

# Lessons for Liam: Essays on Character

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## Preface

I learned the other day that the child my wife, Pam, and I have been expecting is to be a boy. The news is overwhelming to me as I think of the huge responsibility that lies ahead for me as a father. "A father!" The words still frighten me. Yet, I am overjoyed at the prospect of having a son. I am the last of my line of Armstrongs, and it has been important to me to carry on the name. It may seem silly, perhaps, in these "modern" times, but family and family history is important to me. It is also important to raise a child who will have integrity and be a person of irrefutable character.

The Proverbs state "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1, NIV). This is, of course, referring to one's reputation. As I have sought to carry my name without blemish, so too do I hope to pass this desire on to my son (and anyone else who might read these "essays"). I am far from a perfect man, nor was my father or his father before. But as my father has taught me from the mistakes of his life, so too do I teach you with the wisdom of experience. Character, integrity, discipline, respect, godliness, chivalry, compassion, patience, mercy, etc. all seem to be lacking in this present age. The essays that follow are intended to put into words my desire to see William Hunter Armstrong (AKA "Liam") become a trusted and respected man of integrity. The only thing I can provide him that will be eternal is the foundation character. Wealth and looks are fleeting, but reputation lives on in every life you touch. Be remembered as a man who is humble, convicted and compassionate. Above all, put God first in your life.

## Lessons for Liam: Essays on Character

Trust in God    Trust in yourself    Why you will face trials and difficulty in life    Finding your purpose    Dress for success; setting a standard    Manners    Love your neighbor  
Remember to play after every storm    When you fall down (pick yourself up; I will be there; God will be there)    The value of an education    Your body is a temple    Finding the love you desire

## LESSON 1

## Trust in God

As you venture forward in life you will face the spectrum of experience. You will know heartache—a lot of heartache. You know success, and you will know failure. You will have great confidence, while at other times you will tremble in fear. You will know good, and you will battle evil. Life guarantees no easy path. And this is a blessing—yes, a blessing. For it is when we are challenged that we grow—physically, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

Know this—that you will never be tested beyond what you are capable of enduring. We will speak later on the topic of trials, but as Nietzsche wrote: "that which does not kill us makes us stronger." There are reasons for each and every experience. These—good or bad—are to develop you into the wonderful person you are to become.

Though at times you may feel that you are walking alone in the shadow of death, fear not, for your God is with you and will never leave you or forsake you. He is the Almighty. There is nothing that is out of his control or reach. If you feel lost or forsaken, hold fast. Soon enough, you will again feel his presence beside you. He was always there. It is, however, in times of great trouble and despair that we tend to think that we have to go it alone. We take our eyes off our Lord. Like in the poem, "Footprints in the Sand", we see only one set of footprints and fail to realize that it is because he is carrying us. Trials and difficulty, like the worst of hurricanes, soon pass. Always remember to "play after every storm." For it is only after the storm that you will see that God was always there with you and has carried you. He allowed you to experience this for his purposes. It may be to build character in you. It may be to build compassion in another. Whatever, it is for his plan—and his is greater than any we could ever imagine!

God should be in everything you do. Your thoughts and your actions should be a reflection of him. Will you be perfect in this? Of course, not. No one expects you to be perfect. Only Christ was perfect in the flesh. But you must strive for this perfection. This is your life's greatest purpose.

Who is God? Many have asked this question. No one can answer this perfectly. But in a word, he is "love." Love is the very essence of God. God is perfect love—that of which we, in the flesh, are incapable. We are admonished to love our neighbor and to love our enemies. The Bible tells us "love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (I Cor. 13:4-7, NIV).

The labels of modern faith do not bind our trust in God. Pure religion, we are taught, is to care for the widowed and the orphaned (James 1:27)—that is, to care for those in need. Make this your religion. You will know people of countless professions of faith. Know that none of these have a lock on God. Respect all faiths—Buddhist, Muslim, Jew, or Christian—all desire to follow God. Respect those who are without faith, as well, for it is they who need your love the most. In the end, we will all have to answer for how we lived our life, and, be certain, not one of us will have lived it perfectly. Be a friend to all, but in all relationships include God.

You will find God in everything. Everything is an expression of God. Therefore, respect everything and everyone. Let each day begin and end with a conversation with God. Pray continually. This sounds impossible, but what it means is let God enter into every facet of your life—every decision, every action, and every relationship. This means, trust in God!

Hindsight is 20/20, but we are blind when it comes to the future. For God, however, there is no beginning or end—no past or future. God is eternity. He knew you before your conception.

He knows your end. He has set before you a course. Along that course are many roads. At each fork you will make a decision. Each road will lead you to your next destination, but the experience along the way will not be the same. You may take the easy road or you may take the hard road. And trust that the easy road is not always the best road. There are experiences down even the hard road that are necessary for your future success. The key is to seek God's direction. Do not rush down just any path—for certainly; you will make a wrong turn. Trust in God. Lean not on your own understanding. Seek guidance.

There will be times in life when you "know" what you absolutely must have. You will pray in earnest for this one thing. You will ask God and wait. Sometimes you will receive just what you asked for. Sometimes you have to wait. Many times the answer will be a resounding "NO." You will be tempted to plead with God. And sometimes he may, after repeated petitions say, "Yes." But, when the answer continues to be the negative, accept that this is in your best interest. God has something else in mind.

I have always enjoyed the Garth Brooks song, "Unanswered Prayers." Someday, when you go back to a football game at your high school, you will run into that "old high school flame" and realize just how unsuited you were for each other. If, however, you have been trusting in God along the way, you will turn and look at your wife and "thank God for unanswered prayers"—I certainly do! Your father waited over 40 years to meet your mother. But, in that year he was flooded with blessings beyond belief. Along with marrying the woman God intended for me, your conception and birth are the answer to years of unanswered prayers. In reality, however, my prayers were always answered—just not according to my schedule. Be patient. trust in God.

When you find yourself on difficult path, ask God for strength and guidance. The experience that you are going through is a blessing. It is often hard to comprehend how the apostle Paul could tell us to "consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2, NIV). No one wants to hurt. No one wants to suffer. Trials are not fun. Heartache is painful. But, wounds heal, and broken bones mend. In fact, the scars strengthen the tissue that remains. Paul teaches us "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4, NIV).

Knowledge of human physiology tells us that the body is adaptable. In order to adapt, however, it has to be stressed to a level greater than that to which it is accustomed. Likewise, if it is under-stressed, it can revert back to a lower lever of functioning. Therefore, you should welcome the opportunities to grow—to become stronger. God wants you to develop character. To do this, he must let you be tested. He will never let you experience more than you are capable of handling. Nor will he leave you alone, without a means of deliverance from your trials.

Accept, too, that your suffering may be for the edification of others. Likewise, others suffer for your sake—therefore, never turn your back on someone in need. Have compassion. Help, as you are able. Minimally, you should pray for them and that God's will be done. Remember that we are all on this earth for a divine purpose and affect one another, whether we realize it or not. You never know whom your actions may affect. You will find that there is much validity to the principle of "six degrees of separation"—that is, that we are less than six people removed from anyone in the world. So, you never know the extent to which your example will affect others.

Trust in God! Live your life accordingly. As you read the lessons that follow, do so with the understanding that God is at the center of your life.

## LESSON 2

### Trust in Yourself

It is only through labor and prayerful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage that we move on to better things.

--Theodore Roosevelt

In our last lesson, I asked you to trust in God—above anything (or anyone) Trust in God. In trusting him, understand that he has given you all the talents and gifts you need to succeed in your Purpose. Never doubt your abilities. You may not always succeed, but realize that it is in failure that you learn and grow. It is in failure that you grow stronger. Each failure is a lesson learned and a step closer toward success. Know that you have the capability to learn from your mistakes and ultimately succeed. It has wisely been said that failure only comes with not trying. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in *You Learn by Living* "failure comes to everyone, except when one does nothing at all, which is in itself failure" (p.154). \*

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The Proverbs state that "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1, NIV). 'Lessons for Liam' was inspired by the impending birth of my son. It is important to me to raise a child who will have integrity and be a person of irrefutable character. Character, integrity, discipline, respect, godliness, chivalry, compassion, patience, mercy, etc. all seem to be lacking in this present age. The essays that follow are intended to put into words my desire to see William Hunter Armstrong (AKA "Liam") become a trusted and respected man of integrity.

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