



Sir John Templeton and the Gravity of Character

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Thank you, James.

I would like to dedicate my talk to Jack and Pina Templeton, may they both rest in eternal peace. Heather, I learned so much from both your parents...on how to be a parent. Especially your mom. She was always giving Victoria and me advice that...we soaked in...and savored. I miss her loving spirit.

Sir John Templeton invited me to join his foundation in 1995. I was the fifth employee and first academic. When I signed the contract, I was still at Harvard, on the eve of defending my dissertation on adolescent moral development. Truth be told, my wife was not so excited. She kept telling me..."Arthur, you are turning down offers to be an assistant professor....to be the Director of the Laws of Life Essay Contest. An essay contest for kids! What are you thinking?"

I was thinking...that Sir John was going....where no one had ever gone before...and I wanted to be on the starship with him.

John Templeton was born in 1912. He grew up in Winchester, Tennessee and his nephew once told me that when John was 15 he asked one of the local farmers to tell him the best college in the U.S. You would have thought the farmer would have said Vanderbilt...but instead...he replied Yale University. So young John Templeton started writing letters to Yale and he quickly learned that his high school did not offer certain classes in mathematics and science that Yale required. So, young John Templeton persuaded the school principal to buy a math textbook required for one of these courses....and give it to John...and then several weeks later...the principal would test John on the material...but that's not the end of the story...John Templeton then persuaded the principal to let him teach the class and a few other classes. The principal said yes...and several years later...young John Templeton from Tennessee....matriculated to Yale.

He graduated Yale in 1934 and received a Rhodes Scholarship. It was during his time here at Oxford that Sir John began to travel to Europe and Asia...Years later...he became widely known as the "father" of global investing and he often talked about how his travels during the time he was a Rhodes Scholar transformed his worldview.

Almost two decades later, in 1954, he started the Templeton Growth Fund and within a few years he became well-known for investing in a small war-torn country named Japan...particularly in a small company called Sony.

From the very beginning, Sir John's investment strategy was to always invest in what he called the moment of "maximum pessimism."

I know nothing about stocks and securities, but what I learned is that this strategy is the most difficult challenge in investing...you are going against the powerful force we have come to know as "crowd psychology." Who invests in Japan in 1946?

But employing this strategy doesn't just take fortitude and patience. It takes optimism. Sir John Templeton was the most optimistic person I have ever met. His optimism was a positive contagion. You felt it. Especially his glowing smile.

I initially thought his optimism was just part of his natural temperament, a trait like being introverted or extraverted...but I don't think so. I think Sir John's optimism was cultivated...and grounded in his profound belief in God.

So, six months after starting at the foundation, I was promoted. I became Director of Character Development....and I was given the "green light" by Sir John to hire a Laws of Life Coordinator...and so I began to embark upon what is commonly known in the foundation world as talent scouting.

For example, each year Sir John brought together a group of advisors, mostly academics in the fields of science and religion. In 1997, the gathering was going to be held in Philadelphia. Although I had never met him before, I knew Marty Seligman taught at Penn and that after spending the early part of his career researching learned helplessness, Seligman was now conducting research on optimism. I asked Sir John if Marty and I could put together a small, invitation-only convening the day before the Advisory Board Meeting. He agreed.

Marty and I titled the convening The Science of Optimism and Hope. We brought together an amazing group of researchers. That night Marty gave the keynote...and I could tell Sir John loved everything Marty was saying....after his

talk I was helping Marty respond to the questions during the Q&A...when I saw that Sir John had raised his hand...."Sir John, do you have a question for Marty?" And he said..."I sure do...." And with his arms wide open he asked....

"How can my foundation help you?"***Tch...ching...Tchching.***

My friends...in many ways the field of positive psychology, a term that Marty had yet to coin, was conceived that night....and I was proud in the months ahead to serve as a midwife for the birth of a new field of study.

My voyage with Sir John lasted 13 years, from 1995 to when he passed in 2008. I learned so much.

I learned about the virtue of humility. Besides his optimism, this particular fruit of the spirit truly defined Sir John....and I humbly share with you this "fruit of the spirit" reference... as a practicing Jew...who didn't even know....before coming to the Templeton Foundation that Galatians was a book in the New Testament.

Sir John loved the motto..."**How little we know...How eager to learn.**" Yes, he was eager – and curious – to learn...but it was his humility that today we would call his "signature strength." I'll never forget our car ride together. I think it was in 1996. We were in Florida and he wanted me to meet the senior staff at the Franklin-Templeton Fund. I was driving and Sir John was in the front seat. We were just getting to know each other. I started by asking him questions about investing because I thought I should start learning how to invest...but after a few minutes he calmly put up his hand and said, "Arthur...the best investment advice I can give you...is to find a good investment counselor." Okay. It's what I did. BTW, I've had the same advisor for over 25 years. Thank you, Sir John.

But we started talking about his investment strategy, which is where I first learned about investing at the moment of maximum pessimism. But what I will never forget is Sir John sharing with me that only 1 out of every 3 of his investments yielded a significant return. The second third yielded no return but no loss. The final third was a bad investment. He lost money. Again, I think some people are predisposed to being arrogant while others may be more "naturally"

humble. But I truly believe that Sir John's practice of humility was forged not only in the crucible of his faith but also in the crucible of his profession. What we do for a living...also shapes who we are.

The second virtue I learned from Sir John was thrift. Certainly not one of the cardinal virtues or a theological virtue. But Sir John never cared about material possessions. For years I heard that he was the wealthiest man in the world who owned only a single home...and even that one was relatively modest. Besides collecting old Bibles, I do not recall Sir John ever being interested in "things." He loved ideas...and once again....I think his practice of thrift was influenced by his upbringing. He went through the Depression. He grew up around farms. My wife is the daughter of a farmer and there's something about farming that brings out the virtue of thrift.

I'll never forget the first time I learned that the word thrift...and the word thrive.... share the same etymological root. In terms of our materialistic culture today, I fear that this virtue is fading away and may soon be thrown into the dustbin of old, ossified terms. From my perch, following Alisdair MacIntyre, this will be a significant cultural loss. Not a day goes by where I don't intentionally focus on my practice of thrift. Do I really need this...or that? What do I need...to thrive?

The first RFP I ever organized for Sir John was on the Science of Forgiveness. How cool is that! We funded research on the dynamics of forgiveness within the family...between parent and child...between married couples...forgiveness between siblings...We funded research on what we could learn about forgiveness within the context of healing nations, particularly in Rwanda and South Africa. We funded Frans deVaal to study forgiveness among primates.

We sponsored numerous convenings where scholars debated whether forgiveness is fueled more by our emotions....or our cognition. For me, when it comes to forgiveness....I have to feel it first. For my wife, she has to think it first. What I learned by helping Sir John catalyze the field of forgiveness research..... changed my life...on so many levels.

And then there is purpose. Divine purpose. Purpose during adolescence. Purpose in retirement. In preparing these remarks I had an “aha” moment when I did the math and learned that Sir John launched the Templeton Prize in 1973. He was 61 and there is no doubt in my mind that the Prize....and later on the launch of his three philanthropies gave him noble purpose. He was always telling us that his goal in life was not just to help people increase their material wealth, but their spiritual wealth. That was his purpose.

In the early 2000s, I had the honor to invite Bill Damon to research the nature of youth purpose. I had the opportunity to invite Rick Warren, the author of the *Purpose Driven Life*, to speak at one of our Advisory Board meetings. During those years my life I was enthralled with the idea...the concept...the awe and wonder of purpose.

Coincidentally, my own children were in the teenage years during this period of time. My wife and I started talking to each other about purpose a lot... and we soon realized that we both wanted to intentionally send a clear signal to our kids that there is nothing more important. Not success. Not money. Not even happiness. Find your purpose. That became our family mantra. Find your purpose.

One of my children is now a screenwriter and the other is a musician....but the one thing that my wife and I know...for sure...is that they are both purpose-driven and passion-fueled. Their life has meaning and purpose. Just like Sir John.

And then there is love. In 1999, Sir John wrote and the Templeton Press published a small book titled *Agape Love*....but Sir John always used the words “unlimited love.” To Sir John, this love was...and here I quote him...”the most powerful force in the universe.” To Sir John, love was...a law of life....

But let me quote Sir John more fully. He wrote in his book *Worldwide Laws of Life* that “The world operates on spiritual principles just as it operates on the laws of physics and gravity. It is up to us to learn what these principles are and then choose to live by them.”

My friends, Sir John believed in the universal law of unlimited love...as much as he believed in the law of gravity. Just like Thomas Aquinas, to Sir John LOVE is the form of all the virtues. Anyone who met him felt that. That's why he was so passionate about bringing together physicists and theologians. Could his philanthropic investments one day...yield tools, theories, measurements, okay perhaps even compelling data and evidence....that love...just like gravity is an invisible law that forms and shapes the workings of our universe. That's why his philanthropies are in perpetuity. He understood that it may take 50 to 100 years before these insights and discoveries emerge.

Which brings me to my last virtue. In 1995, in his office, Sir John said to me during a meeting "Arthur, an attitude of gratitude creates blessings." Something clicked inside me. Right then. Since that day, I have repeated that expression...every day...often more than once. Sometimes in the morning...sometimes in the evening...on most days....I repeat the phrase to myself or I say it out loud to others....when I know gratitude needs...so to speak...to be in the room or in our hearts.

My wife has also adopted this practice of gratitude, but she does not use the same phrase. Rather, she says to herself...or others...."**Isn't it great?**....

Isn't it great that our children are healthy...Isn't it great....that we have food to eat." Isn't it great....is the mantra that brings the virtue of gratitude into her consciousness.

James, I am grateful to you for inviting me to give this talk....I am also grateful to everyone who has...or is....currently working at the Jubilee Centre. Ten years of incredible, groundbreaking, transformational achievements.

But at this moment...I want to express my gratitude to Sir John Templeton. Sir John...you changed my life...and the life of my family. I sometimes can't believe you actually paid me...because the work made me a better husband, a better father, a better friend and neighbor. Sir John, your belief in God also inspired

me...years ago....to re-connect with my Jewish tradition....or as we learn in Micah 6:8...to walk humbly with God.

I am also grateful to each of you for standing up for the virtues...and for character. What a noble purpose....

May each of you...in the years ahead...no matter your age....no matter your profession...continue to discover and practice the virtues and spiritual principles that will shape and form...your moral compass.

Thank you.