

BASIC WARRIOR TRAINING

A MARINE'S JOURNEY THROUGH BOOT CAMP
A MAN'S JOURNEY WITH GOD



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KNIGHTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY



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A COMPLETE WARRIOR

DEDICATED TO ALL WARRIORS past, present and in the future. Your willingness to work hard, to prepare yourself and to sacrifice for others demonstrates the essence of a man. May those of you who read this strive to make our nation and world safer because of your presence. May you discover the strength of your passion for doing what is right and for what really matters, and may you become the warrior God created you to be.

THE JOURNEY EXPECTED

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

REACHING MANHOOD IS NOT a guarantee. A dramatic change in mindset and behavior must occur for a male to understand the intricate elements that make up who he is. He must learn to adapt to an often harsh environment, face difficult challenges head-on and focus on achieving manhood. He must practice self-awareness rather than acting on his impulses and experiencing the consequences later.

Within the average male, there is a cauldron bubbling over with his ideas, feelings, memories, motivations, impulses, thoughts, beliefs, interests, attitudes and potential actions, which all mix together and confuse him. He wants to be a man more than anything. But how can he become one?

Most males can easily identify what they believe a man *isn't*. As young boys, they recognize that girls are different from them. They categorize what they do verses what girls do. As they grow and mature, they continue to notice the ways women define life differently. What a man *is*, however, is less clear. It's always easier to say what one isn't than to take responsibility for choosing what one is.

When males allow their natural tendencies to take over, their testosterone drives them to display aggression. They thrive on competitive activities that show off their skill, strength, courage

and ability. They use dominance and control to build relationships and establish a social pecking order. A male focuses on these external achievements and appearances, while a man looks inside.

Sadly, a lot of young males have lost interest in having an active relationship with God. They have accepted a more simplistic view of life. Some have mistakenly defined the church and spirituality as irrelevant or too feminine. They have set aside the necessary search for true meaning and life satisfaction and have chosen a more self-centered path. As a result, they have become passive, defeated and bored. There are other males who crave action but have failed to guide it well. These males end up gaining the whole world but lose their soul in the process (Mark 8:36).

The mark of a true man is his ability to connect his internal world to his external experiences and circumstances. His drive for competition develops his internal ability to cope with stress and the challenges of life. He sets personal goals and determines the steps that are required to achieve them. Then he applies his passion toward completing them. His preparation becomes as important as the physical accomplishment of his goals.

Instead of being controlled by his hormones, he uses his aggression to benefit others. Instead of simply showing off, he uses the skills he has developed to make a positive mark on the world. Instead of demanding respect, he strives to earn it.

A man exchanges passivity, insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty for a winning attitude. He learns from his failures. He doesn't quit. He picks himself up and confidently begins again, always looking for a corner of the universe where he can excel.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A MAN?

MANHOOD DOES NOT OCCUR by accident. It's an intentional process that turns a male into a man. It's not easy, and it takes time.

First, you need to figure out who you are and establish your identity. Think about how you regularly respond to various life circumstances. Do you have a moral code that helps you choose between right and wrong? Do you think things through and develop plans before you act? Do you understand your emotional responses and guide them to help you succeed? Do you shrink from life's challenges or step toward them? Do you have a group of men to turn to for guidance, encouragement and confrontation? Do you rely on your faith in God to help you through life? Each of these self-discoveries takes time, which allows you to evaluate your actions, develop principles to live by and establish a firm, reliable identity.

Second, you need other people. Through the raw social interactions you experience daily, you can gather life-changing feedback. We fool ourselves more often than we know. Other people often show us the truth. Relationships serve as an important test of character. Other people experience the same complex and dynamic identity-forming processes that we do. We can learn by watching how they respond to issues that are similar to what we face.

Relationships also give us more opportunities to understand ourselves, life and God. We can see the consequences that others experience, and we can learn what we're missing or what we should avoid. Other people's strengths can highlight our weaknesses and cause us to change for the better (1 Thessalonians 5:11). In the same way, we can contribute to their lives through our willingness to bond with them despite their imperfections. We can help guide them toward successful approaches to life.

Third, you need courage and persistence. Manhood does not occur without experiencing certain forms of heat. This noble state can only be achieved through a series of growth-producing challenges. When entering this crucible that provides pressure from all directions—physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual—a male must be fully engaged and apply all of himself in order to succeed.

Simply relying on aggression, sexual conquests or physical strength is not enough. A man must first gain a new level of maturity that motivates him to develop a plan, learn how to cope with stress, overcome his desires, delay gratification, step toward challenges, learn, stand up for his beliefs, remember his purpose and express his faith. The heat of life takes him to the end of his rope, which prompts him to ask, “Now what?” At this point, he finds that what he once considered impossible is now possible. The result—he finds more rope.

Mitch and I are friends. Regardless of the differences in our ages and life perspectives, we have worked together in the past while coauthoring a book called *Bull*. We have each integrated God into our lives in different ways and have taken different paths to find Him. We have also experienced different sources of the heat that a male needs to experience to become a man.

I grew up in what could be described as a crazy family. However, I managed my way through insecurity and conflict to become a husband, dad, grandfather, psychologist, businessman and ordained minister. Mitch grew up in a more stable environment. He found his challenges playing sports, being a physical trainer, becoming a husband, completing two master’s degrees and becoming a Marine.

No matter what your story is, you can join us as we share how we are learning to integrate manhood into our spiritual journey.

Proverbs 27:17 states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” We hope this book will help you grow in your manhood. You can become a heroic warrior who takes care of himself and contributes to the lives of others as well—someone who isn’t afraid to get dirty in order to protect someone or benefit the world.

God created you to be nothing less than His warrior (Deuteronomy 20:1-4). A spiritual war is raging around us each day. Evil forces exist in our culture that want to destroy the value God sees in each of us. True manhood requires us to acknowledge and develop the warrior within us.

When we combine our collective efforts, the world becomes a safer place. In Matthew 6:10 (KJV), Jesus prays, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” God will empower you as you experience life’s heat. He will strengthen the skills He has given you as He burns His purpose into your soul.

HOW IT WORKS

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, Mitch will share the heat of his manhood experience as he moved from civilian life to becoming a United States Marine. After his story, we will discuss some ideas about personal growth, manhood and spiritual maturity.

As you read this book, we invite you to fight with us, disagree with us, establish your own principles and personalize your faith. One area we may need to agree to disagree on is our use of language. Marine boot camp can be a raw experience. The language we use to convey this difficult journey is also raw. Frankly, most of what occurs at boot camp is not G-rated. Our goal is not to offend you, but to tell Mitch’s story in a realistic way.

We believe in the Biblical God and in building a relationship with Him through accepting the death and resurrection of His Son,

Jesus. We hope that you will have the courage to learn from this book regardless of anything you may disagree with. It's easy to critique someone else's ideas. The real challenge is to develop your own identity-forming beliefs. Identifying only what you're against is a dishonest approach. To be mature and prepare to adapt to life's challenges, you must also decide what you stand for. Remember, manhood does not occur by accident.

Each chapter ends with a manhood challenge. These challenges started as letters I wrote to Mitch while he was at boot camp. Each challenge outlines a specific developmental step every male must face and accomplish. You will not become who God created you to be if you avoid this important part of the manhood process. You will only experience true satisfaction and success when you become your best.

Finally, discuss the questions at the end of each chapter with your band of brothers. Talk about how the chapter relates to your life and to manhood. Beginning this process of positive change can be uncomfortable and painful. When you learn to combine self-discipline with God's empowerment, you will find the key to successfully develop your full capacity as a man.

Being able to live out your great potential is an amazing gift. You must choose to let God prepare you to express it fully. Let the adventure begin!

PROCESSING

“In reading the lives of great men, I found that the first
victory won was over themselves... Self discipline
with all of them came first.”

—Harry S. Truman

I CAN STILL CLEARLY REMEMBER the day before my departure: March 6, 2016. I sat at a restaurant with my fiancée, enjoying my last several hours with her. A lot of emotions ran through my head that night, including wanting to escape. I struggled with the fact that I would be leaving her for the next three months. I kept wondering if there was a way I could possibly get out of this huge commitment that I had made. But then I realized how long I had been waiting for this journey. No matter how bad it hurt, no matter how much it sucked, not going would haunt me for the rest of my life.

They woke us up the next morning at 0400 (4:00 a.m.). I put on my civilian clothes one last time before 13 long weeks of wearing Marine-issued outfits. We got bused to MEPS, the military’s medical processing center, our final stop before our long trip to South Carolina. I remember sitting there, looking around at the other young men who were ready to ship out to Parris Island and (hopefully) claim the title of United States Marine.

Each of us had our own ways of coping with the stress. Some guys wouldn’t shut up. They bragged about how prepared they were and how nothing scared them. Other guys got anxious and asked way too many questions that no one knew the answers to.

Then there were guys like me who sat quietly and stared at the clock, counting down the minutes until we would be bused to the airport.

After a long morning, we finally loaded up onto the buses. Again, I had a strong urge inside of me to refuse to get on that bus. After all, I still had no legal obligations to the Marine Corps. Nothing bad could happen if all I did was refuse to leave MEPS. But as I started planning my escape route, I remembered all of the people who supported my decision to face the challenge of becoming a Marine. I thought of how difficult it would be to explain why I quit before I even started. I was never a quitter, and I wasn't about to be one now. So I swallowed my panic, got on the bus and headed for the airport.

BETWEEN MEPS, WAITING AROUND at the airport and our two connecting flights, it took us an entire day to get to our destination: Savannah, Georgia. Once we landed, I knew this was my final moment of peace before 13 weeks of extreme chaos.

We walked from the plane to our rally point, where hundreds of young men and women sat waiting for the final bus ride from Savannah to Parris Island, South Carolina. They loaded us onto dozens of buses. It was dark outside, but without a watch or cell phone, I had no clue what time it was. They told us to sit down and shut up—our first taste of the Marine Corps' harsh way of communicating.

The bus ride could have taken 10 minutes or several hours. I didn't have the slightest idea. But what I do remember is our bus slowly pulling up to its final stop. The front door opened as a drill instructor burst onto the bus. He immediately started screaming directions, most of which I couldn't understand. He

commanded us to race off the bus and stand on the famous sets of yellow footprints painted on the pavement.

It is these footprints that represent the many men and women over the years who got to the edge of what they thought they could accomplish and went one step further. The history of those who fought nobly for our country and some who gave their lives for such a glorious purpose all began here. This simple act of standing on a pair of yellow footprints signified our long-term commitment to be the best a man can be—a United States Marine.

THE DRILL INSTRUCTORS TAUGHT us how to stand at attention and gave us our final brief. They explained that very few have ever done what we were about to do, but if we were willing to take on the challenge, in 13 weeks we could claim the title of United States Marine—something no one could ever take from us.

As we filed off, I looked up at the two huge doors we were about to enter. Above them read:

*Through these portals pass prospects
for America's finest fighting force
United States Marines*

I realized that never again would I pass through those doors. I had an important choice to make: leave Parris Island a civilian and a quitter, or suck it up, deal with the pain and leave 89 days later as a Marine.

The next several hours were chaotic. Drill instructors circled us, shouting, screaming, cursing, throwing papers, backpacks and anything else they could get their hands on. Some would corner a recruit, as they called us, and torture him through verbal abuse and ridiculous commands.

In all this confusion, they gave us each one phone call home. They told us it was to let our family know we had arrived safely, but I'm convinced it was the Marine Corps ripping off our last shred of civilian life. This phone call was more or less dozens of young recruits standing side by side, screaming into old-fashioned phones, quickly reading off of cue cards and slamming down the phone for the next recruit to pick up. I honestly don't know if my family picked up. All I could hear was the chaos around me.

THE FOLLOWING DAYS looked essentially the same: drill instructors screaming, recruits running in all directions and hours on hours of confusion. We didn't sleep for our first several days of the initial processing—the Marine Corps' way of making sure we were physically and mentally fit to train. When we weren't rushing around to collect our gear, we were forced to sit cross-legged on cold, hard concrete floors.

It might not sound that terrible, but sitting that way for hours at a time, fighting off sleep, crammed between dozens of recruits can really beat a guy down. I remember thinking there was no way I could sit perfectly still for another minute, and if I didn't move soon, I would go crazy. But somehow I got through it. By the end of the week, my back, hips and knees were killing me, and we hadn't even started officially training. I never would've imagined that something like sitting down could bring such mental and physical agony. But the Marine Corps is good at that—making literally everything suck.

As much as all of this hurt, there was one overwhelming issue that made it all so much worse. The drill instructors pleasantly reminded us that our first week there didn't even count toward our training. Our first five days of being stuck on that island

meant nothing. Technically we weren't even recruits yet. I'd been sleep-deprived, underfed and overworked for the past five days, and none of it counted. Each day I could hear that voice in the back of my head getting louder: *If it doesn't count yet, why not just quit and go home?*

BECOMING A MAN is something we all want. At an early age, we played the hero, competed with a purpose and searched for adventure. We wanted to be like that guy on TV who slayed the dragon or fought the bad guys. Despite years of fantasizing about our future heroic feats, deep down we fear the actual process of becoming a man. It's much easier to say you want to be a Marine—or a man—than it is to do the required work to become one.

Achieving manhood demands toughness. It requires us to leave behind what we used to care about and continually step out of our comfort zone to test ourselves. Life can be harsh and confusing. It often attacks us with ferocity and tests us to our limits. Old ways of coping and understanding ourselves no longer work. Only a male who understands his complexity and develops his full capacity can overcome the challenge of reaching manhood.

Jesus calls us to die with Him in order to live with Him (Romans 6:8). To do this, we must forfeit our childish impulse to be taken care of. Mom and Dad can't make this journey to manhood for you. Your decisions are your own, and your success or failure is your responsibility. Consequences occur because of your actions, and it's your job to think about the direction your life is going.

You also can't rely on the faith of those around you. Your own faith in God, when put into practice, determines who you

will become. The quest for manhood involves a certain loneliness. Others can support you on your journey, but the results ultimately depend on you. When Jesus asked His disciples to follow Him, He made no guarantees about the ease of their success (Mark 8:34). True achievement is based on what God wants. Every important goal must be centered on His plan for you.

Making Jesus your ultimate authority is a challenging process that can send you screaming into the darkest areas of your inner self (Romans 7:14-25). Do you have the courage to face your sin and ask God for forgiveness (Psalm 51)? Do you have the integrity of character to fully participate in God's plan and become your best? Will you invite God's transforming power into every part of your life? Are you willing to stand where the spiritual heroes of the past once stood as you learn to redefine yourself (Hebrews 11)? Can you change from being simply a male to living as a man of God (1 Timothy 6:11)? If so, you're ready for the first manhood challenge.

CHALLENGE #1

Connect a strong mind with an equally strong body.

A MAN MUST TRAIN his body and his mind to work together in perfect harmony. For the music in your soul to perform at its best, you must use each of the elements within you to its fullest potential. If one area of your life is out of tune or not fully functioning, it limits the rest of the band.

A strong mind contributes to your ability to think, focus on significant goals, formulate beliefs and decide on the best course of action. However, you won't be at your best if your body isn't providing you with maximum energy. A strong body without an

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THE DEFINITION OF a crucible according to Oxford Dictionaries is “a ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures; a situation of severe trial, or in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new.”

Each of the challenges described so far involves identity-forming heat or difficult hardships. A man must go through a process of being torn down to discover what’s essential to his life. This process helps him identify different parts of himself that, together, describe who he really is. He discovers his skills, attitudes, motivations, thought patterns, spiritual beliefs, emotions and relationships. He learns to develop and use them to overcome his challenges. Like the crucible, you will experience hardships in the heating and refining process of life.

As a man’s identity is tested and strengthened, a group or social identity can also be formed. *Marine*, *manhood* or *warrior* are all terms that can identify a significant social identity. When we work alongside others toward a cause that is bigger than ourselves, helping each other is the same as helping ourselves.

Initially our male aggression pits us against each other. But as friendship bonds form, we start to look out for each other. This process results in the natural drive to defend each other to the death. What a spiritual power source we would gain if we recognized and built this unity in the church.

WHEN A COMMUNITY BUILDS unity, each person does what they can to contribute and recognizes that others will help them. Everyone views responsibilities from a group

perspective, which leads to a team-oriented attitude. The gifts and skills of each person are so integrated with each other that it's hard to tell where one person's responsibility starts and the other's ends.

Mud, water, sand, baggage, fights and obstacles only makes mission completion more vital. Jesus ends the Book of Matthew by instructing us to tell the world about His role in our lives. He challenges us to be disciples and to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). As His followers, He calls us to make a difference.

Once we establish our spiritual identity, we must apply it each day. Jesus gives us amazing spiritual strength when we turn our struggle with our sinful nature over to Him. How can we keep quiet about who He is? What small distractions will we let stop us from completing such an important mission?

No one gets through life without a limp or a scar. The Bible clearly teaches that since the fall of mankind, imperfection, entropy, sin, negative forces, spiritual war and a hostile environment exist (Romans 1:22-23). Focusing on who God is in our lives constantly challenges us to live a miraculous spiritual walk, through both light and dark times.

Loving our enemies, thinking of others, protecting the weak, respecting those who are different from us and valuing women and children all conflict with a world that values dominance and control. Having the faith to give up our own plan causes us to need to remember Romans 12:2: "Don't live the way this world lives. Let your way of thinking be completely changed. Then you will be able to test what God wants for you. And you will agree that what he wants is right. His plan is good and pleasing and perfect."

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(1 John 3:5). He also displays our need to develop a team of supportive relationships (Romans 15:5). Being alone and unsupported does not lead to a satisfying life.

Jesus also reminds us in Matthew 4:4 that “man must not live only on bread. He must also live on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” To do this, you must involve yourself in the disciplines of prayer, studying the Bible, worshiping and gathering with other believers. Through these forms of communicating with God, your spiritual relationship will grow stronger. When you are in tune with God and have developed strong relationships with those you love, life’s difficulties seem less challenging, healing occurs and you will establish positive goals in your life.

CHALLENGE #13

Find and live out your “why” to become who God created you to be.

ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT of being resilient that we didn’t cover in the previous chapter is knowing who you are and why you were created (2 Timothy 1:12). Recognizing your purpose in life—your “why”—gives your entire life meaning and significance. When you know why you are doing what you do, you will be able to apply all of your passion, guide your Godly aggression well and focus fully.

Throughout history we can see that men who understood their “why” and accepted it accomplished some amazing things (Matthew 19:26). All but two of Jesus’s 12 disciples gave up their lives to achieve their “why” because they recognized that it was greater than themselves (Deuteronomy 10:21).

YOUR "WHY" DEEPENS as you grow and change (Ephesians 5:15-20). Sometimes God will call you to begin a process in which your previously-formed purpose in life begins interacting with a new purpose. Part of being a warrior is to take the strengths and capabilities you have already built up over time and force them to submit to the importance of your "why" (Hebrews 10:36). This will strengthen you, but it will also cause some discomfort as you recognize the changes that are happening and learn to adjust your purpose.

Knowing the reasons why you exist, rather than viewing life as a chance event, makes your "why" the glue that binds your identity together. Each area of your life becomes connected by your "why," which helps you guide your emotions, goals, thoughts, values, relationships, beliefs, actions and decisions (Romans 12:4; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Your "why" is a mission statement you must live out.

I keep a yellow paper on my desk of a mission statement I created when I was in college. It states, "A man's life goal is to develop and live up to his God-given potential. To do this, he is dependent on the grace of God, following Jesus Christ's example and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to prepare himself for God's purpose and will for his life" (Ezekiel 36:27).

I never got tired of studying life. Learning about the world around us can help us reach our potential and better understand who God is and why He made us. A well-known quote by John Ruskin that I also have taped to my desk affirms this idea: "The highest reward for man's toil is not what he gets for it, but what he becomes by it" (2 Timothy 1:14). These life themes guide me through tough times because they are stronger and more important than what is occurring in the moment.

WHEN I DEVELOPED KNIGHTS of the 21st Century, I added this phrase to my mission statement: “My mission is to help all men develop their potential and giftedness as God sees it (Ephesians 1:8-9).” Many males haven’t learned to develop their strength, use their personal gifts, express their potential and understand their abilities.

To do this, each man must discover his “why,” which inspires him to be his best. Part of each man’s “why” includes motivating him to increase the maturity of his relationships, contribute to the world and the lives of others, push beyond what he thought he could do, act in authentic ways, participate in life fully and internally guard himself against life’s many distractions (Ephesians 2:10). Our “why” acts as the point by which the rest of our life’s compass is set.

The psychological concept of “flow” describes when a man is fully connected to God’s purpose for him (1 Corinthians 12:4). Time goes by quickly due to his hyper focus. The biggest discouragement comes when what he defines as success is blocked. Define success realistically and as what is within your control (1 Peter 4:10).

To be in flow, you need a challenge that is difficult but able to be accomplished. Your purpose is strengthened when you recognize the control you have over its outcome. This includes prayer and God’s empowerment. The well-known Serenity Prayer differentiates between flow and other realities of life. It says, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Paul also reflected on this idea in the Bible when he wrote, “I have learned to be content no matter what happens to me” (Philippians 4:11).

God’s way will not always be your way. He will make choices about what can’t be changed that you may not agree with. Go

ahead and complain to Him—then have the faith to accept His answer and purpose for you, and make a difference where you can.

SOMETHING POWERFUL HAPPENS during times of pressure that helps you define your identity and solidify your “why.” In a challenging experience, your mind and spirit are often shaken out of their typical state of comfort so that you are able to recognize the crap of life (1 Peter 1:6-7). You begin to see the shallowness in aspects of yourself and the world that you previously trusted (1 Timothy 4:8). In these moments when you find your internal and external support failing, you will naturally begin to search for truth. When you find this truth and discover how it fits into your purpose, it will create the foundation for your whole life (Psalm 63:1-5).

Times of pressure will compel you to question what you previously accepted as fact. You will see God differently because you will be experiencing something negative that He has allowed to happen (Romans 5:3-4). Through this process, your spiritual relationship will be tested and your faith will become solidified. You will discover which relationships are truly supportive and steadfast in the midst of this dark time. You will recognize where you have built your identity on a faulty foundation.

You must also consider how this negative experience will affect your future. When the pressure ceases, will you simply return to life as usual? Will you be motivated to remember what this life trial has taught you? Do the beliefs you form in a dark situation, when nothing else good seems to exist, stay with you when it ends (Isaiah 48:10)?

When your world is turned upside down, and you are forced to question everything you thought was reliable about your identity and life purpose, you will discover the strongest aspects of your life. These are the parts that remain the same and can sustain you no matter what (Psalm 66:10-12).

As I continue to pray for you and read this leadership book about 22 ways to deal with pressure, here are five more of its strategies:

6. Recognize that you are worthy—acknowledge your positive qualities, skills and strengths to limit the negative effects of the pressure.
7. Recall you at your best—remember and rely on your past successes.
8. Use your positive GPS system—focus on positive thoughts before and during challenging moments.
9. Here and now—tune in to your senses and what is occurring around you, staying in the moment instead of thinking about what might be, could be or should be.
10. Be a control freak—take care of yourself in small ways and focus on what influence you do have, rather than the areas you can't control.

May you gain further clarity regarding God's will for your life and who you will become as you take the next step through the strengthening fire of tomorrow.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What fuels you? Explain what you rely on to get you through tough times.
2. When have you experienced “flow”? Describe what it felt like and why it happened.
3. How would you describe your “why”? How can you discover more about God’s purpose for you?
4. Read 1 Peter 1:6-7, and talk about how it applies to your life.

“Because you know all this, you have great joy. You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble. Your troubles have come in order to prove that your faith is real. Your faith is worth more than gold. That’s because gold can pass away even when fire has made it pure. Your faith is meant to bring praise, honor and glory to God. This will happen when Jesus Christ returns.”

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DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

WEEK 2-4

“Learning you get from school. Education you get from life.”

—Mark Twain

WEEK TWO MARKED THE start of our actual training. It was the first time we would be out in the field. Our weeks involved both field training and classroom training. Some weeks we started out in the field and finished in the classroom, and other weeks were reversed.

I can't tell you exactly how each week went—but I remember the pain associated with each of them. By this point, it was almost July. The weather in North Carolina was brutally hot. I was sweating constantly. I learned to change my skivvy shorts regularly to avoid heat rash.

Our first week's field experience had us on the rifle range. We had to qualify as riflemen in order to progress further in our training. We had tables three, four, five and six. Each table was a different evolution. From moving targets to unknown distances, the shoots were day and night. I am admittedly a terrible shot, so the rifle range always gives me trouble. But I passed (with a less than perfect score) and made it to the next week.

I REMEMBER SPECIFIC EVENTS from our training—some I remember in exact detail, but others are more like

snapshots. Some of these events were awful, and some make me laugh until I cry.

One of my most vivid memories is from our table six shoot. We had to shoot targets at unknown distances, at night, wearing our night vision goggles (NVGs) and using our PEQ-16s (target pointers). Because we were still in “student status,” our equipment was not top of the line.

We waited for nightfall. As the hours ticked away, we sat in the bleachers with nothing to do but study and avoid the heat. Finally, the sun disappeared over the horizon. We were ready for our shoot.

I’m sure every Marine who has gone through infantry school has said the same thing, but once I got on the berm, my NVGs refused to work. I couldn’t see any of my targets. I desperately tried to search the darkness in front of me for a target as my instructor screamed bloody murder for me to fire my weapon.

I thought I saw the outline of my cardboard enemy and pulled the trigger. Obviously that was a mistake. I received a sharp blow to the back of my Kevlar. My instructor informed me that the dirt mound down range was not the enemy. He kindly pointed out how much of a waste I was and that if I didn’t correct myself I would be dropped. At that point, I didn’t know if he meant from Charlie Company or if he meant from the Marine Corps altogether.

I SAW NOTHING THAT NIGHT other than thin, fuzzy outlines of what appeared to be my targets. I knew my muzzle was pointed down range, and I pulled the trigger, one bullet after the other. When that magazine was empty, I reloaded and fired again. I was only on the gunline for a few minutes, start to finish, but I was sweating like I had run a marathon. How could a faulty piece

of equipment be the reason that I might not graduate on time?

An instructor handed me my score sheet as I ran off the gunline. I still didn't know if I had passed. I handed my score sheet to the instructor in charge of the pass/fail sheet. He snatched it out of my hand, asked for my last name and proceeded to say nothing. I stood there and waited. He looked up and asked what my problem was. I explained that I wasn't sure if I had passed and didn't know what to do from there. He asked, "Did I tell you that you failed?" "No," I responded. "Then get out of my face," he quickly answered. Just like that, I passed. I have no idea how, but I did.

I was relieved that I was in the first batch of students to hit the gunline. As soon as I finished and got to the bleachers, a storm opened up and the Marines on the gunline got soaked. No one likes to be in the field. No one likes to be sweating and in the field. But everyone *hates* to be wet and in the field. Luckily, I stayed dry that night.

Around 0100 (1:00 a.m.), all students had finished their shoot and the students who had failed took their retests. We were packed and ready to head toward our landing zone where we would spend the night sleeping for the few hours we were given.

It was July 4th. We slept under the stars, with the cool breeze chasing the storm to keep us dry. When I looked up into the night sky, I saw the clashing of clouds as lighting and thunder banded all around us. Although I might have missed my fiancée's cookout with fireworks, cold beer, great music and friends, I think firing off 5.56 centimeter rounds in the middle of a thunderstorm is a pretty awesome way to spend the Fourth of July.

OUR NEXT EVOLUTION was another hike, but this time it was 10 kilometers. We made it through with only a few

heat-related injuries. Once the hike was over, we found ourselves at an obstacle course. We were already exhausted from the hike, but regardless of how we felt, we had to maneuver through the obstacle course as fast as possible.

I sprinted, jumped and hauled myself over each obstacle as fast as I could. When I finished, I rushed to my pack, knowing the day was over. Boy, was I wrong. When everyone finished, it was time to march back to our barracks, which were a mile away. But marching isn't fun, and we already hiked. So the only thing left to do was to sprint with our flak, Kevlar, fully loaded pack and M16. Each person sprinted for as long as he could, checking around him to see where the other Marines and instructors were, hoping not to be last.

THE FOLLOWING WEEK we had to qualify with different systems, including a grenade toss. Our grenade toss was nothing like what you see in the movies. Two Marines sprinted out to the berm at once. One went left, the other right. Everyone else stood back to prevent injuries.

This is probably one of the most stressful times for instructors, as even the bravest of men can trip, slip or fumble their live grenade. As I sprinted toward my grenade hole, I looked around. There was absolutely no one within sight. I rounded the corner and sprinted toward an instructor. He didn't know who I was, and I didn't know who he was.

I can't explain how amazed I was at the psychology the instructors used to calm down young Marines. Their typical role of screaming, yelling and belittling us completely disappeared. As I ran into our makeshift bunker, this instructor smiled and asked me how I was doing. He asked about my life, my time at training and how I was feeling. My response even got a laugh out of him, as I

explained this sure beat my day job. I don't know if the laugh was real or fake, but I could see him working to keep both of us calm as we prepped the live grenade.

He made sure I was ready one more time. I got in position, heaved the grenade over the wall and he dove on top of me. As soon as we heard the explosion, he snapped right back into instructor mode and harshly told me to go back where I came from.

IT WAS TIME FOR another hike—15 kilometers this time. At this point, feeling more confident, I volunteered to be a road guard. This meant that I was in front of the entire company with a few other students who volunteered. We marched with the company until a road intersected with ours. We stood at the intersection and held our position in case any oncoming traffic came. The Marine Corps lovingly refers to road guards as “speed bumps.”

After the entire company passed, we sprinted to the front of the company and met up with the other road guards. Then we waited for our turn to sprint again. Being a road guard gave me a chance to get away from the yelling and screaming. If you can get past the sprinting, it's not an awful job.

I believe it was after this week that we, as a company, had earned off-base liberty. We were allowed to pay for a taxi to take us into town to catch a movie, go to the mall and eat wherever we wanted. Coleman and I learned to love one of the breakfast joints down there and started counting down the days until we could go back.

We liked to venture off on our own. We didn't want to get into trouble, and we didn't want to spend too much money. We would eat, wander around the mall for a bit and then try to find a place to sit down and relax. Those hours of sitting down in our civilian

clothes with no other Marines around were positive mental breaks for us. They allowed us to unwind after a hard week of training.

OUR NEXT EVOLUTION was attacks and defense week. The company split up into two groups. Those who were slotted to be riflemen were to start the week off in the offense, doing patrols and other various events. Those who were picked to be in weapons platoon (that includes mortarmen) started the week off in the defense.

We would be digging foxholes to shelter us against hypothetical enemy fire. We had to get in line and count off by twos. The Marine to my left who counted off with me was to be my foxhole mate. Coleman and I cheated the system to make sure we were partners.

We worked well together, taking breaks while the other dug. It took us all day to dig. Periodically our instructors would come by and tell us how awful our hole was. It rained a couple of times, which made rolling around in the sand that much more worse. The heat rash was awful that day, making digging almost unbearable.

Once we finished, we had a chance to relax as other Marines continued to dig. Eventually night came and we had to prepare for the defensive hold. Each Marine stood post for a certain length of time while the other Marine in the foxhole tried to sleep.

Standing post did not mean standing. Coleman and I were both in the hole knee to knee, wet, chafed and caked in sand for the entire night. We didn't sleep. We tried shifting, turning and shuffling—anything we could to get comfortable. It never worked.

Eventually we gave up on trying to take turns sleeping and stood post in our hole together, waiting for the sun to come up. We heard our instructors creeping around throughout the night, drop-

ping training grenades in holes of students who fell asleep on post. We could hear screaming and shuffling. It was a great learning experience for those who fell asleep. It also gave Coleman and me a chance to laugh.

Boot camp, infantry school and the Marine Corps in general gave us a warped sense of humor. We had to learn to laugh at the suck and find joy in things that others would cringe at. Any chance Coleman and I got to laugh, we did—even if it meant laughing at the expense of others. It kept us sane, it kept us moving, and it kept us close. The sand, sweat, blood, heat rash, fire watch, lack of sleep and awful MREs (meal ready to eat) were all bearable once we learned to laugh.

THE END OF THE WEEK meant another hike, 20 kilometers this time. It was our last big hike before the 25 kilometer hike (15.5 miles), which our instructors warned us about from day one. I was a road guard again, so I was ahead of the pack, and I avoided the insults from my instructors.

Each week our instructors did a phenomenal job of threatening to take away liberty from us. They explained that if we failed to meet a certain standard, they would keep us busy with gun drills, cleaning and staying locked in the barracks, instead of going off the base to enjoy the little bit of freedom we so desperately craved.

I didn't mind these threats because each weekend break made the upcoming weeks seem that much further away. If only we could have crunched all of our training days together, I would have been out of there sooner and back home with my fiancée. However, this time around, I was panicked. She and her family were going on vacation close by, and she planned to come visit me for the weekend—a gift I was not about to let slip away.

Training had me missing her birthday, a couple of weddings we were supposed to go to together, the Fourth of July and her family vacation. I was not about to miss seeing her for a few hours.

I got to see her, both on Saturday and Sunday. As Marines we were required to travel in pairs while off base, so Coleman came with us. I couldn't tell you what we did, where we went or how long I got to spend with her. But I do know that it made the next four weeks miserable. As great as it was seeing her, knowing that I still had 30 more days until I was back home was soul crushing.

THERE WAS ONE GOOD PART about the following Monday. It was finally time for the weapons split. During our last four weeks of training, each specific MOS would branch off from the company and train specifically for their job. As a reservist, I knew I was headed to mortarman training. However, for enlisted students like Coleman, this was the last weekend where they still had no idea about their final MOS placement.

I knew little about mortars, their function or the role they played in our wars. I knew little about the mortarman instructors, their past or how they would treat us once we were their students. I didn't know who I would spend the next four weeks with, if I would like them or hate them, if we would work well together or if we would fall apart.

As long as the first four weeks took, it surprised me how quickly the final four weeks went by. Little did I know at the time, the second half of infantry school would be the biggest challenge I would face mentally or physically in the Marine Corps.

THIS IS A SAMPLE. SOME PAGES HAVE BEEN OMITTED.



FOLLOW A YOUNG MARINE'S JOURNEY THROUGH BOOT CAMP
AND INFANTRY SCHOOL AS HE SEARCHES FOR
THE TRUE DEFINITION OF MANHOOD.

FINALLY, THE FRONT HATCH OPENED.

Out marched four Marines who looked more intimidating than I could have imagined. They marched perfectly in step with each other. They snapped to attention simultaneously. They made no mistakes. After a brief introduction, we were calmly told to stand “on line.” We placed the heels of our boots on a painted black line that ran down each side of the middle of our barracks, right in front of each recruit’s rack. The instructors disappeared, and again, we waited.

That was the last moment of peace and quiet any of us would experience for the next 12 weeks.

You can’t become a man—or a Marine—by accident. It’s a long, difficult process full of pain and challenges. But every step you take moves you closer to being the warrior God created you to be.

Let this book be your guide. Start developing the warrior within you today.