

THE MARKS OF A TRUE

WINNER

ProTeens

THE MARKS OF A TRUE
WINNER

BY FRANK HAMRICK

The Marks of a True Winner
by Frank Hamrick

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PREFACE

The greatest athletes are the ones who have paid the price to make it to the top. That price has cost them dearly, and only those with the guts to pay the price have made it.

Not everyone has the desire and the talent to be a great athlete. Some of us just cannot compete on that level. But every Christian should have the desire to be a true winner for Christ and to give it everything he or she has.

Throughout the New Testament, the Bible uses athletic terminology as an analogy for the Christian life. This study will use the athlete to illustrate how the Bible defines a true winner.

Challenge your teens to give what it takes to be a champion so that they can be victors in the race of life.

Elements of This Study

Study the Table of Contents carefully. It will serve as a road map to show you where you are headed. Take note of the following elements found in this study.

Page Numbers. The pages are numbered consecutively on the outside margin. In addition, the copy of the student manual contained in this teacher's manual has the pagination from the student manual. This will allow you to know what page the students are on as well.

Correlating the Teacher's Lesson and Student's Lesson. For each lesson in your teacher's manual you have a filled-in copy of the student's lesson, then your teacher's lesson, the overheads for that lesson, and finally the quiz for that lesson. The teacher's lesson is actually a guide through the student's lesson to help you present the material to your teens. Study through the teacher's lesson and write down any additional thoughts or insights on the material that you have. Notice that the teacher's lesson and student's lesson correlate in the truths they present without necessarily being a mirror image of each other. (For example, the wording of the headings may be different.) This is because the teacher's lesson is not designed to repeat the student's lesson but to help you guide your students through the lesson contained in their books.

Overheads. These are provided as a visual aid for the presentation of these lessons. You may copy the overhead masters contained in this manual. Nothing else may be copied without getting permission from Positive Action For Christ.

Level One and Level Two and Level Two Only. At the end of each student's lesson is a section of "at-home work" to be completed by the student before the next meeting.

Quizzes. Written quizzes are provided for Lessons 1-14 and 23-29. Quiz answers are at the end of the teacher's lesson. They are not intended to be open-book or open-Bible quizzes.

Teacher's Note

Positive Action For Christ sells a daily organizer and meditation tool called the Book of Remembrance. Now available in three editions (Student, Standard, and Christian Worker), it contains all the forms found in these lessons and more. If you or your students are not using this tool, we encourage you to call our office for a free catalog (800-688-3008). Many Christians are using this resource to help them meditate on God in the Word.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A True Winner...

Contends for the Faith

1. The Agony of Victory	7
2. God's Gold Medalist (Part 1)	17
3. God's Gold Medalist (Part 2)	29
4. The Agony of Warfare	39

Counts the Cost

5. What Is a Disciple?	50
6. A Disciple Loves His Master.	61
7. The Cost of Following Jesus.	71
8. Paying the Price (Part 1)	81
9. Paying the Price (Part 2)	91
10. The Danger of Materialism	102

Consecrates His Life

11. Three Steps to Winning	112
12. Present Your Body	122
13. What Is Conformity?	132
14. How We Become Conformed.	141

Casts Down Strongholds

15. The Secret to the Christian Life	152
16. How to Be Happy (Part 1).	160
17. How to Be Happy (Part 2).	170
18. Meditation & Christian Growth	179
19. Five Basic Spiritual Needs.	188
20. Providences	196
21. Weapons Against Sins	206
22. Principles and Promises	214

Conquers the Flesh

23. The Believer's Three Enemies.	223
24. How to Conquer the Flesh.	234

Concentrates His Energies

25. Wholehearted Commitment.	244
26. Single-Minded Concentration	255
27. Mental Toughness	267

Completes His Mission

28. Why Teens Quit (Part 1)	278
29. Why Teens Quit (Part 2).	289
30. The Call of God	301

THE MARKS OF A TRUE WINNER

THE AGONY OF VICTORY

Most of us have seen ABC's *Wide World of Sports* and heard the phrase "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." While that phrase holds some truth, any world-class athlete will quickly tell you that more prominent is the reality of "the agony of victory." To be the best at anything requires one thing—agony.

The great pianist did not become so through goofing off at the mall. He spent multiplied thousands of hours at the keyboard while all the rest of the crowd was "taking it easy."

The United States water polo team, which won the gold medal at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, admitted that they had tasted "the agony of victory." Due to the long hours they had given to the perfection of their sport, in some instances their wives left them; and others were fired from their jobs. Winning the gold was not all thrill. The road to victory was paved with agony.

In our ProTeen study this year we are going to be studying about how to experience victory by looking at the marks of a true winner. However, from the start we need to understand that achieving victory will involve some agony.

Understanding Agony

What does the word "agony" mean? Webster's Dictionary defines it as "great mental or physical pain; a struggle or a contest."

What does the word "agony" have to do with being a true winner? The first mark of a true winner that we will study is that a true winner contends for the faith. And the word "contend" is related to this word "agony."

Read Jude 3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The words "earnestly contend" in Jude 3 come from the Greek word *agon* (ah-gohn), from which we get our English word "agony." This Greek word is found nineteen times in the New Testament. A look at the way it is translated will help us understand the full meaning of the word.

The New Testament Translation of *Agon*

Agon is translated as follows.

- "Fight" or "fought" (5 times)
- "Strive" or "striving" (5 times)
- "Conflict" (2 times)

- “Agony” (1 time)
- “Laboring” (1 time)
- “Contention” (1 time)
- “Race” (1 time)
- “Suffer” (1 time)
- “Subdued” (1 time)
- “Contend” (1 time—in Jude 3)

We could actually translate Jude 3 any of the following ways and be correct: “It was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly *fight, strive, labor, suffer or agonize* for the faith.”

Thus the first mark of a true winner is that he contends (agonizes) for the faith.

The Implications of *Agon*

What does the word *agon* or “agony” imply? What is Jude 3 really telling us? The agony spoken of in Jude 3 is the agony of the inner struggles of a person.

Any long–distance runner will tell you that the greatest struggle he has is not with the other competitors but with himself. This is seen in two ways.

The Agony of Training

First, there is the battle he fights with himself during the training period—the boring mornings of running endlessly through the rain and snow and sleet, the regimen of eating special food and staying away from all the delicious desserts and drinks that he would love to have. His body and mind fight with him continually: “You don’t need to get up this morning. It’s raining. One morning of rest won’t hurt. Just this one morning.” He has to continually fight to make himself train day after day.

The Agony of the Race

The race itself is another time of agony. As the miles click off, the body begins to ache. The mind begins to play games with the runner. The lungs cry for oxygen, the legs tire and the arms can hardly swing. It seems the whole body is crying: “Quit or at least slow down. Second or third place is good enough—you can win next time.”

This is what the writer of Hebrews had in mind when he wrote Hebrews 12:1: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race (agony) that is set before us.” The word “race” is the same Greek word for “contend” in Jude 3—our word *agon* or “agony.”

Anyone who has ever run a long–distance race will tell you of the agony of grueling miles. The entire race is a race, not so much against an opponent, as a race against self. The heart, lungs, legs, arms and mind all battle against you, crying out for you to “please stop or at least slow the pace.” It is the man who has conquered himself who is most likely to win the race.

Paul also makes reference to a race in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. (Read the passage to the teens.) The word *agon* is found in this passage. Can you guess where? It is the word “striveth” in verse 25: “And every man that striveth for the mastery

(agonizes to be the best) is temperate (self–controlled) in all things.” Notice Paul’s agony in verse 27: “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away (disqualified).” Paul fought with himself, not with others.

The Essence of *Agon*

What is the true essence of this word *agon*? Its essence is seen in the following two areas.

A Man’s Struggle with Himself

Here is the essence of contending—it is the inner struggle and fighting with self and not fighting someone or something else that Jude had in mind when he wrote verse 3.

The word *agon* in practically every usage in the New Testament focuses on the struggle of the competitor—in particular, the struggle with himself. In Jude 3, it is the believer’s struggle with his own sin nature, temptations and evil desires that is in mind, not fighting against others.

A Man’s Struggle for Excellence

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology defines *agon* as “the struggle for superiority” or “the conscious application of one’s powers for the achievement of a goal.” Again, it is not the violence of war or the thrill of beating someone that is the focus of *agon*, but the struggle required to excel. Thus we could again paraphrase Jude 3: “It was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should strive within yourself to be the best you can be for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints.”

Applying Agony to Ourselves

How does all of this apply to you? You are getting ready to face nine months of school and nine months of ProTeens. That’s nine months of agony! I’m sure some of you are thinking, “You don’t have to tell me that.” But the agony you must keep in mind is the agony of driving yourself to be the best you can be.

Nine Months of Training

For nine months you will face the long, hard, lonely hours of Christian training—those hours when no one is watching you, when you are alone in your room studying for quizzes, memorizing verses, having devotions and reading books. No one will be there to applaud you, no fans to scream in your ears and urge you on. (Some of you may have your parents screaming in your ears!) What you accomplish there will be the result of your willingness to agonize while others socialize and to contend while others pretend.

Nine Months of Running

Every ProTeen meeting is like the track meet on Saturday or the Friday night ball game. It is here that the quiz is given, the scores are recorded, and some

of the results of your training agony are revealed. The ones who excel at the ProTeen meeting will be the ones who were willing to pay the price of agony during the week.

Nine Months of Excellence

At the end of this year, we will have our ProTeen Banquet; and there, the ones who contended (agonized and struggled) for the faith will be rewarded. The goal should not be to win or to beat others but to beat yourself and to make this a year of excellence for the Lord. Let's make 2 Timothy 4:7 our goal for this year: "I have fought (agonized) a good fight (agony), I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Quiz Answers: Lesson 1

1. Race
2. Striveth
3.
 - a. Himself
 - b. Excellence
4. Fought, fight, course, faith
5. Any five of the following ten will do
 - a. Fight or fought
 - b. Strive or striving
 - c. Conflict
 - d. Agony
 - e. Laboring
 - f. Contention
 - g. Race
 - h. Suffer
 - i. Subdued
 - j. Contend
6. Any three of the following seven will do.
 - a. The gospel of God
 - b. Salvation
 - c. Being the best I can be for God
 - d. Prayer
 - e. Godliness
 - f. Against sin
 - g. The faith
7. Victory, struggle

Lesson 1 Quiz: The Agony of Victory

Name _____ Date _____

Church/City _____

Level _____ Score _____ (8 points Level One; 18 points Level Two)

Level One and Level Two

- ① 1. What word in Hebrews 12:1 is the translation of the same Greek word for *contend* or *agony* in Jude 3? _____
- ① 2. What phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 is the translation of the Greek word for *contend* or *agony*? _____
- ② 3. What is the essence of the word *contend* in Jude 3?
 - a. A man's struggle with _____
 - b. A man's struggle for _____
- ④ 4. Fill in the blanks to complete 2 Timothy 4:7.
"I have _____ a good _____, I have finished my
_____, I have kept the _____."

Level Two Only

- ⑤ 5. The Greek word *agon* occurs nineteen times in the Greek New Testament and is translated in our English Bibles by ten different words. List five of those English words.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
- ③ 6. The following verses each tell us a different thing we should agonize over: 1 Thessalonians 2:2; Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Romans 15:30; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 12:4; and Jude 3. List three things these verses tell us we should agonize over.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
- ② 7. Fill in the blanks to complete the following statement.
Those who taste the thrill of _____ are those most familiar with the agony of _____.

L E S S O N 1

THE AGONY OF VICTORY**A TRUE WINNER CONTENDS FOR THE FAITH**

Most of us have seen ABC's *Wide World of Sports* and heard the phrase "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." While that phrase holds some truth, any world-class athlete will quickly tell you that more prominent is the reality of "the agony of victory." To be the best at anything requires one thing—agony.

The United States water polo team, which won the gold medal at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, admitted that they had tasted "the agony of victory." Due to the long hours they had given to the perfection of their sport, their wives left them; and others were fired from their jobs. Winning the gold was not all thrill. The road to victory was paved with agony.

Understanding Agony

Webster's definition of agony: great mental or physical pain; a struggle or contest

But what does "agony" have to do with this year's study? Actually, it is simple. All great champions—whether they be Olympic gold medalists, world-class athletes, or master violinists—all have this one thing in common: they willingly "agonized" for years to get to the top.

The same is true of those who become champions for God. No one just accidentally becomes a David or a Moses. God's champions, like sports champions, become that because they have paid the price of "agony."

Note Jude 3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

"Earnestly contend" comes from the Greek word *agon* (ah-gohn').

Agon occurs 19 times in the Greek New Testament.

How agon is translated

fight, fought _____ (5 times)	contention _____ (1 time)
strive, striving _____ (5 times)	race _____ (1 time)
conflict _____ (2 times)	suffer _____ (1 time)
agony _____ (1 time)	subdued _____ (1 time)
laboring _____ (1 time)	contend _____ (1 time)

Thus, the first mark of a true winner is that he _____ **contends** _____ for the faith.

What does the word “agony” in Jude 3 imply? **the agony of the inner struggles of a person** _____

This is seen in two ways:

1. The agony of _____ **training** _____
2. The agony of _____ **the race** _____

What word in Hebrews 12:1 is the same Greek word as “contend” or “agony” in Jude 3? **race** _____

Read Hebrews 12:1, using the word “agony” in place of “race.”

What phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 is the translation of the Greek word for “contend” or “agony”? **striveth for the mastery** _____

The Essence of the Word “Contend” In Jude 3

1. A man’s struggle **with himself** _____
2. A man’s struggle **for excellence** _____

Again, it is not the violence of war or the thrill of beating someone that is the focus of agon, but the struggle required to excel.

Applying Agony to Ourselves

Over the next nine months we face the agony of school and the agony of ProTeens. But the agony we speak of is not the agony of facing homework and teachers and principals. Rather it is the agony of driving ourselves to **be the best we can be** _____.

Let’s make 2 Timothy 4:7 our goal for the year: “I have fought (agonized) a good fight (agony), I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

At-Home Bible Study (Level Two Only)

The word *agon* occurs in each of the verses below. Look up each verse and record the thing we should agonize (struggle, fight, or contend) over. The word(s) in parentheses beside each reference is the English translation of the word *agon* in the Greek New Testament. (Hint: Read each verse carefully and put the word “agony,” “agonize,” “struggle,” or “struggling” in place of the word(s) in parentheses below. Then record the thing we should agonize over in the blank.)

- 1 Thessalonians 2:2 (“contention”) **gospel of God** _____
- Luke 13:24 (“strive”) **salvation** _____
(Hint: The “strait gate” is the gate of salvation.)
- 1 Corinthians 9:25 (“striveth”) **being the best I can be for God** _____
(Note: “Mastery” means “to be the best you can be for God.”)
- Romans 15:30 (“strive together”) **prayer** _____
- 1 Timothy 4:10 (“suffer reproach”) **godliness** _____
(Hint: “Therefore” points back to a word found in both verses 7 and 8. It is the goal for which Paul “agonizes.”)
- Hebrews 12:4 (“striving”) **against sin** _____
- Jude 3 (“contend”) **the faith** _____

By the way, did you have to struggle to answer these questions and then memorize them for the quiz? Aren’t your salvation and your Lord worth the struggle? Keep it up.

Remember: Those who taste the thrill of victory are those most familiar with the agony of struggle.

Your work on this lesson is “contending for the faith;” you’re experiencing the “agony of victory.” Soon you will know “the thrill of victory.”

The Agony of Victory

The Implications of Agon

- The Agony of Training
- The Agony of the Race

The Essence of Agon

- A Man's Struggle with Himself
- A Man's Struggle for Excellence

GOD'S GOLD MEDALIST (PART 1)

In Lesson 1 we learned that the Christian life is a life of agony and pain. Have you ever heard the phrase “no pain, no gain?” What’s true for the athlete is also true for the Christian.

Jude 3 speaks of the agony and pain of the Christian life. As we have already learned, the phrase “earnestly contend” is from the Greek word *agon*, from which we get our word “agony.”

Agon was most often connected to two disciplines: (1) the military and (2) athletics. Both the military soldier and the Olympic athlete had to endure great agony if they were to be successful.

In this lesson we will look at one of those disciplines—the Olympic athlete. During the days of the New Testament, the Greek Olympics were at their height of popularity. The Christian of that day was well aware of the Olympic and Isthmian games, and sports terminology was common knowledge. It is no surprise then to find the New Testament sprinkled with sports terminology comparing the Christian life to an Olympic contest.

Sports Terms Used in the Bible

Athlete

The Greek word *athleo* (ath-leh-o) from which we get our word “athlete” is found four times in the New Testament in reference to the Christian.

Stadium

The Greek word *stadion* (stad-ee-on) from which we get our word “stadium” is also used numerous times in the New Testament.

Race, Run

The Greek word for a competitive race is used eleven times in reference to the Christian running the race of life.

Wrestling

The Bible mentions the sport of wrestling in Ephesians 6:12, where Paul tells us that we wrestle against spiritual foes.

Gymnasium, Exercise

The Greek athlete spent ten months of training for the Olympic competition. The exercise programs for his training were called *gymnos* (goom-nos). The place where the exercises were conducted was called the *gymnasia* (goomnas-ee-ah). Guess what word we get from that. You guessed it—gymnasium. The New Testament uses this word six times in reference to Christian exercise.

Boxing, Knockout

Paul even compares the Christian's struggles to a boxing match. Boxing was also an important sport in Greece; and according to their rules, a man was knocked out if he was hit under the eye. The technical term for this prize-winning blow was *hupopiazo* (hoop-o-pee-ad-zo). Even this term is found in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection...." The phrase "keep under my body" is the Greek word *hupopiazo*. So Paul is actually saying, "I give my body the knockout punch."

Nike

Sound familiar? Think of it—one of our name brand tennis shoes is mentioned in the Bible! The word "nike" comes from the Greek word *nikao* (nik-ah-o) and is found thirty-three times in the New Testament. Of course, the Bible doesn't talk about Nike tennis shoes, but it does talk about *nike* (neekay). The word actually means victory and is both a military and an athletic term. The winners were called *nikon* (nee-kon) overcomers, victors or conquerors.

Trophy, Prize

The Greek word for the sports trophy—*brabeion* (brab-i-on) is found numerous times in the New Testament in connection with the Christian's reward, as is the athlete's *stephanos* (stef-an-os) or crown.

Thus, you can see that the Bible closely ties the struggles and pain, the competition and events and the trophies and victories of the athletic contest to the Christian life.

In fact, sports events so closely paralleled the struggles of the Christian that the early church actually called Christians "athletes!" One of the oldest Christian books in existence is called *The Book of Thomas the Athlete*, and in another book Christ is called "our athlete" (in *The Acts of Thomas*).

God's Gold Medalist

We would be scriptural, therefore, in saying that every Christian is an athlete, participating in the Christian Olympics. But it is not enough to be an Olympic athlete. The goal of the athlete was not to make the Olympics, but to *win the Olympics*—to be a gold medalist. So it is with the Christian. It is not enough that you are on God's Olympic team; God wants you to be a champion, a gold medalist.

What makes the difference between the participant and the gold medalist? Is it just talent? Hardly. Some of the great champions in sports will tell you that they have seen many who had greater talent than they ever hoped to have; but these great “talents” never made it to the pros, while those with less talent did. Why? What makes someone the best that person can be?

A study of world-class athletes reveals eight things about them that distinguish them from the rest of us ordinary folks. These same eight qualities must also be in the lives of God’s spiritual athletes if they are to be “gold medalists” for Him.

In this lesson we will note three of these eight qualities of the true gold medalist. Then in Lesson 3 we will look at the other five qualities. (Later in this study we will return to some of these themes for a more in-depth look as we list the marks of a true winner.)

He Obeys the Rules of the Game

Defining the Terms

Read 2 Timothy 2:5. This verse mentions two technical words that were used in the Greek Olympic and Isthmian games: “strive” and “crowned.” “Strive” is the Greek word *athleo* (ath-leh-o) from which we get our word “athlete.” The word “crown” is the Greek word *stephanos* (stef-an-os) which was the name of the crown of laurel leaves worn by the Olympic champion.

Thus, the verse pictures the Olympic athlete striving to be the best. However, if he is ever to wear the coveted *stephanos*, he must obey the rules of the game (by “striving lawfully”).

Runners can be disqualified for taking a short cut or illegally making contact with another runner. Boxers can be disqualified for concealing something in their gloves. So it is with the Christian athlete. If he is to win the coveted crown of victory for the Lord, he must obey the rules.

Defining the Rules

Where do we find the rules we are to obey? In the Word of God. This is our rulebook. This is why we must know it and follow it.

An NFL player will tell you that the most important book to him is the playbook. If he doesn’t know it, he can’t play on the team. And if he doesn’t follow it, he will soon be kicked off the team.

So with us. God’s work requires that we know and obey His Word. Though God will never kick us off His team, He may put us on the bench while others reap the benefits of being the starters.

The Danger of Disqualification

This is what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:27. The phrase “be a castaway” means “be disqualified.” This is yet another athletic term. The Greek word *dokimos* (dok-ee-mos) means approved. That is, the athlete has officially been declared the winner. His performance was within the rules. The word *adokimos* (ah-dok-ee-mos) means disapproved. That is, his performance was not within

the bounds of the rules; and therefore he is disqualified from competition. That is the word used in this verse. Paul's concern was that he would be disqualified for not obeying the rules.

This should also be our concern. It is sad but true that many Christians have been benched and are no longer being used by God because they wouldn't "play by the rules." Teens, God does not have to use you. And He won't use you if you don't get to know the "playbook" (the Word of God) and if you don't follow the rules of this Book in the game of life.

He Is a Team Player

The Necessity of Teamwork

Some athletes have great individual talent but are never able to fulfill their potential because they have never learned to be a team player. Dean Smith, former basketball coach at the University of North Carolina, was well known for his insistence upon teamwork. Individual players were made to blend their talents so as to work together for the team. If any one had played as an individual, he would have immediately been benched.

So too with the Christian. Christianity is a team sport. Note Philippians 1:27. The phrase "striving together" is the Greek word *sunathleo* (soon-ath-leh-o) literally, "athleting together." It was the Greek word for the idea of playing together as a team.

Showing Our Individuality

In youth work there are often times that the group will be doing things or going places that everyone will not necessarily enjoy. Some show their individuality and refuse to go along. They stand on the sidelines and watch, or they don't go on the outing because it's not what they wanted to do. That's not being a team player.

God wants you to learn now that Christians are to do things together. When it's time for Sunday school, be there. When it's time to take the ProTeen quiz, be here and be prepared. During the ProTeen lesson, be here and take notes. Be a team player, not an individualist.

Note again Philippians 1:27. What does this verse say is required for good team play? "One spirit and one mind." Are we all of one spirit in this youth group? Do we all have the same mind? Are we all together in our effort in ProTeens? Are we all together in Sunday school, on Sunday night, on Wednesday night, when we take the quiz, and when we memorize verses? Are we team players or individuals?

He Is Disciplined

Read 1 Corinthians 9:25. Here we see that "every man that striveth (agonizes and strains) for the mastery (to be the best he can be) is temperate (exercises self-control) in all things."

Exercising Self–Control

Here is the difference between the average athlete and the super–athlete. The champion exercises self–control. He is disciplined. He watches what he eats; he drives his body to get in top shape, and he practices for countless hours.

So it is with the Christian gold medalist. He knows how to exercise self–control and discipline. He disciplines himself to “eat” God’s Word daily. He disciplines himself to cut out those foods that are spiritually unhealthy. (That is, he is careful not to fill his mind with filth and garbage.) He disciplines himself to have devotions, to pray, to attend church and to memorize Scripture while others waste their time on physical things.

Running a Marathon

Hebrews 12:1 shows the discipline required in the Christian Olympics: “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” The word translated as “patience” means endurance. The Christian life is not a 100–yard dash. It is a marathon that lasts the rest of your life. In a marathon it is not how fast you run but how long you run fast that counts. Some teens start out fast in ProTeens, but halfway through the year they drop by the wayside. Why? Because they do not have the discipline to make themselves keep going. It is here that we see the difference in the champion and the average Christian.

When we have our awards banquet at the end of the ProTeen year, will you be a gold medalist or just a participant? That may well depend on your own personal discipline.

In the Olympics, as in the Christian life, in order to gain the gold there must first be the training and the straining. Thus, we must train and strain before we gain. Do you have the necessary discipline?

Quiz Answers: Lesson 2

1.
 - a. Obeys the rules of the game.
 - b. Is a team player.
 - c. Is disciplined.

2.
 - a. C.
 - b. A.
 - c. B.
 - d. C.
 - e. A.

3.
 - a. Jesus Christ
 - b. We overcome evil with good.
 - c. Through our Lord Jesus Christ
 - d. Through faith
 - e. Not being hurt by the second death
 - f. Sitting with Christ in His throne
 - g. The blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony

4. Any three of the following eight will do.
 - a. Athlete
 - b. Stadium
 - c. Race, run
 - d. Wrestling
 - e. Gymnasium, exercise
 - f. Boxing, knockout
 - g. Nike
 - h. Trophy, prize

Lesson 2 Quiz: God's Gold Medalist (Part 1)

Name _____ Date _____

Church/City _____

Level _____ Score _____ (8 points Level One; 19 points Level Two)

Level One and Level Two

- 3 1. List the three qualities of the true gold medalist that were studied in this lesson.
- a. He _____
 - b. He _____
 - c. He _____

- 5 2. Choose the best answer to complete each of the following statements.
- a. _____ According to 1 Corinthians 9:27, if an athlete or a Christian breaks the rules, he (a) should not receive a crown (b) is dishonest (c) is disqualified.
 - b. _____ Philippians 1:27 contains the Greek word *sunathleo*, which means (a) athleting together (b) son of an athlete (c) an athletic contest.
 - c. _____ According to Philippians 1:27, the thing that will kill a youth group is (a) lack of money for activities (b) everyone trying to be an individualist (c) Satan's evil forces.
 - d. _____ First Corinthians 9:25 says that the Christian athlete (a) loves the Lord (b) fights the Devil (c) exercises self-control.
 - e. _____ Hebrews 12:1 says that the Christian athlete must (a) run the race with patience (b) finish his course (c) fight the good fight of the faith.

Level Two Only

- 8 3. Answer the following questions about verses that contain a form of the Greek word *nike*.
- a. According to John 16:33, who has already defeated the world? _____
 - b. According to Romans 12:21, how do we get the victory over someone who criticizes us or does some evil against us? _____
 - c. According to 1 Corinthians 15:55 and 57, how do Christians "beat" death? _____
 - d. According to 1 John 5:4, how do we "beat" the world? _____
 - e. According to Revelation 2:11, what is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____

- f. According to Revelation 3:21, what is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____
- g. According to Revelation 12:11, what two things do Christians use to “beat” Satan?
• _____ • _____

3

4. List three of the sports terms used in the Bible.
- a. _____ b. _____
- c. _____

L E S S O N 2

GOD'S GOLD MEDALIST (PART 1)**A TRUE WINNER CONTENDS FOR THE FAITH**

When the New Testament was written, the Greek Olympics were at their height of popularity. The Christian of that day was well aware of the Olympic and Isthmian games, and sports terminology was common knowledge. It is no surprise then to find the New Testament sprinkled with sports terminology, comparing the Christian life to an Olympic struggle.

Sports Terms Used in the Bible

- **athlete** _____
- **stadium** _____
- **race, run** _____
- **wrestling** _____
- **gymnasium, exercise** _____
- **boxing, knockout** _____
- **nike** _____
- **trophy, prize** _____

God's Gold Medalist

A study of world-class athletes reveals eight things about them that distinguish them from the rest of us ordinary folks.

These same qualities must also be in the lives of God's spiritual athletes if they are to be "gold medalists" for Him.

Let's note three of the eight qualities of the true gold medalist

1. He obeys the rules of the game.

Read 2 Timothy 2:5. The word “crowned” comes from the Greek word *stephanos* and was a crown of laurel leaves given to the victor.

- To win the crown the athlete had to compete “lawfully.”
- What is the Christian’s rulebook? the Word of God
- What happens if an athlete or a Christian breaks the rules? (1 Corinthians 9:27) He is disqualified.

2. He is a team player.

- Philippians 1:27 tells us to “strive together”
- The Greek word used here is *sunathleo* (soon-ath-leh’-o), meaning “ath-leting together.”
- What will kill a youth group? Everyone trying to be an individualist.
- Youth groups need “team spirit.” If you act independently (doing your own thing), it affects everyone else.

3. He is disciplined.

- First Corinthians 9:25 says that the Christian athlete exercises temperance (self-control). That is, he is disciplined.
- Hebrews 12:1 says that the Christian athlete must run the race with patience or endurance.

Remember: The Christian life is not a 100–yard dash. It is a marathon that lasts the rest of your life.

Application

It is not what you do at the beginning of the ProTeen year, but what you keep on doing that counts—and that requires personal discipline. You must train and strain before you gain.

At-Home Bible Study (Level Two Only)

One of the sports terms we studied that is used in the New Testament is the Greek word *nike* (pronounced nee'-kay). It is translated "overcome" in our Bibles, and it really means to win or to beat the enemy.

In each of the verses listed below, a form of the Greek word *nike* is used. Read the verses and answer the questions to learn more about the Christian's victory.

- John 16:33—Who has already defeated the world? **Jesus Christ** _____
- Romans 12:21—How do we get the victory over someone who criticizes us or does some evil against us? **We overcome evil with good.** _____
- 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57—How do Christians "beat" death? **through our Lord Jesus Christ** _____
- 1 John 5:4—How do we "beat" the world? **through faith** _____
- 1 John 5:5—Who is the one who will have victory over the world? _____
he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God _____
- Revelation 2:7—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life?
eating of the Tree of Life _____
- Revelation 2:11—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life?
not being hurt by the second death _____
- Revelation 3:21—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life?
sitting with Christ in His throne _____
- Revelation 21:7—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life?
being children of God _____
- Revelation 12:11—What two things do Christians use to "beat" Satan?
by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony _____

God's Gold Medalist (Part 1)

Sports Terms Used in the Bible

- Athlete • Stadium
- Race, Run • Wrestling
- Gymnasium, Exercise • Boxing, Knockout
- Nike • Trophy, Prize

God's Gold Medalist

- He Obeys the Rules of the Game
- He Is a Team Player
- He Is Disciplined

GOD'S GOLD MEDALIST (PART 2)

Let's review some of the things we have learned thus far. First, the Christian life is a life of agony. There is no victory apart from the struggle and sweat of training and competition to be the best we can for the Lord. Thus, when Jude 3 tells us, "Earnestly contend for the faith," it is saying, "Agonize for the faith."

Second, we have learned that the greatest foe we face is ourselves. Our own fleshly desires for comfort, ease and thrills make us constantly have to fight against our own selves in order to study the Word, pray, have our devotions and memorize verses. Thus, our "contending" is mostly against ourselves, not against others.

Third, we have seen that the Christian life is like an athletic contest, requiring training and straining for victory.

In Lesson 2 we noted three characteristics of the true gold medalist and compared them to the qualities found in God's gold medalists.

- He obeys the rules of the game.
- He is a team player.
- He is disciplined.

In this lesson we will look at five more characteristics of God's champion athletes. These five qualities can all be seen in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

He Keeps His Eye on the Goal

First Corinthians 9:24 introduces us to the Christian athlete, comparing him to the Greek Olympic runner. Paul tells us that as the Olympic athlete runs for a prize, so the Christian should run that he "may obtain."

The Certain Runner

Hebrews 12, Philippians 3 and 1 Corinthians 9 all paint a picture of a Christian running in the spiritual Olympics. You will note one thing in common about all three pictures of the spiritual athlete—he is certain about what he is after.

The Hebrews 12 marathon runner is "looking unto Jesus" (verse 2); the Philippians 3 runner is "pressing toward the mark" (verse 14) and the 1 Corinthians 9 runner "runs that he may obtain" the prize (verse 24). All three have a definite goal.

The Uncertain Runner

Can you imagine a man running in a race and not knowing where the finish line is or not even knowing why he is running? Imagine asking a long-distance runner,

“Where are you going?” And he replies, “I don’t know; I’m just out here running around and having fun!” Obviously, that man won’t win the race.

First Corinthians 9:26 adds: “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air.” That is, he knows where he is going (he is not uncertain), and he is not just “shadow boxing” (beating the air). So it is in any endeavor. The one who succeeds is the one who knows where he is going. No runner ever ran who didn’t know where the finish line was. Every runner has a goal in mind when the race starts.

Learn to be goal-oriented. Do you have goals for this year? Do you have a plan to reach those goals? Are you a certain or an uncertain runner in ProTeens? What about in school? What about your life? Do you have goals, purposes, and plans? Or are you just wandering around in life, taking whatever comes? One of the best things you can do this week is write your goals for this ProTeen/school year.

He Is Mentally Tough

It’s one thing to have a goal, but another thing to pay the price necessary to reach that goal. This is where the men are divided from the boys and the ladies from the girls. Here is where the gold medalist and the ordinary athlete are distinguished. The gold medalist is willing to pay the price for glory, while the ordinary runner will settle for second best.

Notice 1 Corinthians 9:25. The champion will “strive for the mastery.” The word “strive” is the Greek word *agon* that we have already studied. This man is willing to agonize. He is willing to suffer; he is willing to hurt in order to reach his goal. Coaches have a phrase they use in describing this kind of athlete: they say he is “mentally tough.”

What exactly is mental toughness? It is that ability to refuse to quit or give up the fight in spite of the score or the circumstances. A person is mentally tough when he fights just as hard when he is behind 50-0 as he would if he were tied with ten seconds to go.

Do you have mental toughness? What you do in ProTeens this year...what you do in school...what you do in almost anything you start will prove how tough you are mentally. Notice that the important thing is not how smart you are mentally but how tough you are mentally. Many smart people are not tough, and so they quit when the going gets rough.

We have all heard the saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” That’s mental toughness. Mental toughness doesn’t start a thousand things only to finish a dozen. Rather, whatever it starts, it finishes no matter how tough the circumstances.

He Is Determined to Be the Best He Can Be

According to 1 Corinthians 9:25, the world-class athlete does not just strive; he strives “for the mastery.” That means that his goal is to be the very best he can

be. He will not settle for second best. He will not quit until he has done every thing possible to be the best he can be.

In the 1989 French Open, Michael Chang faced Ivan Lendl in a classic tennis match. Young Chang suffered from severe cramps in his legs, thighs and hips. Yet he refused to quit. He would not stop and in the end he pulled off one of the greatest upsets in the history of tennis. Chang was mentally tough, and in the postgame interview he gave all the credit to the Lord—the one who refused to quit but went all the way to the cross for us! Should we not give our all for Him?

He Develops Every Talent to Its Fullest Potential

The gold medalist not only “strives for the mastery,” but he is “temperate (disciplined) in all things” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Notice the word “all.” Teens, you do not know how God will use you in the spiritual Olympics. You don’t know what skills and talents you will need. Thus, you need to develop every talent you have to its fullest.

You may say, “I can’t sing,” or “I don’t have the ability to play a musical instrument,” or “I can’t speak in front of people” or “I can’t write.” But how do you really know? Sure, you may have tried to sing or play an instrument once—but have you ever taken lessons? Have you actually studied the skill from a professional teacher? The writer of these ProTeen lessons once confessed that he could not write, but God later used him to write hundreds of ProTeen lessons.

You don’t know what talents you may have until you give yourself to the agony and discipline of developing your abilities. Here are two good rules for you to follow.

Rule #1: Never Say “No” to an Opportunity to Serve God

If someone asks you to teach a Sunday school class, try it. If someone asks you to sing, do it. If someone asks you to be in charge, accept it. Don’t ever say “no.”

Rule #2: Do Everything for God the Best You Can Do It

Some may take every opportunity to serve the Lord, but then they simply “slop” through it and give little effort. Such halfway service is sin! You serve a perfect God, and what you do for Him should be the very best you can do. That’s why you should develop your talents to their fullest. Take lessons, practice, use your time wisely. Sweat, agonize, suffer—that’s what makes a gold medalist.

He Gains the Victor’s Crown

The Corruptible Crown

Paul reminds us that a man ran in the Greek Olympics for “the prize.” The prize in those Olympics was not gold but a crown of leaves called a *stephanos* (stef-an-os). Think of it—he ran for leaves. He practiced for months for leaves. He endured pain, suffering and agony for leaves! This is why in 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul says, “They do it to obtain a corruptible crown.” Their crown was corruptible; that is, it would wither and fall apart in a few months.

The Incorruptible Crown

Paul then reminds us that our crown in the spiritual Olympics is “incorruptible.” That is, God will give us a crown that will never decay but will last forever.

If men will knock themselves out to win a temporary prize, should we not knock ourselves out to win an eternal prize?

What about it, teen? Do you have the qualities of a gold medalist? If not, why not?

Quiz Answers: Lesson 3

1.
 - a. The Christian life is a life of agony.
 - b. The greatest foe that we face is ourselves.
 - c. The Christian life is like an athletic contest, requiring training and straining for victory.
2. Any five of these eight will do.
 - a. He obeys the rules of the game.
 - b. He is a team player.
 - c. He is disciplined.
 - d. He keeps his eye on the goal.
 - e. He is mentally tough.
 - f. He is determined to be the best he can be.
 - g. He develops every talent to its fullest potential.
 - h. He gains the victor's crown.
3. Quit, give up, score, circumstances
4.
 - a. Never say no to an opportunity to serve God.
 - b. Do everything for God the best you can do it.

Lesson 3 Quiz: God's Gold Medalist (Part 2)

Name _____ Date _____

Church/City _____

Level _____ Score _____ (8 points Level One; 14 points Level Two)

Level One and Level Two

- ③ 1. List the three major lessons we have learned so far.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
- ⑤ 2. List five of the eight characteristics of God's gold medalist.
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____ d.
 - e. _____

Level Two Only

- ④ 3. Fill in the blanks to complete the following definition of mental toughness.
Mental toughness is the ability to refuse to _____ or
_____ the fight in spite of the _____ or the
_____.
- ② 4. What are two good rules to follow to help you develop your talents for the Lord?
- a. _____
 - b. _____

L E S S O N 3

GOD'S GOLD MEDALIST (PART 2)**A TRUE WINNER CONTENDS FOR THE FAITH**

Thus far we have learned three major lessons.

1. The Christian life is a life of _____ **agony** _____. Jude 3 could be translated: “_____ **agonize** _____ for the faith.”
2. The greatest foe we face is _____ **ourselves** _____.
3. The Christian life is like an _____ **athletic** _____ contest, requiring _____ **training** _____ and _____ **straining** _____ for victory

In Lesson 2 we noted three of eight characteristics of God's gold medalist.

1. He _____ **obeys** _____ the _____ **rules** _____ of the game.
2. He is a _____ **team player** _____.
3. He is _____ **disciplined** _____.

In this lesson we will look at five more characteristics of God's champion athletes. These five qualities can all be found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

He Keeps His Eye on the Goal

Note Hebrews 12:2, Philippians 3:14, and 1 Corinthians 9:24. The Christian in these verses is...

- Certain about his goal
- Uncertain about his goal

Learn to be _____ **goal** _____-oriented

He Is Mentally Tough

Here is where the gold medalist and the ordinary athlete are distinguished. The gold medalist is willing to pay the price of glory, while the ordinary runner will settle for second best.

Definition of Mental Toughness

Mental toughness is that ability to refuse to quit or give up the fight in spite of the score or the circumstances.

He Is Determined to Be the Best He Can

What phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:25 proves this? “striveth for the mastery”
(The word for “striveth” in this verse is the word “agonize” in the Greek. Thus, the person “agonizes” to compete and win.)

In the 1989 French Open, Michael Chang faced Ivan Lendl in a classic tennis match. Young Chang suffered from severe cramps in his legs, thighs, and hips. Yet he refused to quit. He would not stop—and in the end he pulled off one of the greatest upsets in the history of tennis. Chang was mentally tough, and in the postgame interview he gave all the credit to the Lord—the one who refused to quit but went all the way to the cross for us! Should we not give our all for Him?

He Develops His Talents to the Fullest

What word in 1 Corinthians 9:25 proves this? “temperate”
That is, he disciplines himself; he goes into strict training. Thus, he is developing every talent so it can be used for God.

Two good rules to follow:

Rule 1: Never say “no” to an opportunity to serve God.

Rule 2: Do everything for God the best you can do it.

He Gains the Victor’s Crown

Note 1 Corinthians 9:25. There are two kinds of crowns to win:

1. The Corruptible Crown (a crown that doesn’t last)
What was the “corruptible” crown? laurel leaves
2. The Incorruptible Crown (a crown that lasts)

Which crown is the best? Which should demand the most of your time and effort? Which crown are you working the hardest for? Be honest!

At-Home Bible Study (Level One and Level Two)

As a review of Lessons 2 and 3, answer the following questions.

List five sports terms that are used in the Bible.

1. **Any five of the following would be acceptable:** _____
2. **athlete, stadium, race, run, wrestling, gymnasium, exercise, boxing,** _____
3. **knockout, nike, trophy, prize** _____
4. _____
5. _____

Complete the following eight characteristics of God's gold medalist.

1. He _____ **obeys** _____ the rules of the game
2. He is a _____ **team** _____ player.
3. He is _____ **disciplined** _____.
4. He keeps his eye on the _____ **goal** _____.
5. He is mentally _____ **tough** _____.
6. He is determined to be the _____ **best** _____ he can be.
7. He develops every _____ **talent** _____ to its fullest potential.
8. He gains the victor's _____ **crown** _____.

Complete the following statements.

- In order to gain the gold, there must first be the _____ **training** _____ and the _____ **straining** _____.
- Mental toughness is the ability to refuse to _____ **quit** _____ or _____ **give up** _____ the fight in spite of the _____ **score** _____ or the _____ **circumstances** _____.

What are two rules you can follow to help you develop your talents for the Lord?

1. **Never say "no" to an opportunity to serve God.** _____
2. **Do everything for God the best that you can do it.** _____

God's Gold Medalist (Part 2)

God's Gold Medalist

- He Obeys the Rules of the Game
 - He Is a Team Player
 - He Is Disciplined
- He Keeps His Eye on the Goal
 - He Is Mentally Tough
- He Is Determined to Be the Best He Can Be
- He Develops Every Talent to Its Fullest Potential
 - He Gains the Victor's Crown