

THE MARKS OF A TRUE WINNER

BY FRANK HAMRICK



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Written 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.

Accept the challenge to give what it takes to be a champion so that you can be a victor in the race of life.

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: _____

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 _____ times in the Greek New Testament.

How agon is translated

_____ (5 times)	_____ (1 time)
_____ (5 times)	_____ (1 time)
_____ (2 times)	_____ (1 time)
_____ (1 time)	_____ (1 time)
_____ (1 time)	_____ (1 time)

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

What does the word “agony” in Jude 3 imply? _____

This is seen in two ways:

1. The agony of _____
2. The agony of _____

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

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”? _____

The Essence of the Word “Contend” In Jude 3

1. A man’s struggle _____
2. A man’s struggle _____

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 _____.

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”) _____
- Luke 13:24 (“strive”) _____
(Hint: The “strait gate” is the gate of salvation.)
- 1 Corinthians 9:25 (“striveth”) _____
(Note: “Mastery” means “to be the best you can be for God.”)
- Romans 15:30 (“strive together”) _____
- 1 Timothy 4:10 (“suffer reproach”) _____
(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”) _____
- Jude 3 (“contend”) _____

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.”

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

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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 _____ 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? _____
- What happens if an athlete or a Christian breaks the rules? (1 Corinthians 9:27) _____

2. He is a _____.

- Philippians 1:27 tells us to _____
- 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 _____.
- Youth groups need “team spirit.” If you act independently (doing your own thing), it affects everyone else.

3. He is _____.

- First Corinthians 9:25 says that the Christian athlete exercises _____
_____. That is, he is disciplined.
- Hebrews 12:1 says that the Christian athlete must run the race with
_____ or _____.

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

Application

It is not what you do at the beginning of the ProTeen year, but what you _____ that counts—and that requires _____. You must _____ and _____ before you _____.

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? _____
- Romans 12:21—How do we get the victory over someone who criticizes us or does some evil against us? _____
- 1 Corinthians 15:55, 57—How do Christians "beat" death? _____

- 1 John 5:4—How do we "beat" the world? _____

- 1 John 5:5—Who is the one who will have victory over the world? _____

- Revelation 2:7—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____
- Revelation 2:11—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____

- Revelation 3:21—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____

- Revelation 21:7—What is the prize for winning or overcoming in the Christian life? _____
- Revelation 12:11—What two things do Christians use to "beat" Satan? _____

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 _____. Jude 3 could be translated: "_____ for the faith."
2. The greatest foe we face is _____.
3. The Christian life is like an _____ contest, requiring _____ and _____ for victory

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

1. He _____ the _____ of the game.
2. He is a _____.
3. He is _____.

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 _____-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 _____ or give up the fight
_____ or the circumstances.

He Is Determined to Be the Best He Can

What phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:25 proves this? _____
(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? _____
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 _____ to an opportunity to _____.

Rule 2: Do everything for God the _____ 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 _____ Crown (a crown that doesn’t last)
What was the “corruptible” crown? _____
2. The _____ 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. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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

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

Complete the following statements.

- In order to gain the gold, there must first be the _____ and the _____.
- Mental toughness is the ability to refuse to _____ or _____ the fight in spite of the _____ or the _____.

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

1. _____
2. _____