

BASIC WARRIOR TRAINING

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



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K N I G H T S O F T H E 2 1 ST C E N T U R Y

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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

THIS IS A SAMPLE. SOME PAGES HAVE BEEN OMITTED.

THE CRUCIBLE

WEEK 11

“With each victory, no matter how great the cost or how agonizing at the time, there comes increased confidence and strength to help meet the next fear.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

FOR THE PAST 10 WEEKS, we had been called useless and worthless. We were told that we would never become Marines, that we couldn’t possibly make the cut. The crucible was our final mental and physical test before we earned the title of United States Marine. Finally we had our chance to prove to ourselves, each other and our drill instructors that we were ready to earn the title.

DAY 1

THE CRUCIBLE LASTS for three days. Recruits go through various combat situations. Certain battles throughout the Marine Corps’ history are recreated, and recruits have to work through these challenging events.

Our crucible started at 0200 (2:00 a.m.) on a Monday morning. Our drill instructors burst into the barracks screaming at us to get outside. Normally they counted down for everything, including getting dressed, but not that day. It was a giant free-for-all.

We jumped out of bed and threw on our cammies, flak jackets and Kevlars. We grabbed our packs and sprinted outside. We got in formation behind the barracks with the rest of our company

and waited to step. Then we started out on our first 10 kilometer hump to the field.

When we got there, we staged our gear and split up into our 12-man teams. Our drill instructor put me in the section leader position, which meant I received information directly from him and relayed this information to the recruits below me. I spent most of my day sprinting back and forth between my drill instructor and our position.

Back and forth I would run, relay the information and bunker down, waiting for the next exercise. However, my drill instructor wanted to have a little fun with me. He would wait until I got in position with my team to begin pulling security. The second I was settled down, he would give me the hand signal to return to his position. Off I went, sprinting down the dirt road. I ran as hard as I could. I didn't want to give him a reason to put me through any additional punishment.

AFTER WE PATROLLED for what seemed like hours, we went to the hand-to-hand combat training exercise station. Here we paired off to practice the martial arts skills we learned during the previous 10 weeks. What started out as "training" wound up being a fight for life. Recruits began whaling on each other, letting out all of their anger, aggression and frustration on their opponent.

I looked over at my opponent, a recruit who was a close friend of mine through most of boot camp. He was covered in blood, and his eyes were watering. He was pushing the pain away the best he could. I looked down at my own cammies. I, too, was covered in blood.

At this point, we were both mentally and physically exhausted. Our instructor noticed our tangled-up mess, with our arms flailing, our legs kicking and our grunts and snarls. It seemed to spark some serious motivation in him as he, along with some other instructors, began to cheer us on. They hollered at us to kill our opponent.

We both kept fighting. It didn't matter how tired we were or how much everything hurt. Neither of us wanted to lose or let down our instructors. We feared a loss would mean we were weak. Finally, they broke up the fight. Our instructor gave us a congratulatory smile, one that we were certain was because we were both broken.

THERE WAS NO TIME TO REST. We packed up our gear and ran to our next evolution. As difficult as sprinting with full gear is for recruits, it's made almost impossible thanks to our ever-watching drill instructors. They commanded us to low crawl through every pile of mud, sand and water. By the time we got to our second exercise, our blood-stained cammies had turned into sand-caked and mud-soaked ones.

The recruit who was my mortal enemy just moments prior was now on my fire team, which consisted of four recruits. We had to maneuver through an obstacle course, carrying with us extra flak jackets, ammo cans filled with cement and several packs. All of our gear needed to reach the end point along with the four recruits in our fire team.

The obstacle course started out rough. We had to low crawl through mud-filled water dozens of times. Once our drill instructor felt that we were wet enough, we sprinted through an open field, climbed over a high wall, hit the ground and low crawled under barbed wire through hundreds of yards of sand.

Guys were already complaining about chafing as sand got lodged in the band of their compression shorts. About halfway through, one of my team members accidentally kicked a mound of sand into my face. My eyes were wide open. I spent the remainder of that obstacle finding my way through the course with my eyes closed, listening to the commands of my teammates. If it wasn't for my teammates, I would have never found my way to the finish line on time. It still amazes me how quickly we were able to get over any dislike, hatred or previous thoughts and feelings we had. We came together and worked toward completing the mission.

SEVERAL TRAINING EXERCISES LATER, we found ourselves being fitted for football helmets and boxing gloves. We waited outside a giant octagon. Once the whistle blew, we ran inside the ring. Several fights took place inside this gladiator-style ring at a time. Recruits toppled over one another, trying to avoid their opponents and the other recruits fighting around them.

Above us, on a second-story platform, instructors looked down, cheered and booed recruits. During my fight, I could hear my senior drill instructor bragging about how physically fit I was and that he would put me against any of their recruits. As he continued to exclaim what a tough athlete I was, my opponent was hammering me. His reach far surpassed mine. Anytime I got close, I would get pounded and would stumble back trying not to wind up on the ground. My instructor's cheers quickly turned to threats, letting me know there would be huge consequences if I lost.

Somehow the fear of letting down my senior drill instructor pushed me forward. I hit my opponent as hard as I could. He landed hard on the ground. For some reason, this man who had done nothing but insult, belittle and torture me for the last two months

had such a strong hold over me. I was willing to do anything for him and his fellow drill instructors.

The whistle blew, and instructors rushed us out of the octagon and back to our gear. I immediately grabbed my hand, which was throbbing from the hit. I took off my glove, and sure enough, my thumb and hand were swollen, already turning black and blue. Now, with over 48 hours left in the crucible, I was battling a broken foot and a broken thumb.

Recruits tried to convince me to see a corpsman. They explained that I could get it wrapped and continue training. Fearing that I would get dropped, I refused. We joked around, saying, “It’s only your firing hand, it’s not like you’ll actually need it.” However, our next training exercise was a live fire range.

DAY 2

I MADE IT THROUGH the first day with minimal issues. I was able to work through the pain in my thumb and foot knowing that in just over 30 hours I would earn the title of United States Marine. However, day two started out rough for me. We were back at another hand-to-hand combat exercise. I squared up against Recruit Graves. Graves was a fantastic guy and a close friend, but a monster of an individual.

I spent close to an hour being thrown around like a rag doll, doing whatever I could to not get broken in half. At one point, Recruit Graves found me flat on my back. He jumped through the air, took a knee and landed square on my ribs. The crack felt painful, but the noise was the scariest part.

It was so loud that Graves jumped off of me and turned to our drill instructor with concern in his face. Our drill instructors told us to continue fighting. And we did.

After the fight finally ended, Graves apologized over and over again, but I told him not to worry about it. The pain in my ribs helped me forget about my other broken bones. We still laugh about that ordeal to this day.

We set off for the obstacle course, an event we had done dozens of times. However, this time we were responsible for maneuvering through the course as a team. We also had additional gear, including packs, ammo cans and Kevlars.

Grabbing the bars and hoisting myself up was almost impossible. I had to rely on some heavy pushing from my team members. Rope climbs were even worse. It got to the point where I was unable to help anyone on my team up and over bars, walls and other obstacles because of the pain in my hand. We realized that if my teammates hoisted me up first, I could hug the bar with my good hand and lower my broken hand. Then each team member could grab my forearm and practically climb up my body, roll over top of me and jump down on the other side. We thought quickly on our feet and started learning our strengths and weaknesses, both mental and physical, to get us through events fast and accurately.

OUR NEXT TRAINING EXERCISE was by far the most brutal experience at boot camp. What started out as a simple patrol led to us belly crawling for miles. We had to keep our heads down, which meant holding our breath as we worked our way through mud and water. At some points, the water was so deep that recruits would completely disappear until they came up for air.

Halfway through this event, we couldn't distinguish one recruit from the next. We were just a group of mud-covered individuals with only our eyes to set us apart. We had to drag our buddies through the mud and water for hours, first on our backs, then on

our stomachs. After each puddle or mud pit, we sprinted to the next one, only to dive head-first into another wet, cold and miserable maneuver.

Eventually, our drill instructor got a radio call saying we were behind in our training evolution and we needed to form up several miles down the road. Without hesitation our instructor yelled for us to get moving. We stood up, tried shaking out our cold, bogged-down bodies and took off running.

Somewhere during this run, sand found its way into my waistband and started rubbing. It wasn't until we stopped that I could feel the irritation. After a look, I saw that most of the skin around my belt had been chafed raw. I spent the rest of the day hobbling around, trying to adjust my pants and compression shorts every other step. It was useless—the damage was done. What I really needed was a new change of clothes, something that would have to wait for just over 24 hours.

DAY 3

WE MADE IT. Our time in hell had finally come to an end. All that stood in our way was our hump back to the graduation platform where we would finally receive our Eagle, Globe and Anchor (EGA)—the symbol that proved we finally earned the title of United States Marine.

The previous night I found myself next to Recruit Coleman. I was in quite a bit of pain and expressed my concern to him. I explained that at our wake-up call, when we would have only a few minutes to get our clothes on, pack away our gear and line up in formation, I more than likely wouldn't make it.

I couldn't walk, I couldn't sit up, and I couldn't grab anything with my injured hand. The chafing grew worse and had spread.

Coleman had our last fire watch shift and told me he would wake me up an hour before the company would be woken up. He spent his hour-long shift helping me get dressed, pack my gear and get situated. We spent most of our time trying to get my boots on. My foot had swollen to the point where it took two recruits to get it off earlier that night, and now with just Coleman and I, the boot seemed impossible to get on.

After a lot of pain and grunting, we got the boot on. I sat patiently and waited for the drill instructors to come storming in. It was, after all, their last chance to grind us before we were Marines. As I sat there, I thought of the hump we had in front of us. I wondered how each step would feel and how fast our pace was going to be.

As long as I could make it through that final hump, I would graduate as a Marine. At that point, I would be done with training. I couldn't get dropped to another platoon. Worst case scenario would have me stuck on the island a few weeks after graduation to rehab my body. But even that was something I would try to avoid at all costs.

IT WAS A RELATIVELY COOL morning, but I was already sweating from the pain. Every move caused the chafing to get worse. Every step made my foot throb. Carrying my pack did a number on my broken ribs, and holding my M16A4 service rifle proved difficult with a broken hand. But, step after step, I kept going. Recruits to my right and left fed me quiet words of encouragement. The recruits behind me occasionally patted me on the back.

I don't remember much from the hike other than a few snapshots. I remember getting to the parade deck, preparing for the ceremony, knowing that within minutes I would earn the title of

United States Marine. No matter what happened in the week to follow, I would never have to experience recruit training again.

Each recruit received his EGA from his senior drill instructor. Plenty of recruits began to cry, unable to hide their happiness and exhaustion. As happy as I was, my mind was elsewhere. I thought of my fiancée and how much I missed her. I thought of my parents and how eager I was to see them again. I was so overwhelmed with thoughts of home that I missed almost the entire ceremony. *Just a few more days until I see my loved ones*, I kept thinking as recruits around me cheered, applauded and embraced one another. Just a few more days.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CEREMONY, we got ready for hygiene inspection. Hygiene inspection occurred regularly. We would strip down to nothing but our skivvy shorts as a company CO and several corporals walked up and down our barracks, checking for any signs of injury. I never worried about these inspections, as I was able to remain healthy throughout most of boot camp. However, this time I could hardly get out of my boots, let alone stand up straight as we waited to be thoroughly inspected.

My senior drill instructor saw my foot first. He asked me how it got like that. I did my best to hide the truth. I explained that my foot would swell up a bit on hikes, but it was nothing too painful. He insisted that a corporal take a look at it. Somehow that never happened. The company CO and the corporals all overlooked my feet. They were too busy aiding the recruits around me who had vocalized their injuries.

Just when I started to relax, I heard my senior drill instructor ask one of the corporals if he looked at PFC Davis. (Now that I was a Marine, I was addressed by my rank, rather than “recruit.”) I

remember looking around at the friends I had made, seeing panic in their eyes. They knew I wasn't going to give in without a fight. But after seeing my foot, they all feared the worst.

I stood perfectly at attention and waited for a corpsman to come take a look at my injuries. As he started to ask me some primary questions, he stopped halfway through his sentence and urged another corpsman to come look at my foot. "That is definitely a fracture," they said each other. They began talking about getting me to the medical bay as soon as possible. I urged them to take a further look, explaining that it didn't hurt and that it was simply swollen from all the hiking we did over the last three days.

They had me sit on the edge of my footlocker in order to get a closer look. They poked, pressed, rubbed and prodded my foot. The pain was immense. Sweat poured from my body as I did everything I could to keep a straight face. "That doesn't hurt at all?" they asked, looking terribly confused. "Not at all," I repeated again and again.

The other recruits started looking around, some of them confused, some disgusted. I caught a glance from my senior drill instructor who stood behind the corpsmen. He knew exactly what I was doing and was not pleased. I saw the anger in his face, and I was worried he would urge them to take me to the ER immediately. But he didn't—not a word was said.

The corpsmen got up and told me if the pain increased I could see them, but that if it was just swelling it was probably nothing. As they left, I heard them discussing with my senior drill instructor how they had never seen swelling that bad without any pain before.

I had won. Finally, absolutely zero obstacles stood in my way. I could officially start to count down the hours, minutes and seconds until I saw my fiancée and family. I was getting off that island on time.

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."

THIS IS A SAMPLE. SOME PAGES HAVE BEEN OMITTED.

into slavery by his brothers, then falsely accused of rape, put in jail and forgotten. In Genesis 50:20 (one of my favorite verses), Joseph tells his brothers, “You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good.” Like Joseph, you can turn bad into good throughout your life because of your good decisions, intentional effort and God’s blessings.

LOOKING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY in each moment causes you to squeeze every ounce of potential growth out of each experience. Challenging or painful circumstances will become memories and events you will never experience again. They leave you with lessons that only the toughest explorers of life are ever fortunate enough to discover. These lessons will create interesting stories you can tell, introduce you to unique personalities and interactions, challenge you with new physical reactions and cause you to develop new emotional responses (Romans 12:12). Take full advantage of these experiences so that you never look back and say, “I didn’t learn enough” (Deuteronomy 7:19).

A ball can’t bounce back without enough pressure inside of it. As I am experiencing moments of testing in my life, I am reading a leadership book called *Performing Under Pressure* by Hendrie Weisinger and J.P. Pawliw-Fry. The book lists 22 ways to persevere and overcome pressure’s negative effects. Each point shows a man how to strengthen his internal world so that it is more powerful than his external circumstances. Here are the first five ways to persevere through pressure:

1. Befriend the moment—think of difficult moments as a challenge, an opportunity or an adventure.

2. Multiple opportunities—understand that this moment is one of many opportunities that will come your way in the future.
3. Downsize the importance—redefine the value of this challenge.
4. Focus on the mission—remember what you want to accomplish and achieve, and why.
5. Anticipate, anticipate, anticipate—prepare yourself for the “what ifs” that may come along.

God tells us to be strong and brave (Joshua 1:9). Carry this instruction into each moment of your life.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What's one challenge you're going through or went through recently?
2. What resiliency strategy did or could you use to get through that challenge?
3. What's one way you've grown in the past year? How did that experience add to your identity?
4. Read Romans 12:12, and talk about how it applies to your life.

"When you hope, be joyful. When you suffer, be patient. When you pray, be faithful."

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MITCHELL DAVIS lives in a small town in Pennsylvania with his wife, Jory, and their three cats. Mitch is a high school wrestling coach, a collegiate strength coach and an adjunct instructor, teaching courses in health and wellness. Mitch has been coaching for almost 10 years and has found his passion in helping athletes pursue their dreams. He also runs a small business, where he helps individuals learn the importance of living a

healthy lifestyle. In their spare time, Mitch and Jory enjoy their peace and quiet and spend their time together reading, enjoying the outdoors and remodeling their home.

ROY SMITH has worked for over 35 years as a psychologist/counselor to men and their families. He is an ordained minister, founder of Pennsylvania Counseling Services and author of *Knights of the 21st Century* (www.K21.men), a men's ministry. Through K21, Roy has written several books and DVD programs in the area of men's issues and has consulted on two women's curriculum series. He has a M.Div. and a



Ph.D. in clinical psychology. Roy is married to Jan, also a psychologist, who has been supportive through the process of creating K21. They have two children and two grandsons.



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.