

# Taekwondo is More Than Just Kicks

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Studying taekwondo, I realized it's more than learning hand and foot techniques. It helps you develop a good character, gives you good connections with others, and helps you develop a closer relationship with God.

When I first started taekwondo, I thought it was all about learning how to kick and punch efficiently. After four years, I know differently. So, if it's not only about kicking and punching, what else do you gain from taekwondo? When I began as a White Belt, I quickly began to learn my first techniques. I learned how to properly fold for a block. To properly fold for a block you have to have one arm bent and across your body with your hand by your face; the other arm needs to be across your body going the opposite direction and down low. Which is surprisingly difficult. Crossing your centerline was the first of many difficulties. I also learned how to make a fist: where to place your thumb and that it is important that no light can be seen through your fist. I learned how to accomplish my first stances, and how to place my hands in a set position. (Your feet must be together with your hands placed tightly at your side.) I learned my very first kick and how to properly chamber and extend for my kick. All of those techniques became a part of my first form – the first of many to come. We are taught weapons forms, self-defense skills, staff drills, and board breaks. On top of learning all those drills and techniques, though, we also work on our personal character. At the start of every class, we have our bow in pledge, and then we all take a seat and discuss the Character Component of the month. We discuss the ins and outs of that characteristic, how it helps improve you, how it can help your personal relationships with friends and family, and how it can ultimately help your relationship with Christ. After my first class, I knew that I wouldn't just be taught how to have a good and strong kick or punch, but that building my character is just as, if not more important than, learning the physical stuff in taekwondo. In this essay, I will discuss three points that taekwondo helps benefit other than your physical techniques: first, how much your character develops; second, how your relationships with others are enhanced; and lastly, how your personal growth in your journey as a Christian improves.

The first thing I will talk about is how much your character develops. In CMA, we study twelve different Character Components. We cover one of those every month. In addition, we also have two themes, Confidence and Connection. Each month we study both of those and how the Character Component of the month ties into both of the themes. The twelve Components are: Compassion, Diligence, Grace, Integrity, Love, Patience,

Peace, Respect, Self-Control, True Humility, Trust, and Truth. As I mentioned before, we have character discussions every class. Those discussions are fifteen minutes to sometimes an hour long. We have an open talk about the Component. Most of the time there are questions we ponder and go over with the instructor and our fellow students. In the third week of the month we meditate. We are led through proper breathing and given a mantra to repeat in our head (a mantra is a small sentence that can be inspirational that you say over and over again), a question to think over, or an opportunity to pray about a specific topic. Through the discussions or the meditation, I have learned how to be patient and respectful. During discussions, especially the really long ones, I often get restless and impatient while sitting quietly and listening to others talk. Imagine: you have been sitting down on the mat for a long time and your feet start to fall asleep, or you have an upcoming test that you need to practice forms and drills for, or the conversation isn't of interest to you. Sometimes with all of those going on at once, you need to just sit, breathe, and maybe say a prayer to be respectful and try to engage in the conversation. By doing that, you are pushing yourself to get through an uncomfortable or boring situation without being disruptive or having a bad attitude. Which works on your Patience!

You also have opportunities to work on your character while working on the floor. One of the things we practice is drills. Staff drills, compass drills, kicking drills, striking combinations, and sparring drills. Those become tedious fast. Say you are told to go practice your kicking combinations. You say, "Yes ma'am," go pull out a wavemaster and begin your combination. At first, you are just running it and working out small details. Once you have the kicks all down in order, better with the memorization, and have been doing it for a while, you start to get tired, or bored. But you haven't been told what to do next or have permission to move onto something else. So you continue to work on it. Your legs begin to ache and you start to sweat. It is very easy to get sucked into the mindset that you have already practiced enough so you start to slack on your technique. You don't get your leg up high enough, or you try to delay having to do it again by talking with someone else or just moving slowly. But by not staying with it, you are giving in to your weakness. One of the benefits from drills is will power. Your ability to endure. Which is also Diligence.

Through Diligence you learn to have Respect for your higher ranks and understand they know more than you. While running forms with fellow students, you learn Patience to follow the leader and not get ahead of them. During sparring you learn Self-Control over both your emotions and your power. Whether you are sitting through discussion, practicing drills, or running forms, you are working on your character and bettering yourself by keeping a good attitude and giving it your all.

On to point two: Your relationships with others are enhanced. When I started taekwondo, it was in 2021. Right after the “big pandemic”, I was not able to get out of the house a lot. My taekwondo instructor has been best friends with my Mom for over 30 years. She goes to my church and we were talking once and she said there was this summer camp she was hosting and KayLea, my younger sister, wanted to go. My mom said she wanted someone to go with her so that she wasn’t alone. I told Mom that I would do it. So we went. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting to like it or have any fun. I believe that there were four people in the class with me. We did some small stuff and the camp was a couple of days long. I actually enjoyed it. So I asked Mom if I could sign up for the Become a Black Belt program. Of course she said yes. And so I began my journey as a White Belt, four years ago. For me, it was a form of socialization. I made new friends. And actually, I met my best friend at taekwondo. She became a Black Belt last year. It was very encouraging to see her go through the program before me. My fellow students have formed my friend group. We spend a lot of time at the studio, so it is kind of hard not to become attached to the people there with you. They are your partners for drills, they help critique your skill and technique, and ultimately help you become the best version of yourself.

Then you have the relationship between instructor and student. At a Black Belt ceremony I attended, one of the students that was receiving her Black Belt was giving a speech, in which she talked about the relationship between instructor and student. She talked about how you can tell what the instructor is trying to say just by her eyes and body language. Without a single word said. You spend so much time with your instructor, and you become in sync. It’s truly incredible.

Another way your connections with others are enhanced is with the community. In CMA, we have a Demo Team, which you can join when you are an Orange Belt. The Demo Team represents CMA and we do demonstrations and routines with music. One of the performances we have every year at a community event is called Fun in the Midnight Sun. Nikiski Rec Center hosts it every year and there are booths, food trucks, and businesses from around town that come down to participate. CMA is one of the businesses that goes. We have a booth and we put on a performance about three times throughout the day. At the booth, people from all around the community come to watch us. We answer questions, run forms, and break boards for everyone to witness. It is a form of outreach which benefits the community and the studio by getting our name out more.

I never expected to have as many friends as I do now. They are all truly a blessing. Good connections are essential in life. Choosing friends who help build you up and become the best version of you is really important. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says that, “Bad character corrupts good morals.” This means to be mindful of who you choose to hang around with. The most important relationship and friend you have, though, is with God. Which brings me to my last point.

Your relationship with Christ is crucial to success in life. I have grown up going to church most of my childhood and all of my teen years. Church for me used to be something that I would do on a Sunday rather than watching T.V. or sleeping in. I would sit through a sermon and do some singing. I wasn’t really engaged. When I started taekwondo, I studied more of God and His impact on people's lives outside of the church setting. CMA has both a secular and a faith based curriculum. Since I am homeschooled and I.D.E.A. is paying my tuition, I am required to do the secular curriculum. But my Mom wanted me to memorize the verses as well as the quotes. I still sat through faith based discussions and participated. I learned more than I already knew, with a different spin on things. Other than just half-way listening to a sermon every week, we talked and dove deeper into different topics. I mentioned earlier that we meditate and there are some days we are given a specific thing to pray about, to go to God for Him to guide us. That was also pretty beneficial.

Everyone at the studio is so caring. You get the feeling of home that some people may have not experienced before then. It is a safe place to learn and grow. It is impossible not to see God's work in the lives of everyone there. I don't think you get this at all studios, but this comes from the hearts of our instructors. Without them, the studio wouldn't be here blessing the lives of Nikiski and bringing people closer to God.

Back to our first question, "What do you gain from taekwondo?" With this essay, I hope I showed everything that has benefited me while studying this art. When I look back to four years ago, I see how much I have grown up and what taekwondo has done to help to shape the person I am today. I started out thinking that my greatest achievements would be going through the belts all the way to Black Belt, or breaking my first board, or winning my first sparring match. But when I look back, it's not those that I see mostly. I see how much my character, personal relationships with others, and my growth spiritually have expanded exponentially. To me taekwondo is more than physical. You gain so much more than a good physique, or a nice punch. Those are still good things, but you are growing your spiritual and mental self as well.