of 'faith'?

Key Verse:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17 (NKJV)

The setting is the Upper Room in Jerusalem just prior to Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has told His disciples he had been hanging out 'with' them but soon would return to 'be in' them! That must have thrown a little sand in the old brain housing group! Later, during a post resurrection appearance, Jesus reminded them of something wonderful to come in the near future.

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; “for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 4:4,5, (NKJV)

On both occasions, Jesus was speaking of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit - an 'outpouring' that would result in an 'indwelling'. It is that indwelling of God's Spirit that more than makes up for our natural rebellion against anything that would dare invade the kingdom of 'self'. The Apostle Paul summarized really well when he told a young church at Philippi:

"for it is God who works in you both to will (desire) and to act according to His good purpose." Philippians 2:13 (NIV)

So What?

As a Christian in whom God has chosen to dwell by His very own Spirit, I have *no excuse* for willful disobedience to His desire and pattern for my life. There is absolutely no way I can deny it, rationalize it, or disguise it. Disobedience is disobedience. Sin is sin. The tendency to treat the matter of sin lightly is not new. Hear what Paul had to say to the early church at Rome:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Romans 6:1-2 (NKJV)

If, after dying and being planted in the local cemetery, God miraculously brought you back to life, would you jump back in the hole? Of course not! Don't have to stray to far into the logic zone on that one, do we?

Our loving God has given us both power and strength sufficient to keep us from jumping back into the hole - His very Spirit! All we have to do is follow the desire of our new nature in Him!



The Results of Obedience

By Dan Cartwright, Chairman, Board of Directors

SPECIAL FORCES: DAY FORTY-TWO

Intermediate Training: Unit Three

Positive Principles

The Results of Obedience

Ideally, soldiers obey their leaders because they are loyal to their profession, dedicated to accomplishing the mission at hand, and because they are trained to obey commands. The soldier who obeys because he fears the results of disobedience doesn't last long as a soldier, at least not in any of the elite combat units. When strong moral leadership and loyal obedience combine with mutual respect and admiration, the result is the successful performance of the mission at hand, the inner sense of accomplishment for a job well done, and sometimes a more tangible reward presented in a public venue to honor the soldier who went 'above and beyond' the normal call of duty.

Key Verses:

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matt 25:21 & 23)

In the parable of the talents

(Matt 25:14-30) Jesus repeated the same words to the two servants who had been faithful with their master's money. "Well done!...Come and share your master's happiness!" Faithfulness rewarded with at least a promotion and what sounds like a bonus or maybe a shindig at the boss's house!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Tim 4:7-8)

Just before his death, in his final instructions to young Timothy, the Apostle Paul expressed his inner satisfaction that he had run the race the well. He also knew what awaited him and all those who serve our Lord and long for His appearing—a crown of righteousness. He was ready to head home knowing he had left nothing undone. Now that's peace!

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship

him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Rev 4:9-11)

What a picture of the throne room in heaven! The laying down of crowns before the King of Kings and the Lords of Lords, who is worthy to receive ALL honor and glory!

So What?

Have you ever thought about what you would like to be remembered for—what you might want on the stone over your grave? "Well done, good and faithful servant!" works for me, as does "He fought the good fight." Hopefully, since I am just a young pup (relatively speaking) I have many remaining days for running the course in service to our Lord. Some days, I'll probably blow it. Sometimes I'll hit the mattress at night feeling that I did OK, but nothing stellar. Then there will be the times I hear that still small voice in my spirit that says "Well done today!" May the latter sort increasingly outnumber the first two until the day I head to my real home.