

Thomas E. Kirk
E Dan #033077
Lititz World Tang Soo Do
April 2007

Moving Higher - by Following or Leading?

Moving higher: Higher in my integrity and daily walk with God; Higher in my relationships with family and friends; **Higher in my Tang Soo Do training.**

1. I must decide what I believe it means to move higher. I believe that to move higher, I must become more like those whose lives or skills I wish to emulate. I must grow. **I must be a follower.**
2. I must decide what I believe is the source or standard upon which that growth will be based. Who decides whether I have moved higher or not? I believe that will differ in each area of my life, but basically, it will be determined by the person I am following.
3. I must decide if I want to move higher – and why. Is it a worthy goal? Is it possible to attain the standard that has been set?
4. I must develop a plan on how to carry out that decision. What changes can I make in my life, my beliefs, my thoughts, and my actions so I can meet that goal?
5. I must put that plan into action. Faith without works is dead – I must do something, or I will become stagnant.
6. I must share what I have learned and gained with others. **I must be a leader.**

First – What does Moving Higher mean? It means change. It means growth. It means that I can't stay the same. I must increase in knowledge. I must increase in wisdom. I must increase in physical ability. When I find others that have something I desire in my own life, I must follow their lead.

This means many things to me. The most important person whose life I wish to follow is Jesus Christ. Talk about a hard act to follow – He was perfect! But – in being perfect, He was and is a great leader. He led by example. I'm glad that even though He knows that I am going to fall short, He loves and accepts me anyway.

Following anyone is a major decision. Once that first decision is made – it then becomes a lifelong series of minor decisions that must be made many times a day. Great discipline is needed to be a good follower.

I also desire to emulate the skills and abilities of my Tang Soo Do instructors. I have been very blessed by great instructors at Lititz World Tang Soo Do. My first senior instructor was Mr. Recher. I only had the privilege of training under him for a few months. My primary instructor after that was Mr. Thomas Kifolo. He also led by example and taught me many things – not only about Tang Soo Do, but about life.

My current senior instructor is Mr. Joseph DeFilippo. His youthful exuberance and skills are a great example to me, and keep me motivated. My goal is to learn the skills that my instructors have demonstrated.

I also want to learn from those who are the leaders in my spiritual life. I have been blessed to have been spiritually trained by many gifted teachers. I have only been training in Tang Soo Do for 10 years, but have been training to be like Jesus for 34 years. I first made the decision to follow Jesus while I was in college in 1973. It was the best decision I ever made in my life, and I know that it will take the rest of my life to get anywhere close to being like Him.

Second – Who decides? In the spiritual realm, that will be decided by God. He has clearly laid out the standard in His word – the Holy Bible. The Bible has been tested over many centuries and found to be both historically accurate and spiritually significant. There are many translations of the Bible, just as there are many versions of Tang Soo Do that have been handed down through different teachers. But – the Biblical text holds true, and lives are changed forever.

How do I move higher in the hierarchy of God? I do that by serving. What a dichotomy. The servant being the leader. Yet – as with many teachings of the one true God and His son Jesus – you will find His methods are in direct opposition to many teachings in our current society as well as those of many Eastern philosophies. That's ok – I'm not afraid of being different than those around me.

As far as my Tang Soo Do training, that has also been clearly defined by my instructors – all the way from Grand Master Shin to my immediate higher belts in our classes. We have books and manuals as well as the excellent methods of training where our art has been passed on by verbal and physical demonstration for thousands of years. We progress through the belt ranks as one passes through the growing seasons – constantly moving higher – a little bit at a time.

That in itself is a great lesson. If a white belt was to come watch a group of senior Black Belts or Masters train, it would be very understandable why they would probably want to quit on the spot. They will say "I can't do that". And – they would be correct – at least for the immediate future. Growth over time is critical to reaching any goal and following any leader.

Third – What do I want to do? Personally, I want to move higher. I want to grow closer to God and become more like my Lord Jesus Christ. I want to exemplify all of the great characteristics I have seen in the many Christian leaders and mentors from which I have had the privilege of learning.

I want to demonstrate the same skills as my Tang Soo Do instructors. I have had very gifted leaders. I admire their skills. I know they work hard to keep themselves in shape and to grow in their ability to instruct. It shows! They will always be leading me and encouraging me to follow. This is a worthy and attainable goal.

What is the ultimate “Purpose of Tang Soo Do Training”. Why am I doing this? In this day and age and in our society, it is becoming more and more important to learn some basic self defense techniques (#1 **Self-Defense**: *We protect our lives and possessions from injustice and danger*). I want to be able to protect myself and my family from those who may desire to harm us.

I want to strengthen my body (#2 **Health**: *We promote our physical and spiritual health and enjoy strong bodies and sound minds through rigorous training*). Continuous training has done wonders for me. As I get older, I'm sure I will modify my training to accommodate life changes.

I want to be a better person. (#3 **Better Person**: *We strive to be of better character through endurance and hard work*). I can physically endure more, and it has given me many opportunities to develop character and humility.

Fourth – How will I move higher? I must discipline myself physically, mentally, and spiritually. In one way, that will be accomplished by adhering to the **seven tenets** of Tang Soo Do because I believe that all other aspects of my Tang Soo Do training are meaningless without them. And, since my Christian faith is the highest priority in my life, the tenets of my faith must have preeminence over all other tenets. The following quick review will show their importance.

Integrity is the quality of being honest and trustworthy. In Matthew 5:37, Jesus admonishes us to "let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'." Fortunately, that does not mean living a life of perfection. Not “if”, but “when” I fail, as long as I am honest about my shortcomings with God and others involved, I can still walk in integrity.

I need to **concentrate** on growing in all three aspects of my life - spirit, soul and body. When all three parts of me concentrate on what is appropriate, I can be strong in my faith, and strong in Tang Soo Do.

I must **persevere** steadfastly on my chosen path to higher levels of Black Belt. Ephesians 6:18 says “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints”. At the beginning and end of each class, I choose to spend our time of meditation in prayer that I and my fellow instructors and students may be able to persevere in our training and that I may be a witness for the Lord Jesus in all my actions and words.

In the Bible I am commanded to **respect** and **obey** those in authority. Obviously this holds true in our Tang Soo Do training as well. I must respect my instructors and fellow students. I am to obey those in authority as long as they are not commanding me to do something contrary to my faith and the Bible.

Self control means to have reserve, discretion, stability and constraint. In my training, I need to have control of my body and my mind. Controlling the mind is a constant battle within me because I have my own will, and my will doesn't always lead me in the right direction. Fortunately, I have God's Holy Spirit to help me, and with concentration and perseverance, I will be able to exercise self control.

I believe that true **humility** can only come through an honest evaluation of myself and how I am seen by the eyes of God. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." That is a life goal for me - that I might be able to walk humbly before my God.

An **indomitable spirit** means unconquerable. I hope to exemplify that the indomitable Spirit in me is the Holy Spirit of God which is truly unconquerable. God's Spirit helps me to walk in "**integrity**". When I have integrity, I can "**respect**" and "**obey**" those in authority. As I "**concentrate**" on His word and "**persevere**" in prayer, I will be able to exercise "**self control**" and walk in "**humility**".

It is my desire that God's Spirit will control my mind and emotions and every other aspect of my being. As I allow this to happen on a daily basis, I will truly be a man of God who happens to study, teach and enjoy the art of Tang Soo Do.

So - what must I do to move to a higher level in Tang Soo Do? I must train my physical body. I must study to improve my mind and learn what is required of each successive level of Black Belt. I must strengthen my spirit so that those who teach me, those that train with me, and those I teach will see a man that is exemplifying the seven tenets of Tang Soo Do.

Fifth – Am I moving higher? I am . . . and I am not. Like most frail humans, I am not all I want to be. I have times when I am very disciplined and times when I am lazy. Perfectly stated in the 14 attitude requirements that are needed to master Tang Soo Do is the fact that "When you begin to feel idle, try to overcome this". This is not if, but when, and is obviously a known weakness of human kind. We all have times when we want to take the easy way out, but the easy way is not always the best way.

The Apostle Paul clearly stated that even he did not always do what he wanted to do. I find that amazing for a man that wrote most of the New Testament. In Romans 7:15, he states "I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate" and in Romans 7:19 "When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway".

I believe that I am a "spirit" being, that I "have" a soul or mind, and that I "live in" a body. So – I am a three part being. I want to make my body do certain things, but it often rebels. I need to renew my mind so my mind can control my body. But – ultimately, I need to have my spirit in control of my mind. That's the hard part of moving forward. In Romans 7:21 Paul again states "It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong (22) I love God's law with all my heart. (23) But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me." Romans 7:25 states "Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord".

As we examine each of these three areas: the body, the mind, and the spirit, we'll see that the **Fourteen Attitude Requirements** are also needed for me to move higher to the next level of Black Belt.

I train my body because I have a purpose (*#1 Purpose of training should be enhancement of mental and physical betterment*). How should I go about training my body? To start with, I will seriously give my *all* (*#2 Serious approach, #3 All out effort*) as I train at our studio an average of three times a week (*#4 Maintain regular and constant practice, #6 Regularly spaced practice sessions, #10 Always follow a routine training schedule*). There I will be taught new techniques and refine old techniques (*#5 Practice basic techniques all the time, #11 Repeatedly practice all techniques already learned*). In addition, I will go through stretching techniques every day to keep myself limber. I will alternate aerobic and strength training mixed with Tang Soo Do practice at home a minimum of two days per week. This will help my body become more flexible and stronger over time. And, I will keep myself clean (*#14 Cleanliness is required after training. Keep yourself and your surroundings clean*).

How can I study to grow in my mind, and learn what is needed to move higher to the next level? Again, I have a purpose (*#1 Purpose of training should be enhancement of mental and physical betterment*). I must mentally approach my training in a serious manner (*#2 Serious approach*). I must be alert to what is being taught (*#7 Always listen to and follow the directions of instructors or seniors*). I must apply my mind and learn what is behind the forms, one-steps and techniques (*#12 When learning new techniques, learn thoroughly the theory and philosophy as well*). This, along with continual review of what I have already learned (*#5 Practice basic techniques all the time, #11 Repeatedly practice all techniques already learned*) will help me keep my mind strong and healthy.

Finally, I must move on in the spirit of Tang Soo Do while maintaining an ever watchful eye on how I grow in my spiritual quest to be more like Jesus. I must keep my spirit under control at all times (*#8 Do not be overly ambitious*). I may have pride in what I have accomplished, but I must not be prideful or arrogant. I can keep things in perspective by remembering that I have come this far by working hard and by the grace of God (*#9 Frequently inspect your own achievements*). I must continually strive to move higher in my training (*#13 When you begin to feel idle, try to overcome this*).

Developing this vital area of training my spirit is all important. How well I succeed in allowing the Holy Spirit of God to direct my path, will be the deciding factor that will cause me to grow and move higher to the next level or, or will cause me to stumble and stay at my current level. I purposefully try to work on each of these requirements. I believe I have made good strides in implementing them in my life. Yes – I am moving higher.

Sixth – What will I do? I will teach. I will share with others what I know and love about my God. I will teach others about the most powerful force on earth – the love of God for the human race, and the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. I will tell others about all the mistakes I have made, but that because of love, I can keep going, and live a life that is also full of victories both great and small.

I will tell others of how my study of Tang Soo Do has enhanced my life mentally, physically and spiritually. It has enhanced my life mentally because it has caused me to read and study. Those are things that I hadn't done for a long time since I had been out of school for 23 years. It was tough getting back into that habit. Learning the basics of another language was also quite difficult, but through constant repetition and explanation, I have learned what is needed. Trying to remember all of the moves in the forms, and all of the one-steps has proved to be quite a stretch for my older mind.

It has enhanced my life physically just due to the obvious physical aspect of the art. I've read that practicing a martial art is the best form of aerobic exercise. I believe that! At 52, I am in better physical shape than when I started at age 43. That is due totally to my practice of Tang Soo Do. I am grateful.

It has enhanced my life spiritually because it challenges me to develop the spiritual aspect of who I am. As I have stated, I am a Christian, and that is very important to me. I respect, but do not embrace many of the spiritual teachings of Eastern philosophies and religions. Being that many of the Christian faith seem to have an inherent problem with martial arts (due to a lack of understanding) my study of Tang Soo Do has also caused me to grow in my Christian faith as I have had to examine the scriptures to help me explain that you can be a Christian and study a martial art. I believe that with proper instruction, the study and practice of a martial art like Tang Soo Do, offers Christians an enjoyable alternative to conventional exercise programs. It is also a practical means of providing security for family, self, home and others. When approached correctly, it does not conflict with my faith.

As I endeavor to move to a higher level within Tang Soo Do, I offer my thanks and sincere respect to our Grand Master Jae C. Shin for starting and leading the World Tang Soo Do Association. I also appreciate his humble approach to life and his desire to serve God. Above all, I hope to be seen as a man who faithfully honors, serves and represents his true Master - the Lord Jesus Christ!

When those who set the standards, see others trying to meet those same standards because of what they see in me, then I have followed well, and have earned the privilege of leading. **When I accomplish that - I will have moved to a higher level.**