

Enduring Hardship, and Emerging Stronger

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Through my journey in taekwondo, I have had a lot of setbacks and pauses, including surgeries, other medical issues, or even choosing to do other things rather than going to class, but through all of this I learned how to be patient, keep working through hard times, and to trust the process.

Have you done something in your life where you expected it to be easy and fast but in the end it was hard and slow? I did.

I have been in Taekwondo for five years now and I love the community and support at CMA. However, when I started, I wanted to earn my Black Belt quickly. Things didn't turn out the way I had hoped. Setbacks are an inevitable part of life, and while we cannot control when they happen, we do have the power to choose how we respond to them. Through my journey in taekwondo, I have had a lot of setbacks and pauses, including surgeries, other medical issues, or even choosing to do other things rather than going to class, but through all of this I learned how to be patient, keep working through hard times, and to trust the process.

When I joined Challenge Martial Arts, I was nine years old and I wanted to get my Black Belt in three years on the dot because I was told that is how long it can take; so I told myself, "I am going to get it in three years so I can do something else, and have more fun". I had no idea at the time what that something else was, but I told myself, and my family, that no matter what I was going to see it through and get my Black Belt. Then, not even a year later, I almost quit when I was an Orange Belt because I had lost all interest in continuing. Thinking back on it, I remember trying to convince myself that I didn't need my Black Belt - I could make other accomplishments in my life that would be "just as good". At the time I was nine years old and couldn't understand all the lessons, character, and friendships I would make along the way. Here I am still in Taekwondo five years later, and if I could go back, I wouldn't change a thing. Staying in taekwondo over the years has shown me that I am my own worst enemy; I am the only person who can easily influence me into doing something like quitting. But I am seeing through what I

started all those years ago because I believe in myself to do it. Even though I didn't earn my Black Belt when I thought I wanted to, I believe everything has worked out, and continues to do so, for the best.

“Timing is everything. If it’s meant to happen it will. At the right time. At the right place. For the right reasons.” - Anonymous. I found this quote and it spoke to me for a reason I can't quite explain. When I read it, I thought it really explained my journey through taekwondo very well. The thing is that if God wants something to happen, then it is going to happen. We can't always stop things from happening just because we are uncomfortable, or scared with how they might turn out. I can't count how many times I wanted to quit because I was scared of what might happen. On the other hand, I also have wanted to quit because things weren't going my way. Sometimes I got wrapped up in my own self doubts - I would think I couldn't do this, that I wasn't going to be able to make it to Black Belt. Eventually, I put all my doubts aside and started telling myself that there are so many people who believe in, and encourage, me. Why can't I believe in myself?

When I was in Blue Belt, I was doing it with my cousin and we were in the same belt helping each other, learning together, and progressing together, and I thought that it was very beneficial for me to be going through a belt level with a family member - with someone close to me who would know about all the struggles with the forms I was learning. I wanted to always be in the same belt as him, to proceed together, and just be with each other so that we would always have that support system of being in the same belt, and eventually we could get our Black Belts at the same time. Even though I tried super hard to stay on track with him and was doing really well, I ended up falling behind,

because when I was in Blue Belt I had to get a surgery that kept me out of taekwondo for a few months. When I came back, it was like a slap in the face because I felt like I could not remember anything, and I had to ask for a lot more help from others because getting back to where you were, when you are out for a long time, is so hard. This was one of my toughest times in taekwondo, and felt like the easiest time to give up. I practiced my hardest to get up to the same belt as my cousin; I pushed myself, and I finally got to Brown Low, but the fight wasn't over. I kept pushing myself and we tested into Brown High together. What I learned from this experience is that I can accomplish a lot of things if I put my head down and work for it. I won't accomplish anything by giving up, or expecting it to just happen. Getting big rewards in life often requires big sacrifices, and I was prepared to make them.

On the other hand, resisting the small rewards in life to wait for something better strengthens self-regulation and willpower. There was once a test done on children, called the marshmallow test, where these people would put a marshmallow in front of a kid, then tell them that if they didn't eat it, then they could have two marshmallows when the adult came back. I feel like I have done the marshmallow test in my own way. I have been waiting for what seems like a very long time to get my Black Belt, when I could have easily quit and been OK with the belt I had at the time. I once heard that "if you quit at one thing it becomes easier and easier to quit other things down the road". If you want the big achievements in life, you have to ignore the little unrelated distractions that are going to come along the way.

Learning to cope with delayed results and embracing patience when things take longer than expected is also something I have needed to deal with throughout my entire

journey. Things don't always go our way, and that can be frustrating, sad, and even scary at times. But the thing is that if I always had things go my way when I wanted them to, I would have quit a long time ago, and would never have made it to Recommended. Sometimes waiting out the storm of emotions, or heartache, and working through those tough times, can lead us to a wonderful achievement. Another big thing that plays into this is trusting God's plan that He has set in place for us. During my journey at Challenge Martial Arts I have found that we can't always see the plan He has for us. When I was about to test into Black Belt Recommended, my family and I were planning to move out of Alaska; that was really hard for me because, by then, I was so close to Black Belt. I wanted to wait it out and test for my Black Belt. But I realized that that wasn't my choice to make - there was nothing I could do about whether or not we were moving. Getting closer to my test for Recommended, I was given a choice: I could test into Recommended the normal way, where you have all the aspects of a Recommended test, or I could take a modified Recommended test, and it would be more like a Color Belt test. After getting these options, I thought long and hard about this, because I had a lot to consider, like that there was still a chance we weren't moving, and if we ended up not moving, then I would have just tested into Recommended the easy way. I ended up not taking the easy route, because ultimately we never know what is going to happen, and if we constantly are choosing the easy ways in life, then we are never going to see the good things that come out of doing the hard things - like earning more respect from people, or learning tough lessons, or working through the pain. I am not trying to tell you that taking the easy way is never an

option; what I am trying to say is that it is not the only option available to you and it is not always the best option.

Throughout my journey of striving for my Black Belt, I needed to have patience. A lot of the time achieving what we truly want is not an easy task. With all the setbacks and sacrifices I have made to keep on my journey to Black Belt, I have learned that even if I get knocked down, I can get back up and fight ten times harder in order to reach the goal I am striving for. My Black Belt.

In conclusion, while setbacks and timing often challenge our plans, how we respond to these obstacles is what ultimately defines our success. Timing is crucial in pursuing what we want, yet setbacks are inevitable. How we respond to these delays shapes our ability to move forward and ultimately reach our desired goals, like me getting my Black Belt. By learning patience and adapting, we become better equipped to achieve our goals. These challenges, though difficult, provide invaluable lessons that can guide us toward personal growth and success. It's not about when things happen, but how we handle them along the way that truly matters.