



What's Your Style?

By

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“He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity *and* every good path.”

Proverbs 2:7-9

One of the first questions people ask me about the martial arts I teach is “what’s your style?” Not, does it work, but what’s the type of martial art or the name of the style or system. I usually ask what they mean by ‘style’ so I can address their specific interest. I think the better question is whether a system of martial arts will work in a real-life attack.

While some martial arts instructors have spent their lives studying one type of martial art from one specific ‘style,’ others have studied many types and styles. That is my background having studied and taught many types and styles of martial arts for 55 years. I studied Judo, Aikido, Japanese Karate, Kobudo, and Kung Fu as a teenager, and Tang Soo Do, Tae Kwon Do, Okinawan Karate-do, Kobudo, Kenpo, Kung Fu, and T’ai Chi Ch’uan as an adult.

As for the specific styles I teach now my answer is Yon Ch’uan Martial Arts, 15 Animal Kung Fu, and Hwa Yu T’ai Chi Ch’uan. My primary instructor in all of those arts is Grand Master Robert Xavier. I have also studied with two of his senior students, Grand Masters Dave Maloy and Glenn Newth. I also studied Okinawan Karate-do and Kobudo with Sensei Stephen Van Camp.

I share this information with my students so they will understand that the training methods and self-defense techniques in our classes come from a variety of traditional martial arts systems that are based on “what works.” One of the benefits of studying many martial arts styles over a period of 50+ years is learning what works and what doesn't. Techniques that don't work in real self-defense situations can be easily dropped from the curriculum because there are so many effective techniques available from these martial styles.

Earning a Black Belt in Yon Ch'uan Martial Arts and 15 Animal Kung Fu can take as long as seven to eight years, though some students are able to complete the requirements for 1st Dan in six years. Learning the “art” of martial arts should take several years of intense study in preparation for Black Belt testing. However, learning something that will help you defend yourself should take no longer than one or two classes.

My goal in teaching self defense is that every student learn at least one thing in every class that they could use to their advantage if they were attacked leaving that class. While it may take months or years to develop the ability to deal effectively with a wide range of attacks from one or more people, it is my experience that people of all ages can learn basic self-defense skills in a short period of time. We could call this martial arts style the “style” of using whatever works to effect a safe escape from attack.

The goal in the “whatever works” style of self defense is to avoid

attack, but if attacked to escape in less than five seconds. The reason for selecting five seconds as the goal is that attacks that last longer than five seconds often result in injury to the person being attacked. That's based on teaching scores of students who joined our class because they had been injured in attacks and learning about their experience, and viewing hundreds of real attacks and fights caught on video to better understand the attack and defense process. Instead of teaching students how to "fight," we want them to evade attack and quickly escape to safety. Winning a fight is not our goal. Even experienced martial artists can be seriously injured in a fight, especially if the attacker has a weapon or friends. Our goal is evasion and escape.

"Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, 'Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.'" Luke 20:45-47

Jesus warned His followers of something they saw, but couldn't see. People saw the religious scribes walking around in their long robes, basking in the attention they received in the marketplaces, synagogues and feasts. Jesus, being God, saw something else. He saw the greed and hypocrisy of their hearts and minds and how dangerous they were to the spiritual health and wellbeing of God's people. Jesus saw the futility of their religious practices. Because

Jesus could 'see' what His followers could not see, He warned them to 'beware.'

Martial arts instructors do the same thing for their students. We 'see' the many dangers that face men and women, boys and girls. We have a saying in Grace Martial Arts about these dangers – "You can be attacked anywhere at anytime by anyone."

No matter what 'style' of martial arts you practice, the fundamental elements of self defense are basically the same. We'll begin with how to train to 'Beware, Be Ready, Be Quick.' We begin with *Beware*.

Beware

One definition of 'beware' is: be cautious and alert to danger. Another is: be on your guard.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1

Peter 5:9

You and I may not see the devil, but he's around and he's up to no good.

The same is true about people in this world who want what you have and are willing to hurt you for it. That's why we learn self defense. Many of us learn martial arts because of the 'art,' but we learn self

defense because we want to be safe.

Being 'aware' does not mean being 'afraid.' In fact, we trade 'fear' for 'faith.' That faith is in our training. How do we train to be aware? It's the same methodology for training in any martial technique. We learn what to do, how to do it, when to do it, where to do it and why we do it.

Awareness in self defense means staying sharp, keeping every God-given 'sense' awake to potential danger. That includes sight and sound, taste, touch and smell. It's similar to how we teach young children to beware of dangerous situations. We teach them to look both ways before they cross the street, listen to what we tell them, taste hot food carefully, hold our hand at the mall and don't let go, and run outside if they smell smoke in the house.

Look around the next time you're in a public place and think about what you see people doing. Where is their 'focus'? Are they staying vigilant to know who is watching them? Who is getting closer to them? Who is about to attack them? Or are they focused on their friends or their music player, smart phone, tablet or laptop? Children, teens and adults must be vigilant in public all the time. We don't know who may be targeting us and when they might attack us, unless we practice 'danger awareness.' Take your students through some of these basic 'awareness' scenarios to help them begin thinking 'defensively.'

- Leaving their house
- Walking to school or a friend's house
- Getting in and out of a car
- Walking in a parking lot toward a store
- Walking in a mall from store to store
- Shopping inside a store
- Purchasing items in a store
- Leaving the store to talk back to their car
- Eating with family or friends at a restaurant
- Standing in line at a movie or concert
- Walking from one building to another
- Getting in and out of an elevator
- Riding an escalator at the mall
- Climbing stairs and seeing or hearing another person above or below you

The number and types of 'danger awareness' scenarios you can go through with your students is almost limitless. Make them as real as you can while helping your students enjoy the learning experience. Learning how to deal with a 'scary' situation doesn't have to be scary.

The 'primary goal' in self-defense training is to help students develop confidence in their ability to live safely and defend themselves honorably, efficiently and effectively.

Once we learn a martial technique and ‘how’ to do it, is that it? Of course not. We ‘practice’ that technique over and over again until we could literally do it in our sleep. We perfect it because that technique may be the one that will save our life someday in a real-life attack.

How do we train our students in danger awareness? I play a game with students called ‘What If?’ It’s a scenario-based defense game where students share about a dangerous situation that bothers them. ‘What if’ this happened? What could we do?

We play the game of ‘What If?’ in four stages:

1. How could we avoid the dangerous situation by using awareness skills? (e.g. knowing dangers associated with the location and time of day)
2. How can we escape from the dangerous situation and where would we go? (e.g. sensing something bad is about to happen and moving quickly toward a safe place or safe adult)
3. If we can’t escape, how do we face the dangerous situation? (e.g. passive and aggressive positioning)
4. How do we deal with the dangerous situation efficiently and effectively in less than 5 seconds? (e.g. blocking, striking, throwing, escaping)

It’s a game, so we have some fun with it at first. Younger children enjoy running away from the ‘bad’ people and toward their parents or other adults in the dojo. Older children enjoy the contact aspect of being grabbed/pushed/pulled and getting away from the attacker

quickly with an evasion/escape technique. Teens and adults find satisfaction in being able to block/punch/kick/throw an opponent with 'stun and run' techniques.

After a little bit of fun, we get down to the business of training in *how* to perform the techniques we just learned to gain Power, Speed and Accuracy (PSA) in each movement. We also teach them basic martial techniques of yielding, clearing, contacting, controlling and countering that include folding, unfolding and rapid striking to 'steal' the attacker's strength and 'seize control' of the situation. We teach 'off-balancing and redirecting' to remove the attacker away from his or her target – us.

Blocking and countering are done slowly at first to focus on power and accuracy, then done incrementally faster to build speed while controlling power and accuracy. Slowness at first is also helpful for partners so everyone is safe during training. Off-balancing and redirecting (throwing down, throwing away) is done slowly at first to focus on blending with the attacker, off-balancing them and redirecting their energy while changing the height, width and depth of the attacker through the fluidity and precision of the movement.

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not

expect.” Matthew 24:43-44

Jesus sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. They asked Him a question – “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” They believed Jesus was the Messiah and that He would bring in the Messianic Kingdom for Israel.

Jesus began His answer by warning them about being deceived. He said that many would come in His name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and deceive many people. Jesus said that even when they heard of wars and rumors of wars and nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom and of famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places, they should know that the end will not be yet – “All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

Jesus also warned His disciples that they would be hated by all nations for His name’s sake and would be persecuted and killed. Jesus said many false prophets would rise up and deceive many people. He said that lawlessness would abound and the love of many would grow cold. Jesus said His Gospel would be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, “and then the end will come.”

It was in this context of answering the disciples’ question about the sign of His coming and the end of the age that Jesus told them to “watch” and “be ready.” The Lord also gave an example that is familiar to martial artists – a home invasion – “if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have

watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.” Then Jesus added – “Therefore you also be ready.”

Be Ready

Being aware of danger is a great place to start, but it isn't enough if we're not ready to do something to defend against that danger. Awareness can help keep you out of dangerous situations, but what happens when you find yourself so close to an attacker that your awareness doesn't give you enough time to escape? Would you know what to do?

That's why self-defense training must go beyond just classes in awareness. If you see a dangerous person approaching you in a parking lot and you move as quickly as you can toward your car or some other safe place but the person moves faster than you and catches up to you before you are in that safe place, are you 'ready' to defend yourself?

Five Defensive Options

There are five basic options available to you in every self-defense situation.

1. Escape
2. Block
3. Strike
4. Trap
5. Throw

Think about the situation where you are trying to run from someone chasing you in a parking lot, but they are faster than you are. They catch up to you from behind and grab your arm or shoulder. Are you ready to do something to get away from your attacker? Are you ready to *escape* from their grab? *Block* them as they try to grab you? *Strike* them when they grab you? *Trap* them after they grab you? *Throw* them when they grab you?

Which self-defense option works best for you often corresponds with how you've trained to be ready. If you are ready with multiple self-defense options to a variety of attacks from different directions, you will have an increased confidence when you are walking in a parking lot (or anywhere else).

Escapes

Escaping from a grab depends on many things, so a student of self defense needs to train in escaping from a variety of grabs: grabs from the front, grabs from the sides, grabs from the back – wrist grabs, arm grabs, elbow grabs, shoulder grabs, full-body grabs.

We train students in the 3 E's of Escaping: *Effective, Efficient Evasion*.

Three-Zone Defense

Knowing how to escape begins by knowing where you stand in relation to a potential attacker.

Zone 3 — Not within reachable space ... if a potential attacker cannot reach you without taking a step, you are in a relatively safe zone. You can often escape by simply moving away from the potential attacker quickly.

Zone 2 — Within reachable space ... if a potential attacker can reach you without taking a step, you are in an unsafe zone. You can often escape by simply moving away from the potential attacker quickly.

Zone 1 — Physical contact employed ... when someone grabs you or strikes toward you, you are in a danger zone. You can often escape by employing a basic escape technique or by blocking a strike and moving away from the potential attacker quickly. If

escape or blocking technique is not effective, then employing a countering technique (strike, trap or throw) often leads to an effective escape from the attacker.

A key to effective evasion includes *efficient* movement. Struggling for a lengthy period of time often leads a defender to exhaustion and defeat. Learning how to effect an escape in less than five seconds usually leaves the defender with enough energy and strength to run to a safe place. It also moves the defender away from the attacker before being trapped or seriously injured.

Moving to Safety

There are *six basic directions* in self defense: *retreat* (moving backward), *advance* (moving forward), *left* (moving left), *right* (moving right), *up* (moving up) and *down* (moving down). Actual self-defense movements often include multiple movements at the same time: e.g. down-retreat-left; up-retreat-right, etc. The movement chosen depends on the type of attack and the type of escape technique.

For example: an attacker uses his right hand to grab the left wrist of a defender. The defender might move his body in a down-retreat-right direction while executing a twisting-arm escape against the attacker's grab. That moves the defender away from the attacker using their left hand to effect a double grab. The defender's body moving in a downward direction also adds strength to the escape and causes the attacker to either let go or step forward in a bent position, causing them to lose some of the strength of their grab. It also places the

defender in an excellent position to run away from the attacker, or if the attacker chases him, to kick backward driving heel to lower abdomen, then continue running away.

The combination of directional evasive movement (Yield and Clear) and effective escape technique (Contact and Control) accomplishes the primary objective: the defender escapes and moves from Zone 1 to Zone 3 before the attacker can employ a second attack.

Moving in the wrong direction can have the opposite effect of an escape technique. Instead of getting away from an attacker, a defender could find himself or herself pulled closer to the attacker's body and grabbed with both hands into a grip that is more difficult to escape.

For example: an attacker uses his right hand to grab the left wrist of a defender. The defender might move his or her body in an up-advance-left direction while attempting a twisting-arm escape against the attacker's grab. That places the defender closer to the attacker and removes them from a position of strength to one of weakness.

Training to Escape

“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things

that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.” 2 Peter 1:1-4

Many martial arts classes have an ‘introductory’ lesson that gives students and instructors an opportunity to get to know each other and helps the students understand what they can expect to learn. Whatever the martial arts style, self defense will probably be a key element in that first lesson.

In Grace Martial Arts, we want every new student to know that they will learn how to be *safe from harm*. The ‘introductory’ class will include the 3-Zone Defense concept and demonstrations of basic escapes from a one-hand wrist grab and two-hand wrists grab. We want students to understand *what* they’re doing and *why* they’re doing it along with *how* to do it.

So, how do we train students to escape effectively and efficiently?

We train new students to understand the ‘dynamics’ of someone grabbing them. Most attackers will use a ‘natural’ grip, so we demonstrate how difficult it is to escape from a stronger person’s ‘natural’ grip unless we change their grip to ‘unnatural.’ [More on that later in the series.]

We want to make the training 'fun' rather than 'scary' for new students. They need to understand that we care about them and their safety. We move slowly toward new students so they better understand the physical actions and reactions involved in self defense. We also move slowly to help them overcome the 'fear' of being grabbed and the 'feel' of each technique.

Every student is a unique person, so we want them to feel confident in the ability of their instructor to teach them and their ability to learn from the instructor. Some students are more sensitive to pain than other students. Some students are timid or concerned about being embarrassed during class. Some students want to show off during class and can hurt others during training. Those are some of the personal dynamics that are important to remember during 'escape' training.

We want students to 'experience' the process and not just 'watch' the process. Instructors help students 'partner' with another student (usually of similar age, size and gender) to experience the 'escape' process. I still use the Tori/Uke system I learned in Judo as a boy. It helps students become 'engaged' in training because of the hands-on involvement with their partner. The Tori 'executes' a technique in response to the Uke who 'initiates' the attack against the Tori.

We begin the 'escape' training in class by explaining the role of each partner and designating which partner is the Tori and which is the Uke. Every student will get the opportunity to act as a Tori and Uke with each technique. The instructor asks all of the Uke in the class to raise their hands to make sure they know what they're doing, then demonstrates what they will do during 'escape' training. The Uke acts in the role of the 'attacker.' The instructor then asks all of the Tori in the class to raise their hands and demonstrates what they will do during training. The Tori acts in the role of the 'defender.' Once the instructor is confident that everyone knows their part and how to do it safely, the teacher gives the order for the Uke to grab the Tori in the prescribed manner (e.g. right hand to right wrist, left hand to left wrist, right hand to left wrist, etc). The instructor then gives the order for the Tori to escape from the grab in the prescribed manner.

A general rule of 'escape' training is that the Tori responds to the Uke's 'linear' grabs (described above) with a circular (spherical) technique that works against the weakest part of the grab and changes the Uke's grip from 'natural' to 'unnatural.' [More about that later in the series.]

'Making' Distance

One of the early lessons in 'escape' training during Grace Martial Arts classes is to Yield and Clear while performing all techniques. Instructors will demonstrate with an assistant instructor or senior student what happens when Tori performs an 'escape' technique

without moving away from Uke. That's the classic Zone 1 to Zone 2 situation where Tori escapes Uke's grab without Yielding and Clearing their body. Tori may be free of the grab for a moment, but Uke easily grabs them again because Tori did not make any distance while performing the technique. Tori goes from Zone 1 to Zone 2 and quickly back to Zone 1, which means the 'escape' technique didn't work.

Escape techniques only work when Tori performs the technique while moving away from Uke to a distance where Uke cannot effect another grab without having to take one or more steps toward Tori. We train Tori to take at least two steps away from Uke so Uke cannot grab them again without having to make a big movement toward Tori. Tori learns to escape using 'Yield, Clear, Run.' Once the training moves toward 'street' (real-time) speed, Tori will see the importance of performing the technique as one motion (yield, clear, escape, run) rather than individual movements.

That brings up the importance of students understanding 'making distance' and 'taking distance.' Doing something with 'distance' is the key. 'Making' distance is moving farther from your partner. 'Taking' distance is moving closer to your partner. We teach 'making distance' first because we want students to escape 'from' a grab whenever possible. We teach 'taking distance' later when the training is about Uke 'making' distance with grab, push or pull. [More about 'taking distance' training later in the series.]

We recommend instructors break down the technique for new students in this fashion:

- Uke grabs tori
- Tori retreats with Yield and Clear while performing technique
- Tori turns in correct direction and runs from Uke

We go through the count slowly at first, then pick up speed as Tori develops a 'feel' for each technique. Moving too quickly in the beginning can frustrate new students. The early classes are a great opportunity to help students build confidence.

[We have fun counting in Grace Martial Arts classes using English, Spanish, Japanese, Korean and Chinese names for numbers. If a student can count in another language (e.g. French, German), we let them call out the numbers and everyone follows them. Kids love it!]

We invite you to visit GraceMartialArts.com again soon as we continue to share insights into Martial Arts from a Christian perspective. We also invite you and your family to become part of a Christian Martial Arts program.

If you would like more information about Grace Martial Arts and Karate For Christ International, please contact Sensei Mark McGee at gracemartialarts1@gmail.com.

Teaching Children How To Be Healthy And Safe

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