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**Falling from Grace?**

The Rise and Fall of Lance Armstrong

By Paul Asay

**What Happened:**

For years, Lance Armstrong was near the top of the sports world. After recovering from cancer in 1997, the cyclist went on to claim a record seven Tour de France titles and become one of the most recognizable and inspirational athletes of his time.

However, Armstrong's legacy was tarnished and perhaps demolished when the United States' Anti-Doping Agency released a 1,000-page study that concluded the cyclist used banned, performance-enhancing substances. His Tour de France titles, along with all wins since 1998, have been stripped.

"On one hand, it's a sad day for the sport; but on the other hand, it's an absolutely fantastic day for the sport," said Betsy Andreu, a longtime critic of Armstrong's, told *Sports Illustrated*. "Because it shows the choices you make today, you'll face consequences for them tomorrow; and no matter how big you are, how much money you make or how big a celebrity you are, you'll be held accountable. I'm grateful for that."

The USADA says the evidence against Armstrong is "overwhelming," and what Armstrong did represents the "most sophisticated, professionalized and successful doping program that sport has ever seen." Twenty-six people, including 11 of his former teammates, have testified that Armstrong doped and encouraged others to do so.

Armstrong has denied ever doping, and despite the fact he dropped an appeal to the USADA, the cyclist still insists he's innocent. Some, despite the evidence, believe him.

Armstrong still heads his massively popular charity, The Lance Armstrong Foundation, a \$500 million organization that's done a lot to help cancer victims for more than a decade. Some people say the only way the foundation can survive is if Armstrong comes clean, confesses and begins making amends—things Armstrong so far has shown no inclination of doing.

**Talk About It:**

Do you believe Lance Armstrong? Are you swayed by the evidence against him? What would it take to make you change your mind one way or another?

Lance Armstrong was a hero to a lot of people; and to some people, he still is. Have you ever had a hero in your life fall from grace? How did you deal with it? Was there part of you that couldn't believe your hero could fall?

One of the saddest parts of Armstrong's story is what it might mean to his foundation, which became wildly well-known through its Livestrong slogan and bracelets. What do you think will happen to the foundation? What do you think *should* happen to it? When someone falls so hard, does it inevitably tarnish the real good the person has done?

The Bible tells us that we're all human—we all make mistakes and sometimes big ones. What are we supposed to do when we make mistakes or do something wrong? If Armstrong is guilty of doping, what should he do? If he apologized, would you forgive him?

**What the Bible Says:**

“They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, ‘Who will see them?’ They plot injustice and say, ‘We have devised a perfect plan!’ Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning. But God will shoot them with arrows; suddenly they will be struck down. He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn” (Ps. 64:5-8).

“Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Cor. 7:10).