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***Start a
Thriving
Martial Arts
Ministry***

**BY:
DR SPENCER R FUSSELMAN, SHIHAN**

HOW TO:

START A THRIVING MARTIAL ARTS MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Every true warrior knows the greatest battle is never fought on the mat or in the ring. The most formidable opponent we will ever face is the one staring back from the mirror. This is the lifelong war for self-mastery, a state of being forged at the powerful intersection of spiritual truth, scientific understanding, and the raw, practical discipline of the martial arts.

From the disciplined forms of Karate to the intricate grappling of Jiu-Jitsu, the ultimate purpose of training has never been merely to defeat an external opponent. The true journey of a martial artist is an internal one. The real prize is the conquest of the self—our fear, our anger, our laziness, and our pride. This book is a roadmap for that journey. It is a guide to conquering the self, not through mere willpower, but through the divine power of God, and channeling that victory into a thriving, disciple-making ministry that will leave an eternal legacy.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WARRIOR'S STANCE: A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR MARTIAL ARTS

The path to mastery in any pursuit begins with discipline. For the Christian warrior, this concept is not foreign; it is foundational. The Apostle Paul, using the powerful imagery of an athlete, draws a direct and undeniable line between the physical discipline required for a temporal prize and the spiritual discipline required for an eternal one. He challenges us in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT:

“Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”

Paul’s words are a clarion call. The focus, sacrifice, and sweat equity of an athlete are not just admirable traits; they are a physical picture of a spiritual reality. The martial arts dojo, therefore, becomes a unique laboratory for the soul. The discipline required to perfect a stance, the perseverance to master a kata, and the self-control to spar with honor are the very same spiritual muscles we must develop to live a life that glorifies God.

THE CENTER LINE PRINCIPLE

In many martial arts, the “centerline” is a core principle. It is an imaginary line running vertically through the center of the body, representing the area where we are most structurally sound, most powerful, and also most vulnerable. To attack effectively and defend efficiently, a martial artist must learn to dominate the centerline. Deviating too far to the left or the right compromises power, weakens defense, and invites defeat.

This physical principle is a perfect metaphor for our spiritual walk. When God commissioned Joshua to lead His people, He gave him a similar command for victory:

“Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do... Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:8-9)

The instruction was clear: do not deviate from the path. Stay in the center of God's will. Just as a martial artist finds their greatest power along the centerline, we find our greatest spiritual impact and success when we are aligned with God's Word and His purpose for our lives. When we drift into compromise on one side or legalism on the other, we lose our spiritual power and effectiveness.

A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SELF-DEFENSE

A Christian martial artist is, by nature, a protector. But how does this warrior spirit reconcile with Christ's command to “turn the other cheek”? To understand this, we must look at scripture with wisdom and context.

The phrase “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) in its original context referred to a backhanded slap—a deep cultural insult, not a life-threatening physical assault. Jesus

was teaching a radical new way to respond to personal dishonor, absorbing the insult with grace rather than retaliating in pride. This principle is vital for personal character.

However, scripture also paints a clear picture of our responsibility to protect the innocent and uphold justice. The Bible is filled with warriors who were blessed by God. Psalm 144:1 declares, “Praise the Lord, who is my rock. He trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle.” When Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, the workers held a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other, ready to defend their families (Nehemiah 4:17-18). Jesus Himself told his disciples, “if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one” (Luke 22:36), acknowledging a time for readiness and defense.

The Christian warrior understands this distinction: we absorb personal insults with grace, but we have a moral and biblical duty to stand in the gap and protect the vulnerable—our families, our communities, our flock—from physical harm. Our skill is not for ego, but for service and protection.

CHAPTER TWO

THREE PATHS, ONE CALLING

DEFINING YOUR MINISTRY'S "WHY"

Every Christian martial arts instructor has a heart for service, but that service can manifest in different ways. Before you can build an effective ministry, you must have a clear blueprint for what you are trying to achieve. Generally, Christian martial arts ministries fall into one of three categories:

The Christian Practitioner: This is an instructor who is a devout Christian and runs a positive, family-friendly dojo. They may have a cross patch on their uniform or a Christian association certificate on the wall. While their faith informs their character and business ethics, there is no intentional, systematic strategy for evangelism or discipleship integrated into the curriculum. It is a Christian running a martial arts school.

The Evangelistic Outreach: This instructor sees the dojo as a powerful evangelical tool, a "seeker-sensitive" environment to draw students and families who might not otherwise attend a church. They will often incorporate "mat chats" or life skill lessons backed by scripture and may share the gospel during class. The primary goal is to use the discipline of martial arts as a bridge to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Discipleship Forge: This instructor operates with the belief that martial arts is not just a bridge to the faith, but a powerful vehicle for the faith. The goal is not just to make converts, but to forge disciples. This model involves the intentional and deep integration of systematic Bible study and spiritual disciplines into the very fabric of the martial arts curriculum. The journey to black belt becomes a parallel journey of spiritual maturation, designed to forge modern-day warriors for Christ who are strong in body, mind, and spirit.

While all three paths can honor God, the **Iron Lotus Martial Arts and Ministerial Association** is built upon the conviction that the third path, The Discipleship Forge, creates the most profound and lasting impact. An evangelistic outreach is vital, but without a deep root system of discipleship, new believers can struggle to grow.

The Discipleship Forge model recognizes that the principles of the dojo—discipline, respect, perseverance, courage—are biblical principles. By intentionally weaving them together, we don't just teach martial arts with a "side of Jesus." We show our students how the physical discipline they are learning is a tangible expression of the spiritual life they are called to live. This holistic approach transforms a martial arts school from a business or an outreach program into a life-changing discipleship journey. This is the core mission of The Iron Lotus Martial Arts Association.

DEFINING YOUR PATH

Before you can build, you must have a blueprint. Take some time to prayerfully work through these questions to help clarify God's specific calling for your ministry.

Section 1: Your Personal Calling

Why did you feel called to combine your Christian faith with martial arts in the first place? What was the initial spark that ignited this passion?

When you picture your ideal dojo five years from now, what do you see? Describe the atmosphere. What kind of impact are you having on your students' lives beyond the mat?

Beyond teaching techniques, what is the single most important thing you want every student to learn from their time with you?

Section 2: Evaluating the Three Paths

Read the descriptions of the three ministry models again (Practitioner, Outreach, Discipleship Forge). Which one immediately resonates most with your heart? Why do you think that is?

What excites you about the idea of using martial arts as an Evangelistic Outreach to introduce people to Jesus for the first time? What challenges might you face with this model?

What does the idea of a Discipleship Forge—truly "forging disciples" through deep, integrated spiritual training—mean to you personally? What kind of commitment would this model require from you as an instructor?

Section 3: Crafting Your Mission Statement

Based on your reflections, try to complete the following sentences:

My primary goal as a Christian martial arts instructor is to...

I will achieve this by creating a dojo environment that is...

The ultimate measure of my ministry's success will be...

Now, combine these ideas into a single, powerful mission statement for your ministry. This statement will be the compass that guides your decisions.

(Example: "To use the discipline of martial arts to forge young men and women into resilient, Christ-following leaders who impact their community for the glory of God.")

Your Mission Statement:

CHAPTER THREE

THE INTEGRATED CURRICULUM: WEAVING SPIRIT AND SKILL

Beyond the Mat Chat

Moving from the vision of a Discipleship Forge to its reality requires more than a brief "mat chat" at the end of class. It requires the intentional integration of spiritual truth into the very fabric of your teaching. Every aspect of training becomes an opportunity for a deeper lesson.

Kata and Prayer: The intense focus and repetition required to master a kata (a pre-arranged pattern of movements) perfectly mirrors the discipline of focused prayer and meditation on God's Word. As students practice their form, you can teach them to quiet their minds and focus not just on the physical movement, but on a scripture or attribute of God.

Sparring and Self-Control: Sparring (kumite) is a laboratory for the Fruit of the Spirit. It tests a student's ability to remain calm under pressure, to show respect to an opponent, and to exercise self-control. It becomes a practical lesson in managing the frustration and adrenaline that life throws at us, connecting directly to Galatians 5:22-23.

Endurance Drills and Perseverance: When students are pushing through grueling conditioning drills, they are building physical endurance. This is the perfect moment to connect their physical struggle to spiritual perseverance. You can share from Hebrews 12:1, encouraging them to "run with endurance the race God has set before us," fixing their eyes on Jesus even when their muscles are burning.

A System for Discipleship

This level of integration can feel daunting. That is why the core of the Iron Lotus methodology is a fully developed, yet customizable, Bible study curriculum designed to be seamlessly woven into any existing belt-ranking system.

Imagine a student testing for their yellow belt. In addition to demonstrating their required kicks, blocks, and stances, they also have an age appropriate set of study guides that build the foundations of faith, answering tough questions like, 'How do I trust the Bible?' or 'Who is Jesus?' this is more than just scripture memory and a few questions to answer, but it is the beginnings of interacting with the bible on an intellectual and scholarly level, to become students of Christ, true disciples, not just passive church goers. As they progress toward their green belt, the physical requirements increase, and so does the depth of their spiritual study. This transforms the journey to black belt into a parallel, intentional journey of spiritual maturation. It provides a clear, structured path for discipleship that is just as tangible as the belt around their waist.

The Science of a Warrior's Mind

This integrated approach is not just spiritually sound; it's scientifically effective. If faith provides the power for self-mastery, science reveals the blueprint for how our minds can be trained to achieve it.

It's a common myth that you need motivation to take action. The neuroscience is clear: action creates motivation, not the other way around. When you force yourself to perform a disciplined act—like stepping on the mat when you feel tired—your brain rewards the effort with dopamine, the neurochemical of drive. This in turn creates the feeling of motivation to continue. Motivation is the reward for discipline, not the requirement for it.

Scientists have even identified a "willpower hub" in the brain. This is a game-changer for martial artists. Every push-up you force yourself to do, every round you refuse to quit,

isn't just building your body. You are literally forging the part of your brain responsible for self-mastery in every area of your life. The grit you build in the dojo becomes the resilience you use to lead your family, excel in your career, and walk faithfully with God.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUILDING YOUR DOJO: STEWARDSHIP AND STRUCTURE

The Workman is Worthy

Let's address a crucial question that holds many back from starting a ministry: Is it biblical to charge money for it? The answer is an unequivocal yes. The Apostle Paul, quoting both the Old Testament and the words of Jesus, makes this principle clear in 1 Timothy 5:18 :

“For the Scripture says, ‘You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.’ And in another place, ‘Those who work deserve their pay!’”

You are offering a service of immense value—one that provides physical fitness, life-saving skills, character development, and eternal discipleship. Proper stewardship means valuing this service accordingly. To undervalue your program through excessively low pricing is to devalue the impact you can have. It can communicate that the service isn't professional or serious. More practically, it will limit your ministry's reach by preventing you from affording a quality training space, safe equipment, and the time needed to pour into your students. Charging a fair price for a service of excellence is not just acceptable; it is a wise and biblical act of stewardship.

For certain cases, if a student is unable to pay, be creative, offer scholarships that require essays and/or community service. As a form of payment. However, if a family has no

‘buy-in’, they are at an extremely high risk of not doing the work or dropping out.

Ministry Models: For-Profit vs. Non-Profit

When you establish your dojo, you will need to choose a legal structure. The two most common paths are for-profit and non-profit.

For-Profit (e.g., LLC, Sole Proprietorship): This is often the simplest and fastest way to get started. You are running a business with a ministerial purpose. It offers you the most flexibility in how you manage your finances and make decisions. You pay taxes on the profits, but your accounting is generally more straightforward. This model emphasizes that you are a professional providing a high-value service.

Non-Profit (501(c)(3)): This structure formally establishes your organization as a ministry. It allows you to accept tax-deductible donations and makes you eligible for certain grants. However, the setup process is more complex, requiring a board of directors, bylaws, and stricter government oversight. You cannot personally profit from the organization; you can only be paid a reasonable salary. This model can be powerful for fundraising and establishing community trust.

There is no single "right" answer. Prayerfully consider your long-term vision. Do you want the simplicity and flexibility of a business, or the fundraising potential and formal ministry structure of a non-profit?

Preparing the Training Ground

Once you have a vision and a business model, it's time to build. Here are the essential logistics:

Insurance and Liability: This is non-negotiable. You must have liability insurance to protect you, your students, and your host location. Require all students and parents to sign a clear liability waiver before they step onto the mat. This is a matter of professional responsibility and good stewardship.

Finding the Right Space: You have two primary options.

Church Partnership: Partnering with a church can be a wonderful, low-cost way to start. You can use their gym or fellowship hall, which keeps overhead low and integrates you directly into the church community.

Commercial Lease: Leasing your own space provides more control over your schedule and atmosphere but comes with significantly higher costs. This is often a goal to work toward as your ministry grows.

Essential Equipment: To create a safe and professional environment, you will need quality equipment. Start with the essentials: high-quality mats for flooring, punching bags or shields for striking practice, and basic safety gear like headgear and gloves for sparring. As your ministry grows, you can invest in more specialized equipment.

A vision from God requires a plan on the ground. Building a sustainable ministry involves careful planning and stewardship of the resources He provides.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COSTS

Start-Up Costs: These are the one-time expenses needed to open your doors. Be thorough in your estimation.

- **Equipment:** Mats are the biggest expense. Budget for high-quality 1.5"-2" mats. (\$2,000 - \$10,000+ depending on space size).
- **Training Gear:** Heavy bags, shields, focus mitts, and loaner safety gear. (\$1,000 - \$3,000).
- **Legal & Business Fees:** Registering your business/non-profit, attorney fees for waivers. (\$500 - \$1,500).
- **Insurance:** First month's premium and any deposits. (\$200 - \$500).
- **Marketing:** Basic website, flyers, banners, social media ads. (\$300 - \$1,000).

- **Lease Deposit:** Typically first and last month's rent if you lease a commercial space.

Recurring Costs: These are your monthly operational expenses. Your tuition fees must be structured to cover these costs for the ministry to be sustainable.

- Rent/Mortgage
- Utilities (Electric, Water, Internet)
- Insurance Premiums
- Website/Software Fees
- Marketing Budget
- Instructor Salaries (including your own)

ASSEMBLING YOUR MINISTRY SUPPORT TEAM (RECRUITING BACKERS)

Few ministries are launched by a single person's resources. Nehemiah didn't build the wall alone; he had the backing of the king and the help of the people. You need to assemble a team of backers who believe in your God-given mission.

Frame the Vision, Not the Venture: When you approach potential supporters, you are not just asking for a loan; you are inviting them to invest in a disciple-making mission. Prepare a simple, one-page prospectus (see the sample plan below) that clearly outlines your mission, your strategy, and your financial needs.

Identify Potential Partners: Pray and identify people in your circle who may have a heart for your mission: elders or leaders in your church, local Christian business owners, family members, and friends who are passionate about youth ministry and outreach.

Present the Opportunity: Schedule meetings to share your heart. Explain how their financial support will directly translate into lives being changed for eternity. Offer them a chance to be part of the founding team of a ministry that will impact the community for generations.

SAMPLE ONE-PAGE MINISTRY BUSINESS PLAN

(Use this template to create your own prospectus for potential backers)

Ministry Name: _____ - [Your Town] Chapter

Mission Statement: To use the discipline of martial arts to forge young men and women into resilient, Christ-following leaders who impact their community for the glory of God.

Ministry Model: A "Discipleship Forge," integrating systematic biblical teaching into a professional martial arts curriculum. We will operate as a [For-Profit LLC / Non-Profit 501(c)(3)].

Target Audience: Families, children (ages 5+), and teens in the [Your Town] area, with a focus on providing a positive and structured environment for character development.

Services: Group martial arts classes, leadership training programs, after-school programs, and community self-defense workshops.

Marketing & Outreach Plan:

Phase 1 (Launch): Partner with 3 local churches and 1 Christian school to offer introductory workshops. Launch social media presence and basic website.

Phase 2 (Growth): Participate in 2 community events per quarter. Begin targeted online advertising for family programs.

Financial Plan:

Goal: Secure \$8,500 in start-up funding to cover initial equipment, insurance, and marketing costs.

Sustainability Model: Monthly recurring revenue from student tuition is projected to cover all recurring operational costs within 6 months, based on enrolling 30 students at an average tuition of \$120/month.

MARKETING YOUR MINISTRY

(COMMUNITY OUTREACH)

Your dojo can't make disciples if no one knows it exists. Effective, consistent outreach is vital.

Partner Strategically: Connect with local churches, private Christian schools, and homeschool co-ops. Offer to run a free self-defense seminar or a "bully-proofing" workshop for their youth group or students. This provides immense value and serves as a powerful introduction to your program.

Be Present in the Community: Set up a booth at local festivals, school carnivals, and church outreach events. Perform exciting demonstrations that showcase your students' skills and the positive atmosphere of your dojo.

Build a Digital Dojo: Create a simple, professional website with clear information about your class schedule, pricing, and mission. Use social media (like a Facebook or Instagram page) to post pictures and videos of classes, share student testimonials, and celebrate belt promotions. This creates a sense of community and shows potential students the vibrant life of your ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMMUNITY FOR THE QUEST: WHY YOU CAN'T WALK THE PATH ALONE

The journey of discipleship, and the even greater journey of leading others toward the master, is not meant to be a solitary one. The quest requires a community of like-minded warriors who will hold you accountable, share wisdom, and sharpen you as "iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17). A lone instructor faces immense challenges: curriculum development, spiritual burnout, and the lack of accountability and fellowship.

It is for this very reason that the **Iron Lotus Martial Arts and Ministerial Association** was founded. It was created to be the organizational framework, the spiritual covering, and the supportive community for the disciple-warrior's path.

THE IRON LOTUS ADVANTAGE

Joining the Iron Lotus Martial Arts Association means you are no longer building in isolation. You are joining a fellowship of schools, instructors, and students who share a common, unapologetic vision: to use the powerful platform of the dojo to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Affiliation provides three unique advantages:

- **A Singular Mission:** Our primary goal is not simply to build a large network of schools, but to equip and empower a community of professional disciple-makers. Every resource, every training event, and every leadership role is designed to serve this singular mission. We are laser-focused on forging disciples.

- **Robust Curriculum:** You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Iron Lotus provides a robust, customizable discipleship framework designed to be integrated into any martial arts tradition—be it Karate, Taekwondo, Kung Fu, or others. This allows you to seamlessly weave a clear discipleship path into your students' training, transforming your program into a true disciple-making journey from day one.

- **Accountability & Wisdom:** Guarding this mission is a structure of accountability and wisdom unlike any other. The presence of the Board of Advisors and the Grand Masters Council—comprised of high-ranking, theologically sound martial artists—ensures the Association never strays from its core purpose. This body provides the spiritual and martial authority needed to guide high-level promotions and ordinations, guaranteeing a standard of excellence that is both martially and biblically sound.

If the vision of a Discipleship Forge resonates in your spirit, if you believe the dojo can be a place where lives are transformed for eternity, then you do not have to build it alone. We invite you to join us. Become part of a brotherhood and sisterhood of warriors committed to a higher calling. Stop just running a martial arts school and start building a legacy.

Visit IronLotusMartialArts.com to learn more about starting a chapter and joining the mission.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- **2 Time U.S. Martial Arts Hall of Fame Inductee**
- **Founder of Iron Lotus Martial Arts Association.**



Dr. Spencer R. Fusselman (Shihan) is a 7th-degree black belt and the founder of Shinja Kenpo Karate and the Iron Lotus Martial Arts Association. A U.S. Army veteran and pastor, his diverse background in styles like Kenpo, Shotokan, Shou Shu Kung Fu, Shaolin Kempo, Brazilian Jujutsu, and Military Combatives inspired him to develop his unique martial art. Shinja Kenpo Karate embodies his core philosophy of the "holistic warrior," blending rigorous physical training with spiritual discipline and mental discipline.

The Shinja Kenpo Karate system is distinguished by its revolutionary teaching method, deeply rooted in the sciences of biomechanics and kinesiology. This approach challenges students to move beyond simple memorization to analyze the core principles of human motion. By understanding the physics and physiology behind each technique, students develop advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, training the mind as intensely as the body. Through this focus on biomechanics, Shinja Kenpo cultivates not just a capable fighter but an adaptable and analytical thinker. Shihan Fusselman is an internationally recognized instructor, holding multiple awards for his leadership and mastery in the martial arts.