

# IMPLEMENTING A MARTIAL ARTS MINISTRY

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## **Introduction**

As Christian martial artists, most of us come to a point in our lives where we realize the potential which the martial arts hold for ministry. Whether through self defense training, classical martial arts classes, or dynamic demonstrations, the martial arts are an effective tool for sharing the saving grace of Jesus Christ. All too often however, the daunting logistical, political, and emotional elements of implementing an effective martial arts ministry prevent many from doing so.

This document is intended as a guide for the Christian martial artist whose heart burns with the desire to use the martial arts skills the Lord has given, and lead others to Him through discipleship and outreach, using the martial arts as a method.

The Christian principle of following the Lord's will and leading at all times must be followed for this guide to be of any practical use. Ponder Proverbs 3:5-7 "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil." As martial artists, the importance of proper discipline and subjection to authority should be self evident. If we are to be effective servants for the Lord's work, we must remember that we are just that.

Before the undertaking of any martial arts ministry, it is imperative that the Christian martial artist engages in a prayerful period of time in which the Lord's leading becomes clear. Without the Lord clearly involved, far more damage than good may be realized. It is also important to remember what James 3:1 has to warn us: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." As spiritual leaders, not only do we need to be able to lead others to the Lord's saving grace, but we must also maintain our own holiness on a day to day basis.

As you progress through this guide, it is suggested that you keep a legal pad handy and take notes concerning the points which specifically deal with your style of ministry or which stimulate an idea in your head which you may forget later if it is not recorded.

You should also read the entire document from beginning to end to get an overview of the process and details involved before actually beginning your planning process. If you are approaching the process with one or more partners in ministry, read through the guide together.

May the Lord be with you as you strive to serve him through the medium of martial arts!

Scott Hoffer  
Solid Impact Ministries

## **Focusing Your Ministry's Identity**

Before you can effectively implement a program, whether it involves the training of others, dynamic demonstrations or shows, or both, you must focus both your purpose and methods.

This involves determining what your strengths and weaknesses are, and then tailoring a program which will capitalize on your strengths. You must determine carefully who you primarily wish to reach. "The entire human race" while a noble goal, is rarely realistic or practical. Choose a target audience for your ministry, and determine how you will go about reaching them.

Begin by determining what gifts the Lord has given you which will lend themselves to a martial arts ministry. These include not only the ability to punch and kick. Examine each item in the following list and determine where your strengths lie. Honestly ask yourself the following questions:

1. Am I a good teacher of my techniques?
2. Can I effectively share Christ in front of a large crowd?
3. Am I patient in dealing with others who are different from me?
4. Am I creative?
5. Does my schedule allow consistent time to be donated on a regular basis?
6. Do I have good organizational skills concerning both people and materials?

Check your answers, the odd numbered questions deal with elements necessary for teaching a martial arts or self defense class. The even numbered questions are related to demonstrations and shows. Use this list as a springboard. Break down your talents and strengths, with an eye towards the different types of ministries they would lend themselves to.

Now for the hard part; your weaknesses. They don't need to limit you, but you do need to know what they are. They will be both in the physical as well as mental and emotional arena. When you have identified what they are, pray for strength to overcome them, and begin to strategize ways around them. For example, if you have a hard time speaking in front of a crowd, talk your local Sunday school class into allowing you to practice for 5 minutes at a time on them before or after class or at social gatherings to help you build your confidence. With the Lord's help, we can do anything He requires. Philippians 4: 13

Once you have determined what your strengths and weaknesses are, the next step is to determine how you will be using the martial arts in your ministry. There are many different options, and you must make the decision based on your abilities, as well as the next decision, who you want to reach.

The following is a short list of options:

- Self defense seminars for couples
- Classical martial arts classes
- Sport karate classes
- Self defense classes for children
- Karate classes as an extension of a church youth group
- Dynamic breaking demonstrations
- Explanatory karate demonstrations
- Host a martial arts seminar or clinic
- Host a Christian karate tournament with a demonstration event in the middle
- Offer karate classes as a phys-ed option in a Christian school

Any of these ideas could be used alone or in concert with others to create a viable effective ministry. It should be remembered however that the Great Commission, set forth in Matthew 28:19&20 is a two pronged command. It directs us to not only go and make disciples of all nations, but to also “teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Outreach and Discipleship are the two elements of the Great Commission which must be fulfilled by the Church today. If your ministry does not fulfill both elements, in and of itself, make sure it works within or alongside another ministry that provides the element which you are lacking.

While you are deciding how to use the martial arts as a ministry, you should also be deciding who your intended audience or “target market” is. Will you primarily minister to teens, junior high and below, or women's groups? If you will be teaching martial arts classes, will you target Christians or non-Christians? The answers to these questions will greatly impact your methods and curriculum.

## **Preparing a Professional Program**

As you progress towards developing a professional program, make sure that you are your own worst critic. Never be satisfied until every element is perfect. It is absolutely critical that as Christians, we strive for excellence. I Corinthians 10:31 “Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” We are representing the Lord in all that we do, and we should not only try to be equal in quality to the skills and programs of the world, but better.

Some of the best resources for ideas and constructive criticism are other Christian martial artists. Seek them out. The GMAU is more than happy to share its ideas and suggestions with inquisitive Christian martial artists who are implementing their own programs. If you can find other Christian martial artists in your own community, you not only have a source of knowledge, but potential allies to assist you in your ministry. The number one rule to remember at all times when dealing with other Christian martial artists is that we are Christians first and martial artists second. In another 100 years, none of us will care how we threw our side kicks, but we will care about who accepted the Lord. Keep the big picture in perspective at all times. Don't let worldly pride get in the way of the Lord's work.

We always tend to look at how we did something as being the best way to do that thing. Don't make this mistake where the martial arts are concerned. Be willing to examine your methods for effectiveness in light of your ministry's goals. In a traditional martial arts class the instructor did not overly concern him or herself with student retention. In a ministry oriented class student retention should be a high priority. If we don't have students, we can't minister to anyone. Do not let the traditions of the East sacrifice students or dilute your spiritual message. Things like bowing to a god shelf, meditating, or demeaning a student have no place in a Christian ministry.

Don't be afraid to make changes. In I Corinthians 9:22, Paul said “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” Paul was flexible in that he understood the necessity of making the Lord's word relevant to all men. He had to change, it was not reasonable to expect that those he was ministering to would. We also need to be willing to make changes in our curriculum and our styles to both attract new students, and retain old ones. If you plan on presenting demonstrations and shows, they must regularly be changed to prevent audiences from seeing the same thing too many times if ever.

Because of the occult ties with some martial arts, and the resurgence in secular interest in Eastern religions, it is important as Christian martial artists that we be able to explain the significance in all that we do. Why do you point your fingers that way in that form? What are you bowing to when you enter the workout area? What do all of the oriental terms you utter really mean? Remember James 3:1 “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” We are teaching others who will emulate our every move. We must ensure that each move we make is sincere and above reproach. If you're not sure on a specific element, eliminate it. Better that than unknowingly introducing your students to an occult influence.

A common mistake made by Christians in ministry today, is to try to accomplish too much by themselves. For your ministry to be successful, your chances are greatly enhanced with a support staff. This should include someone to help with physical needs like setup and teardown of a class setting or show stage, produce artwork for brochures and posters, and purchase materials like boards and bricks. If you are planning on presenting shows, advertising is critical, and it is essential that you have someone to assist with mailings and phone calls so you can concentrate on preparing your message and practicing the nuts and bolts elements of the program. Martial arts class students are natural candidates for this type of “volunteer” work, as it helps prepare them for eventual direct participation in ministry.

Before you can approach a church with a new program, consider that most church budgets are already full. They are looking for innovative effective new ministries that cost relatively little to implement. Surprise them by presenting them with a ministry which is completely self supporting. To do this, you must clearly identify means of funding your ministry in advance. Will you charge a nominal fee for instruction to cover costs? Will you approach potential donors and see if they would be willing to donate so much a month towards a dynamic new ministry? Will you ask for a set fee or love offering for each show or demonstration? Whatever your methods, be specific with the numbers in determining your monthly needs prior to assuming that you will be self supporting. Remember, if you're doing a dynamic breaking demonstration, breaking things costs money, and you can only break things once before you have to buy more things to break. Plan accordingly.

A last step in preparing a professional program is to assemble a binder which contains a description and outline of your program which you can present to a church or potential sponsor of an event. This shows that you have more than a passing interest in what you're doing, and that you're serious about doing it first class. All text should be laser printed or typed, and all artwork should be done first class. Put yourself in the reader's shoes. Would *you* buy it?

## **Approach and Presentation**

Before you can actually approach a church with your ministry idea, you need to ask yourself some hard questions about your current position within that church body.

- 1.How long have I been attending this church?
- 2.How well do people know me here?
- 3.How's my testimony? Do I truly represent Christ in all that I do and say?

How you answer the above questions can have a real bearing on how well you will be received when you approach church leadership with your idea. Before we can lead, we must learn to follow. If you're not following effectively now, the time may not be right for you to take up the reins of leadership yet.

If you've determined that you're personally on-track, the next step is to do a little “market research” on the church your approaching. You should research both past and present program failures and successes. What made them work? Is there anything about your proposed ministry that might prematurely exclude it from consideration due to history?

Make sure that you also have a clear idea as to the decision making process at the church you're approaching. Who makes the final decision? Even though the constitution says the Deacons do, it might be old Mr. Smith who they go to for advice. Knowing who you really need to convince is a first step.

Find a “champion” or two within the organization who believe in you and your program to “talk it up.” It always helps to have more than one person talking about your idea. The more people you can get excited and committed to your idea before you make a formal proposal, the better.

Prepare for the objections and questions which will most surely come. “What about the occult connection to Eastern religions?” and “Shouldn't Christians just turn the other cheek?” You should have Biblical support for your answers, and be able to competently respond. For assistance with this, refer to the books listed in the Appendix.

Making your official presentation is in reality nothing more than explaining your gifts, and asking that you be allowed to use them for the Lord. You should make a formal request of the pastor or head deacon, setting up an appointment to formally present your program. Be humble, but let your excitement show. If it is at all possible, a live demonstration can work wonders. This is not necessarily so much a physical demonstration, but a demonstration of the methods with which you will be impacting people for the Lord. Try to inject a sense of the effectiveness with which the martial arts can hold people’s attention, as well as teach a balanced lifestyle. Be organized, and professional. Even if you know everyone who you're presenting to, don't cut any corners.

## **What to Do if You Encounter Rocky Soil**

Even if you've done everything right, church leadership may say no. If this is the case, you first need to respect their judgment and authority, and second, pray that if the Lord would have you minister through the martial arts that He do the convincing.

We must be content to wait on the Lord when we have taken all of the necessary and reasonable steps to do His will. Patience is a virtue, and often we must learn it over and over again. The last thing to do is get impatient and bitter. We don't know best, and we must leave it in the Lord's hands.

There may already be an existing martial arts ministry in your area which would be thrilled to have you assist them in their efforts. In addition, the GMAU is always looking for Christian martial artists to contribute articles and news for their quarterly newsletter. Your local Youth for Christ or Campus Crusade may also be interested in having you do a self defense seminar or class, or even a demonstration.

Another excellent method of using the martial arts as ministry is to be an ambassador for Christ in your local martial arts community. Many areas have more than one secular school which has a sparring night where anyone is invited. These sparring nights are excellent opportunities for friendship evangelism and for finding other Christian martial artists. Participating in local tournaments either as a competitor or as a judge is also a good way to become known as a Christian martial artist in your local community.

Your only limitation is your own desire and imagination. If the Lord wants you to have a distinct martial arts ministry, and you're willing to do it His way and with His timing, then it will happen. Be patient, and keep in shape!



## **Appendix**

Recommended books and publications:

The Martial Arts -- A Christian Perspective, Philosophy and Program Author: Dr. Kent Haralson

Christians and the Martial Arts (16 pg booklet)

The GMAU Journal (A quarterly newsletter of the GMAU)

All of these publications are available from the GMAU – See front cover for ways to contact the GMAU.