

'God first' commitment fuels Armstrong's Olympics outlook

PARIS, France (BP) – His Instagram account proclaims “GOD FIRST!” and U.S. Olympic swimmer Hunter Armstrong tries to be faithful to that description whether he's winning gold medals or not.

“That's the first thing I want people to see and know about me,” Armstrong told Baptist Press. “As we grow, we have to make sure we have our priorities in line. I keep God as a priority. I can't really live without him. I can live without swimming or being an Olympian or any of that stuff.”

Armstrong captured one gold medal in the Paris Olympics as part of the men's 4×100 meter freestyle relay team with Caeleb Dressel, Jack Alexy and Chris Guiliano that held off Australia to win the title on Saturday. In individual competition on Sunday, Armstrong failed to advance to the finals in the 100-meter backstroke.



Armstrong (Photo credit: Mike Lewis)

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“I feel like in past years I’ve been sort of on the edge of it,” he said. “When I’m in competition, I’ll pray, and that will last for a little bit. Church camp, same kind of thing. But as soon as I didn’t need him anymore, it would fade.”

That began to change in the aftermath of a breakup with his girlfriend – a woman Armstrong had planned to marry – and following the death of his grandfather.

“The biggest catalyst for change in life tends to be pain,” Armstrong said. “Sometimes God will put you in a position where you have no other choice than to turn to Him.

“That’s been the biggest change that I’ve made this year,” he continued. “I promised at (world championships) that if He would help me get out of this, then I would embrace it.”

Armstrong’s gold in Paris was the second Olympic gold medal of his career. His first came in Tokyo in 2021 as part of the 4×100 meter medley relay. Success in relay races is fitting for Armstrong, as he is quick to point to the influence that some of his fellow swimmers, such as Michael Andrew and Carson Foster, have had on him spiritually.

He remembers an encounter with Andrew at a swimming competition. Though the two had met, they didn’t really know each other well. Armstrong remembers being especially nervous prior to a race, and Andrew noticed Armstrong’s state of mind.

“He got out of the warmup pool, came over and said, ‘Hey, can I pray with you?’” Armstrong said. “He was the start of, ‘OK,

this is how you use faith in competition.’”

Foster also helped sharpen Armstrong by inviting him to participate in group Bible studies for competitive swimmers.

“Truly my goals for Paris are just to do my best and see what the results are,” Armstrong said prior to the Olympics. “I think everybody here wants a gold medal, but I’ve overcome so much this year that I’m just happy to be here.

“Obviously, I want to have a great performance for myself, my country and my teammates. But if I walk away and I don’t have a single medal or a single best time, I can still walk away knowing that I represented myself well – and God.”