

GOD, GUTS, AND GALLANTRY

[Discussion Questions on Dating, Courtship, and Marriage](#)

Those who lack a copy of the book obtain it at: www.willjoslin.com

Please turn to Chapter 3: [Marriage and Children](#), and read the first three pages.

1. When James Lide Coker was ready to marry, where did he seek out a wife?
2. When he sought a wife, do you think he was, generally speaking, among believers? Where did he NOT seek out a mate?
3. If a Christian chooses to try online dating services, what qualities would be good to look for in a dating prospect?
4. What qualities might be good to avoid?

Note to the Leader: Before we start on the next questions, for variety, ask the young people to take turns reading the following seven paragraphs to the group. If you have only one youth present, alternate reading the paragraphs with him or her.

It is hard to overstate the importance of retaining sexual purity before marriage. Because without boundaries, physical attraction can overpower one's better judgment, causing him or her to completely miss God's leading and His timing when choosing a mate.

We are wise to choose our own physical boundaries before entering into a dating relationship. This sets a precedent of self-control and victory over temptation that is needed both before and during marriage. A well-established habit of self-control that couples exercise before marriage will help them form a strong foundation to overcome temptation to stray from their vows when temptation comes after marriage. Because before and after marriage, feelings of burning desire to sin occasionally come to everyone. God wants us to wisely manage these feelings.

Feelings and Emotions – Can We Trust Them?

Let's consider what advertisers and moviemakers are telling today's youth culture. It's a message that feelings, emotions, and vanity are of great importance. Movies, TV, and

magazines promote the idea that only our feelings can lead us to happiness, often meaning sexual feelings. Feelings have almost become a god in popular culture.

The message to youth is that they tell us must comply, whether with trendy makeup, suggestive clothing from places like Victoria's Secret, or by means of cosmetic surgery. Advertisers encourage us to ignore truth and just live by our emotions, which, by the way, usually includes popping off our money on their products.

This feelings-based, self-focused message gives us a very shaky foundation for life. After all, our feelings can change every day, or even from one minute to the next. Our hearts are deceitful, and without guidance from the one true God, through His Word, our feelings generally won't lead us to a good place. In Jeremiah 17:9, God warns us of the potential fickleness of the feelings in our hearts: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

Because of our sinful natures, we just aren't good or wise enough for truth to just spring up from our hearts. Truth is given us from God by revelation in the Bible, and the "follow your feelings" message is a form of self-worship. Feelings are not our god. The Lord wants to spare us from the misery and deception of self-worship, so He says, "You shall have no other gods [including yourself] before Me" (Exodus 20:3, NIV).

That said, God is not against feelings; He just wants us to be wise in how we discern and handle them. Furthermore, sometimes we feel like following God, and that's great! The psalmist says: "Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4, NIV).

5. What does God say above in Psalm 37:4 about the connection between our devotion to Him and our feelings and desires?
6. What do you think eventually happens to us if we punt on God and decide to live just by our own innate feelings and emotions?

It's easy for people to feel in love, and to "fall in love" very quickly. And after crossing an emotional line, that attraction can be so strong that it is hard to reverse a wrong decision. Spiritual discernment and common sense are often drowned in a rushing river of feelings.

God's encourages us to stay alert to where we go with our feelings: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). We also know He wants us to stay sexually pure from verses such as: "Set your minds on the things above, not on the things of earth" (Colossians 3:2), "Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the

soul” (1 Peter 2:11), and “and “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him [Jesus] purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

God’s Intent is Our Good

At first thought, abstinence may seem too restrictive, but let’s think it through. God’s intent is to protect us before marriage so He can provide for us maximum happiness in marriage. God wants to bless us, and marriage, done right, is one of His greatest blessings. But if we ignore God’s warnings in this area of sexuality, we soon adulterate our thought lives and undermine the exclusive intimacy God intends for marriage. If we think we know better than God and can ignore His warnings, the real tragedy is that we only hurt ourselves. Proverbs 9:12 says “If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.”

Whether we end up marrying or not, we will experience happiness and purpose in life by living obediently to God in this and all other areas. If we disobey God in one area, the Holy Spirit’s power in our life is curtailed, and unless we confess and make it right, this can quickly lead to disobeying Him in other areas.

God is a God of grace. If you have failed morally in the past, but have sincerely confessed your sins, He completely forgives you. You can start over without any condemnation! “When we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). However, let us remember that as Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, He said, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). That’s why we need to have our own pre-set boundaries.

If you don’t yet have any boundaries, begin to think and pray through setting up your own precautions. And perhaps you could discuss your thoughts on protecting yourself with your study leader or with another Christian of the same sex who is living to please God.

7. After prayer and thought, what are your pre-set physical boundaries for dating? (Leader, if more time is needed, you can come back to this question in the next session.)

Lifelong Marriage

The Major and Sue Coker had a full and purposeful marriage and were faithful to each other throughout life. They laughed together, cried together, and ministered together. Near the end of her life, Sue had a weak heart and headaches and was often in bed, and James continued to care for her. When Sue was asked her ideal of earthly happiness, she replied: “To have spent forty years with James.”ⁱ (In the end, they were married forty-four years.)

8. Have you ever seen a marriage relationship like that, which demonstrated lifelong love and respect?
9. If so, what did that look like?
10. How can you prepare yourself for a relationship of lifelong love and respect?
11. Do you think you are likely to find a devoted and lifelong mate among unbelievers?
12. As admirable as he was, Major Coker was human and had his weaknesses. He was a very busy man with over a dozen businesses and a college to run. When Sue was sick and needed him, do you think, at that moment, that he always “felt” like giving time to her?
13. When you marry, will you, like him, plan to honor your vows “for better ,for worse, in sickness and in health, ‘til death do us part,” regardless of how you feel on a particular day or week?
14. Where will you find the strength to do so?
15. Let’s read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud. How do you think the Holy Spirit helped Major Coker keep his vows to Sue, and helped Sue keep hers to Major Coker?

Learning from Someone Who Made Unwise Choices

Samson gives us a biblical example of the consequences of ignoring God’s word. He was a believer to whom at certain times God gave great physical strength as a warrior, but when it came to his own self-control, he was pitifully weak. As a young man he chose to marry a woman from among God’s enemies, the Philistines, around 1060 BC. Few things are more tragic than a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul warns us: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” God gives this warning to spare us from the misery of going through life at cross-purposes with our mate.

It was not the fault of Samson’s parents. They had been faithful to teach him life principles. So Samson was familiar with Deuteronomy 7:3, which says: “You shall not intermarry with them [unbelievers]; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.”

But Judges 14:1-3 tells us: “Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father

and mother, 'I saw a woman in Timnah, *one* of the daughters of the Philistines; now, therefore, get her for me as a wife.'³ Then his father and his mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, for she looks good to me.'"

Samson married this Philistine girl, Delilah, and she became her husband's wicked deceiver and betrayer. She successfully plotted Samson's capture by the Philistines, who gouged his eyes out and imprisoned him. Marrying her ultimately cost Samson his life (Judges 6:15-31).

16. Who or what was Samson yielding to when he insisted on marrying the Delilah, Philistine woman?

17. Do you think he enthroned his feelings as king?

18. What was he was thinking?

19. What about you? Are you living on a higher level than Samson? Do you have a higher criterion for a mate than just one that "looks good to you"?

20. There is certainly nothing wrong with looking for a mate to whom you are physically attracted. In fact, I strongly recommend it. But what other dimensions are you looking for in a mate? This is a hugely important question. What does God say about what else we should look for? Please take some time to answer thoughtfully, jotting down your ideas.

Learning from Couples Who Did it Right

Aside from the Major and Sue, and other couples you may know who have had successful Christian marriages, there are examples in the Bible. In the first century, a couple name Priscilla and Aquila had a good marriage and worked as a team to serve the Lord. They had a church in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19), assisted the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:18), and helped to train a man named Apollos who became a powerful Bible teacher. (Acts 18:24-26).

Let's review (at a minimum, read over together the titles of the highlighted sections) in [Chapter 10](#) on the Sunday School Ministry, [Chapter 11](#) on the Welsh Neck High School, and look at how Major Coker and Sue had priorities in common with Priscilla and Aquila.

21. What are several ways that God used the Major and Sue to build His kingdom?

22. What do you think Major Coker's impact for God would have if he had married an unbeliever?

Before rushing into marriage, it is also well to consider what kind of legacy your choice of a mate will leave for your descendants.

23. What kind of legacy, and, if you have children, what kind of descendants do you want to leave on this earth?

24. On earth, and throughout eternity, how do you think your descendants will be affected by your choice of a marriage partner?

ⁱ Frank R. Chambers, nephew of the Major, in his talk "Major J. L. Coker, Christian and Philanthropist," *Memorial Exercises*, subtitled [*Coker College*] *Founders Day, April 9, 1919*, p. 60. and Kate Chambers, *Chronicles of a Worth-while Family*, a book on the Chambers and Stout families, published in only twenty copies in 1919. In 2004, one hundred more volumes were published by Edgar H. Lawton Jr. with help from Coker College and Frank Bush, p. 79.