

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.

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 a 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

<i>Fight, Fought</i>	_____ (5 times)	<i>Contention</i>	_____ (1 time)
<i>Strive, Striving</i>	_____ (5 times)	<i>Race</i>	_____ (1 time)
<i>Conflict</i>	_____ (2 times)	<i>Suffer</i>	_____ (1 time)
<i>Agony</i>	_____ (1 time)	<i>Subdued</i>	_____ (1 time)
<i>Laboring</i>	_____ (1 time)	<i>Contend</i>	_____ (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."

Lesson 1

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 castaway (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 _____ ISC# _____ 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 _____.