

Spreading the Gospel With Kickboxing and the Martial Arts



By Dave Howe

“Over the span of two years, it has truly been a blessing to be part of the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and Kickboxing class led by Phil Knowles. Not only do I get a thrill from working out physically by hitting some pads and learning MMA techniques, I also get a thrill from working out spiritually in the time that we spend in prayer and devotion. I’ve enjoyed connecting with guys and building special relationships with them. This class gives us the opportunity to share our lives with each other.”

– Seth, one of the regular participants

Phil Knowles founded the Men’s Kickboxing group in 2007 out of his passion for martial arts, self defense, his strong faith in Christ, and his desire to spread the Gospel. “God has blessed me with a passion for the martial arts and self defense. In the past few years, I have had the pleasure of seeing the Lord work through this ministry. I have seen how our students have grown closer to the Lord. They have challenged my own walk with the Lord and help me draw closer to Him.”

Phil’s Story

I asked Phil how he first got interested in martial arts and why he feels so strongly about it.

“The martial arts have been a passion of mine since I was about 10 years old. As a child, it grieved my heart every time I heard of a child being kidnapped and not safely returned. I remember praying for missing children every night. I started martial arts training, but had to drop out due to my family’s budget constraints. Then I got serious about martial arts training in high school when a friend and I were attacked in our neighborhood by a few bullies. The next day, I believe the Lord led me to get involved in the martial arts.

It was those few years of training that motivated me to enlist in the Army. After I had finished Basic and Advanced Individual Training (AIT), I came home and became friends – practically brothers – with a guy I met during high school. He was a black belt and an instructor at the National Karate School, which I attended shortly after finishing AIT. That is where I received my black belt.

“It is a rather ironic story; the martial arts teach you how to fight and to defend yourself, but they teach you how to avoid fighting as well. When I was a blue belt, my old high school friend and I ran into the same bullies; they acted pretty much the same seven years after our first encounter, ready to pick another fight. All I did was stand there looking at them. That was enough for them to stop taunting us and walk away. The moral of that story is: the more you know about MMA and kickboxing, the less you use it.

“During my years of training, I developed a desire to teach. You cannot protect everyone every time, but people can be taught to defend and protect themselves,” said Phil. “I also want to use martial arts and my experience as a tool and resource by making warriors and disciples for our Heavenly Father – our true Warrior.”

The Ministry in Action

Phil’s vision for the ministry is founded in four key Bible verses.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,” (Proverbs 27:17).

Create an environment to learn martial arts and build one another up for the glory of Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life,” (John 3:16).

Spread the Good News of Jesus Christ with martial arts as our gift.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,” (John 15:13).

As warriors for Christ, we have a responsibility to protect our families.

“Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:13).

Our true weapon against Satan is the Word.

Brice Kendall came to the group when he was just three months sober, battling his addiction to alcohol. “I needed positive, sober people in my life, and I found just that. From the very beginning, I felt welcomed and accepted.” Brice came with no prior experience in martial arts, but he was able to catch on quickly with the willing help of fellow group members. “At the end of the class we had a fifteen minute devotional from the Bible. We then discussed what was read and prayed for needs.”

Besides the class time, the group gets together socially for things like BBQs. Brice continued, “These outings were great for me because I needed that positive fellowship outside the walls of Grace Church. The Monday night kickboxing class has given me confidence, godly friendships, and the ability to protect myself and my family. The positive friendships aided in my recovery from addiction.”

Jeff Lindholm came into the group with martial arts experience in Thai boxing. This experience, combined with Phil’s kickboxing background, gives the group a wide range of moves to learn. Jeff has become the group’s assistant instructor with Phil. I asked Jeff what typical questions and objections he hears about joining the group.

Two common objections:

1. Guys do not want to get hit in the face.
2. How does a violent sport fit in a church?

Jeff's answers:

1. We hit pads, not each other.
2. Knowledge of the martial arts actually prevents violence.



Phil Knowles and Jeff Lindholm

Learning kickboxing and MMA is a discipline. After the opening prayer, the group gets right into a vigorous warm-up routine followed by specific practice punches. One man holds the pad and calls out the punches. A second man with gloves has to react quickly and accurately to these fast calls for punches. Then they switch roles. The men get a good workout during the warm-up and practice.

Following this exercise, others can join in for a “Granada” sparring time, which is only for experienced men. During this very physical time, the adrenalin gets going, and they practice control of their anger and emotions. Phil teaches that their strongest move is to defuse a potential fight and walk away. This is a critical skill for their success if they ever get involved in a confrontation. Classes end with a devotional Bible study, time to share prayer needs and time to pray for one another.



Sign Up for Fall Classes

The next Men's Kickboxing class starts on Monday, September 10, 7-8 p.m. The cost is \$40 for the season. For more information, go to www.atgrace.com and enter “kickboxing” in the search engine.

For more information about this ministry, visit www.Fighters4Christ.com or email phil.knowles@comcast.net.