

The Writing on the Wall

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The Spirit of Kung Fu

Kung Fu is an Expression of My Faith

God takes your abilities and desires (heart) and redeems them to bring Him glory in both personal growth and public ministry. Your hobbies can be either a **stepping stone** or a **stumbling block** in your walk with Christ. I have been a martial artist my whole life. At the age of 6 I decided that I was going to master and then teach kung fu; however, I was not given an opportunity to learn any martial art until the age of 18. God made me wait. Why did He make me wait? Because he wanted to test me to prove that I could handle kung fu and to show me what He wanted me to do with it. One day God asked me if I was willing to sacrifice my kung fu for Him. I really struggled over that decision. I loved the martial arts, but I loved God more. I eventually determined that, Yes, I would give up my kung fu for Christ if He asked me to do so. It was then that God provided me a godly teacher to train me in both kung fu and how to use it for His glory. God then began to use kung fu as a frame of reference to teach me those things that He desired for me to learn. In my study of the martial arts, I have determined that there are a vast number of parallels between Spiritual truth as taught in Scripture and truth taught in the arts. Let me show you what I mean.

Skill:

The Chinese word *kung fu* is literally translated as *work* and *husband*, but when compounded together they mean *skill*. The word is universally known to be the umbrella term for all martial arts from China, but linguistically the term applies to any set of skills from music to cooking. One of the things I would like to show in this paper is that

working in the Kingdom is a skill; it requires work and practice to be good at it, just like kung fu. And just like in kung fu, there are certain principles you need to understand in order to be successful.

Self-Control:

The Purpose of *kung fu* is two fold. The first purpose is to develop our selves into better people. The second purpose of kung fu is to obtain and maintain control. This is the method by which we primarily fulfill the first. By control, we mean control over our selves first, and over our opponents second. Of the two options, we make a greater priority the first. Some people have asked me why control of ourselves is more important than control of our opponents, and I have responded by saying that if we do not have control over our self, then we will never have control of our opponent.

In life, there is a principle commonly stated in terms of putting the cart before the horse. The horse can not pull the cart if it is not in front, it just does not work. This is the case here as well; I must learn to control myself if I am ever to control my opponent. Once I have learned to control myself, then I find that I am able to control my opponent fairly easily. If other people are like me, then they are asking the question, “How do I learn to control myself?” Well, in my own life I discovered that the answer lay in the definition of self-control. What is it? What does it mean? The obvious answer is me having control over my self, but what I discovered is that that is not the most accurate definition of self-control. For the Christian, self-control is not “developing control over my self,” but “relinquishing control of my self to God”. When we relinquish control over our self to God then God, who is the blessed controller of all things, gives us the control over our self that we need to control our opponents. This is particularly comforting in times of stress and danger, because I do not have to rely on my own ability. Instead, I can trust God to work it out and simply do the best I can claiming the promises in Scripture.

Divine Timing:

It is all about timing. You have seen it over and over again; a good joke told at the wrong time is a bad joke. Kung fu taught me the importance of waiting on God’s timing in my life. If I throw a punch, my timing has to be perfect. In order to connect with that punch I have to time every single move I make like clockwork, or else I lose and he wins. Timing applies to life and spirituality as well. I have had many experiences

where God has demonstrated His divine timing in my life, and I have learned from Him that sometimes you have to learn to time things correctly or they are not effective. Over and over I have learned this lesson in my martial arts training, and it smoothly crosses over into my spiritual life as I recognize that the right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing. You have to have the right window of opportunity or it will not work. So many times we want to do something but God makes us wait, just like He made me wait until I was 18 to be able to learn kung fu from a godly teacher. Any other time would have been the wrong time.

Action/Reaction Cycle:

In the movie *The Perfect Weapon* with Jeff Speakman, Jeff is a man who has always had trouble with his temper. He often snaps, loses all control and then retaliates out of anger. In an effort to help his son remedy that problem, Jeff's father enrolls him in a martial arts class to teach him self-control. A consistent theme throughout this whole movie is the Tiger/Dragon conflict. The tiger is young, strong, and fast but impetuous and reacts without thought to stimulus; but, the dragon is the epitome of wisdom and always wins because he is smarter and does not **react** but instead **responds** with the appropriate action. Often, you see this, one guy pushes another guy who pushes him back who pushes back, who hits back who then hits back and it continues to escalate until it is a no holds bared, knock down drag out fight to the death. And all because the guy said he did not like the color of your car! Why? How hard would it have been for one of them to humble themselves and evaluate the situation and be willing to respond with a new action that would have actually moved him closer to his goal than simply reacting to the action with the same action?

Jesus talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount, saying "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ...' But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;" (Matt. 5: 38-44) Jesus says that we should respond to people's actions with a **new** action, respond to anger with love. Respond to other people's pride with your humility, the Bible says a soft answer turns away wrath. (Prov. 15:1) If I fight your force along the same lines as your force then the stronger force will win, but my Shifu (teacher) will take a strong man and have him push

against Shifu's finger and control the man by not resisting along the same lines as the man's force but simply redirecting it along the many different avenues the man is not applying his force. Kung Fu helps me to live my faith better by helping me to understand the "Action 'vs.' Reaction" cycle and how it hinders my walk with Christ and my relations with others and in so doing, hinders my ministry. I look toward Christ and learn to respond to actions with right motives and attitudes instead of simply reacting to actions with wrong motives and attitudes.

An Empty Vessel:

There was once a practitioner whom I knew, who every opportunity he got he tried to impress me with what he already knew and how good he was instead of trying to learn something new and benefit from someone else's experience. He would ask me a question and then argue with me over my answer, I finally tired of this and asked him why he asked me a question if he was not willing to listen to my answer. This practitioner failed to utilize an opportunity to increase his understanding and skill by being humble. If I enter any setting with the mindset that I am going to show what I know and impress everybody then I am a student whose teacup is full. There is no room for any more tea. With this attitude I will never be able to fully appreciate what the teacher is trying to teach and I miss a great deal.

In contrast, if I come to a class with an empty teacup then I am forgetting what I know, and truly trying to understand and appreciate what the person is trying to teach me. The Bible talks about this as well. We are like vessels that God can use to share blessings, but in order for us to be used we must first be emptied of ourselves and then we can be filled with what God has to offer us. (Matt. 23; 2 Tim. 2) If we lose ourselves in the person of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves changed. I like to remember that big heads make better targets, but having an accurate assessment of myself will allow me to plan my attack in a manner that will be successful. Humility is seeing your self through God's eyes, and not believing in the lie that our pride feeds us. When I learn what pride is and how it can hinder my ability to see things as they are and see myself as I am, then I enable myself to escape situations that I cannot handle successfully and respond to people and situations in the correct manner; and that allows me to make a greater impact on my environment.

Perception v Reality:

As a fighter, I wish to make my opponent perceive the situation (my skill, my resources, or my actions) as being something other than what they really are. This is the concept of faking. If I take the fake offered to me by the “world” or Satan in the different situations I find myself in then I open myself up for trouble. This principle is very important for working with people outside of the martial setting, for example: I am a manager at Wal-Mart and I walk by a group of associates standing around with their vests on and talking to each other. The perception is that they are stealing time by not working when they are supposed to be, however this perception may not be reality. I need to take the time to feel this situation out and find the truth, which could be that they are on break. Understanding that my perception of events and what is in reality occurring are not always the same thing allows me to be able to look past the “fake” that is offered me, and see the situation as it really is, enabling me to set my own plan into action and keep control of the situation.

Seasons and Sashes:

In kung fu class, the student begins with nothing. From this point of having nothing, they test for their *white sash*, from there they progress to their *green sash*, and then to their *brown sash*, and then finally to their *black sash*. This progression of sashes is very much like the progression of seasons in our life. We start with nothing. In class, we have a board that shows all the students according to rank, my Shifu is fond of saying that the secret to keeping your name on the board is getting your name on the board by getting your white sash. This is much like salvation; the secret to keeping it is getting it. Our life is a series or progression of periods that the Bible calls seasons. (Eccl. 3) In each sash, you learn different things and develop different skills. Likewise, in each season of your life you learn different things and develop different skills. However, if as a white sash, I am always looking to become a green sash and thus increase in rank and status within the class instead of seeking to learn all I can while I am a white sash then I am missing the point and failing to benefit from the sash that Shifu has awarded me. God has given us seasons in our life to benefit us, such as childhood, singleness, matrimony, and so on. But too many times we look at those seasons as problems we need to remedy rather than blessings that we can benefit from.

Fear God:

One of the first things God taught me through kung fu was what it meant to fear Him. He taught me this by putting me into a relationship with a person, my Shifu and his teacher, that modeled that Fear. The Scriptures tell us to fear God. What does that mean? Is it a real fear, such as I am scared of Him? You better believe it! But it is more than that. It is more of a deep, well grounded respect and reverence. I respect my Shifu and his teacher so much that I am afraid of them. I am afraid of doing something that will upset them. Take that concept and put it on a much grander scale and that is the way I should view God. In Proverbs chapter 1, it refers to the Fear of the Lord as the beginning of Wisdom. If wisdom is the full application of correct knowledge and understanding, then it is an action that requires a motivation. It is the Fear of the Lord that says I am afraid of disappointing or letting God down. Because I am afraid of letting God down or displeasing Him, I am motivated to study, gain, and apply the knowledge of the Holy to my life, which leads to Wisdom.

Family:

One of the things that I find most unique about my kung fu Association is that it so perfectly models for me the way the Kingdom is supposed to be. My kung fu Association is composed of my Shifu's teacher at the head, and his students under him that make up individual schools, and under them are their students. There is such a feeling of family and acceptance, community and respect among this group of people. I can go to Vegas, or Ohio, or Fargo, or Kansas City and instantly be accepted into the kung fu School there as if I were a brother coming to visit from far away despite the fact that those people do not know me from Adam. Yet, we are all united under the banner of our Shiye (teacher's teacher) in the same organization. That is the way the Kingdom is. We are all united under the banner of Christ, in the organization which is the church, as family despite the fact that I may not know some of them from Adam, and we may come from all walks of life and backgrounds yet we are all family through Christ.

Commitment:

Mr. Miyagi said it best in the *Karate Kid*: "Walk on the road, hmm? Walk right side, safe. Walk left side, safe. Walk middle, sooner later, get squish, just like grape. Here karate same thing. Either you karate do 'yes'; or karate do 'no'. You karate do

‘guess so’, squish. Just like grape. Understand?” This is true of almost anything, but especially of things having to do with warfare of any kind, whether it is physical, spiritual, verbal, psychological, or political. If I attempt something with a half-committed approach then I will only get myself into big trouble. I need to give whatever I do my all in all. This applies to my Christian walk as well, I need to give everything I have to walking that walk, or else I will be tripped up by Satan. Revelation 3:15-16 talks about how God feels about this issue of commitment.” I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.” Harsh words, but God never says anything lightly.

Pillars of Growth:

As Christians we are warriors, soldiers in the Army of the Lord fighting a war. Satan, our adversary, is doomed to defeat due to the act of sacrifice at the cross, but he is desperate to take as many people with him as possible. Satan seeks to accomplish two things:

- 1.) Prevent people from becoming Christians, and should he fail
- 2.) Prevent those who have become Christians from being useful soldiers in the cause against him.

Now Satan is an adversary far above our sad and pathetic means, he is crafty and quick and stronger than any one or group of us; however, we have the hole card, the veritable Ace – Jesus, and He is more than able to defeat Satan. Thus we are more than conquerors through Him. However, if we are to be able to be used by Christ to defeat Satan, we must do certain things. The first thing is to place Christ as the **Lord of your life**. This is vital; He must be the center of balance in our spiritual lives. In kung fu we call the center of balance the Dan Tian and it is very important that we keep this part of our body stable and not break harmony with it, because if we do we lose all power in combat. Now, in kung fu there are four essentials of combat training I have to be involved in if I am to be an effective fighter: nutrition, conditioning, technique, and contact. If I am weak in any one of those areas, some one who is strong in all of them will have the edge. If he gets an edge over me and I am not able to gain it back, then I will lose. When I was younger, I went through a discipleship study with my father called

Master Life for the purpose of preparing me to minister in the martial arts, one of the things that I came away with was the understanding that there are four spiritual pillars of growth involved in being a strong Christian: Reading the Word, Praying within the will of God, Fellowshiping with believers, and Witnessing to the world. If we as Christians do not develop all of these disciplines with equal emphasis then we will not have the ability that we must have in order to have Christ use us to defeat Satan.

Relationship Witnessing:

Paul talks about studying to show ourselves approved (2 Tim. 2:15) and Peter talks about being always ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15). I liken this to a quote from Bruce Lee. He was talking to his teacher in his movie *Enter the Dragon* describing his fighting style. He said that when his opponent contracts, he expands; and when his opponent expands, he contracts; and when an opening presents itself, he does not hit, it hits by itself. When we witness, we enter into relationships with other people, be it from perfect strangers talking to each other in a gas station or long-term friends discussing matters of the heart. As you talk and interact, they say something to you, and you listen; you say something to them and they listen; and when an opening presents itself, you do not think "witness", you just witness without thinking.

Bruce's fighting ability is possible only because of his **diligent practice** and **intention to fight**. Likewise our ability to witness instinctively requires us to train diligently with the intention of witnessing. While Bruce Lee trained by learning physical techniques and going through ritual combat sets (forms), talking and listening to his teacher, practicing with classmates, and helping to teach younger students; we train by studying the Word, praying to God, fellowshiping with other believers, and witnessing. While a well rounded fighter seeks to be strong through all four pillars of training, Christian should seek to become strong in all four pillars of growth. Without training in those four pillars we (Christians) will never be strong. Diligent training, dedicated practice! Let me encourage you with this promise from Scripture, "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." Luke 21:15 Prepare your heart and let the Lord speak through you; train hard, fight easy!

Robbing Ourselves of Power:

Shifu talks all the time about bad habits that students have that rob them of power and the real benefit of practice. Such things as speed over precision and muscle over technique serve as examples to me of things that we as Christians do to rob ourselves of power and influence in our ministries. The following are some examples:

Segregated/Integrated Christian:

Let me share with you some of the ways that Christians are foiled in their ministry, robbed of precious opportunities to minister. It is a common practice for Christians of today to segregate their faith. You know what I mean; we have different areas of our life: employment, entertainment, education, and enlightenment. We like to keep those areas of our life compartmentalized, separated from all other aspects of our lives, which is ok. However, we like to compartmentalize Christ as well, which is not ok. You may ask me, "What do you mean?" Well, here it is in a nutshell: We exclude Christ from certain places and activities of our lives, restricting Him to Church and Church people. But Christ is either Lord **of** all, or He is not Lord **at** all. We either need to allow Christ full access to all areas of our lives, allowing Him to flow freely into all activities of our lives or we do not let Him in at all. It is all or none people! Remember who you are in Christ and who you represent everywhere you are, and with everything that you do.

The word Integrity is based on the same root as integral, and it means being wholly one person. It means that we should integrate all areas of our lives into our Christian life. Are you the same person at work as you are with your friends during play, or at church, or at school? What kind of things do you do at work, what kind of movies do you watch, and what things do you talk about at school? You can not claim to be a person of integrity if you are not wholly one person all the time. We as Christians lose so much power by not being sincere about our faith to the world. Sincerity is the secret to being a powerful witness to the world and the secret to sincerity is being wholly focused on Christ and developing your relationship with Him. When we do that, all other things will fall into place in due time.

Purity as a Direction, not a Line:

One of the things I really like about the book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris, is his concept of purity. Harris says that **purity is a direction, not a line in the**

sand! It took me a very long time to understand that concept, but here is my best shot at trying to explain it to you. If purity is defined as a line that I cannot cross, then I can still be pure no matter what I do as long as I do not cross that line. I can get as close as I want, and my nature will want to get very close. So, if my line is abstinence until marriage, then I can do everything but sleep with that girl and still be pure. But is that what the Bible says? No, it says flee from evil. Run away! Run very far away, in the opposite direction from sin. So purity can not be a line in the sand. It has to be a direction. I should be all the time moving away from unclean things and then I am pure. It was not that long ago that my Shiye was lecturing at a seminar where he explained this very same concept in relation to martial training. If my training is not correct then no matter how hard I train or how often, I am moving away from the goal. **You cannot get to the goal if you are walking in the opposite direction!** This concept applies to purity as well, if I am moving away from impurity I cannot get too close to it. I will never reach it because I am moving in the opposite direction.

Guard Hearts and Eyes:

Another thing that Mr. Harris talked about in his book was that Guys need to stop viewing themselves and acting like hunters or players in the dating game and instead need to start viewing themselves and behaving like Warriors of Honor, guarding the hearts of women. That means doing whatever it takes to not cause a girls heart to be focused where it should not be, like on us instead of Christ. And Girls need to start guarding the eyes of Guys. They often do not realize that their gift of beauty is often flaunted by their wardrobe and it draws our eyes to their bodies instead of to themselves and thus makes it difficult keep our minds on Christ. The Scripture is full of warnings to guard our eyes because our feet follow our eyes – that is, we tend to follow the path in our thinking and eventually our doing that our eyes are drawn towards. How am I supposed to be a minister of the gospel, when I am constantly barraged with visual stimulants that cause my mind to be thinking about everything but Christ? I can not talk to people about the love of Christ, when I am fighting lust on every corner. We too often fail to realize that what we wear tells people about us, and we need to consider what we want to tell them. If we are to minister we need to not do things that hinder our ministry, but rather help it along. This is also paralleled by the concept of intention in Kung Fu. It

is very important that I not let my intention be manipulated or completely drawn by something. If my intention is on my opponents arms, then I am neglecting his feet; if it is on his feet, then I am neglecting his arms; if on his left side, then what about his right. I have to have a universal focus and not allow him to draw my intention to something else.

Rooted:

In kung fu, if I am not rooted, then I will be tossed about by my opponent, even by my own actions as I perform them. I will have no power, and no ability to influence my opponent. But, if I am rooted, then I am able to influence my opponent however I wish. By rooted, I mean I have a strong and stable connection with the ground beneath me. If I am standing on my toes, and someone pushes me, then I will be moved. But if I sink my weight down into my legs, and strike a strong pose, then my opponent can push till his heart's content, and I will be able to absorb and control.

When my co-worker asked me if I was balanced, I asked her to clarify. What does it mean to be balanced? This was her answer, "You know, rooted, grounded, centered, all is well within." After asking my questions, I began my answer. "Balanced? I don't know. But here is what I do know: I am Rooted in Christ, Grounded in the Word, and Centered in the Will of God; so if that makes me balanced, then yeah."

Now, here is a thought: a friend of mine and I discussed where she is going with her education and Christian walk, Christian Counseling. When I asked her why, one of her reasons was that God has given her a passion for discipleship, which is a pillar of counseling. I agreed. Then I began to make an observation, one which she shared.

The church as a whole has failed to educate, to instruct in the disciplines, to disciple people after salvation. When I can not go anywhere without people in the world pegging me as a pastor as soon as I start talking about God or the Bible then there is a problem. It is bad because it is a reflection of the perception of the world that only the leaders of the church are knowledgeable about Scripture. But it is worse when I get the same reaction from the church itself. Is the church so ungrounded in the Word that it thinks like the world?

We place so much emphasis on getting people in the church, but what then? A good friend and student of mine, after becoming saved, asked God the question, "What now?" Over 5 years later, she is still trying to find the answer to that question. She has

to drive 40 miles one way to a church that will disciple her. This is a sad day. When Christian teenagers balk at the idea of putting Christ before their boy/girlfriends, when sharing the gospel with your friends never enters your mind, when you do not even know how to share the gospel there is a problem. When a student spent an hour looking for Hezekiah 2:12, and when 7 out of 10 people believe that 'The love of money is the root of all evil' is an accurate quote from the Bible" then the Scripture is not being taught. Enough time is not being spent in systematically teaching Christians how to study the Bible and what it teaches. When my mediocre knowledge shines like a diamond in the church, then there is a problem. Evangelism is vital, but folks, evangelism is the natural result of proper discipleship! Evangelism will happen quite naturally with disciplined Christians, but it does not work the other way around. If you are not schooled in the disciplines of Christianity, how can you live as one? And if you do not live as one, how can what you say mean anything? I ask you, how can you lead others to a life of godliness, if you do not even know what it is?

Being a Christian is not always easy, but it is not as hard as some make it out to be either. The formula is easy, lose yourself! Lose yourself in the person of Jesus Christ, and you will find yourself changed. But how can you lose yourself in the person of Jesus Christ, if you do not know what He taught. You need to immerse yourself in the Word of God and discover the person of Jesus Christ. Get rooted in Him, and the world will never be able to move you!

Half Steps:

Last night I watched Joshua Harris' video on purity, and he made a comment that got my mind to thinking. He said that purity was lost by tiny little steps away from righteousness, away from holiness. He cited David and his sin with Bathsheba. That whole little episode began with this thought: that when kings went to war, David stayed home. It was not a big deal, just a little step. He was not where he should have been. Then he saw a woman bathing on her rooftop, and instead of looking away and praying away the sinful thoughts, he looked. He watched, he lingered, and he lusted. Then he called for her, and one thing led to another until not only was he an adulterer, but a liar, and a murderer too. All because he took a few little steps, half steps towards sin away from God's holiness.

Being the martial minded person that I am, I naturally thought of some kung fu concept that I could use to parallel this idea, and it came quite naturally. I have found that one of the best ways to close the gap with someone, or to force them back, isn't with brute force or by leaping a great distance, but by taking small steps. We call them half steps and we use them to cover, create, or keep distance between our opponents and ourselves. It would amaze you how close I can get to you without you even knowing it by only taking half steps. Or, even force you into a corner that you don't want to be in by taking half steps. I can work my way through a very crowded room by half steps, and step someone all the way across the room and never take a big step. Sometimes we let ourselves get worked into a corner, or forced into a spot that compromises our witness, that affects our own relationship with God without ever even realizing it because we never took a big step. Many times, as I was a beginner, I had a tendency to get myself backed into a corner. I never could figure out how I got there. Then one day, I realized that it was because I wasn't being aware of the small steps that I was taking backwards. From that day on, I began using that to my advantage, taking small steps forward. Just like that realization and the application of taking small steps forward, we need to spiritualize it and begin taking steps towards holiness and purity and not away from it.