

GOD, GUTS, AND GALLANTRY

Discussion Questions for Pastors, Christian Leaders, or Leadership Mentoring

Leaders or participants who lack a copy of the book may obtain it at www.willjoslin.com.

These questions are designed for pastors, church staff, para-church staff, or lay Christian leaders. They are also useful for personal devotional studies. The questions assume that participants have read the book *God, Guts, and Gallantry*.

In his 2009 book, *A Christian Code of Conduct*, Australian Christian statesman Peter J. Daniels states:

The Christian church is probably at its lowest point of relevancy in our society for the last hundred years... Are we going to be courageous enough to stop and take stock of our failures and inadequacies, and create a plan for the next one hundred years with clear, concise measurements, and with works that follow our faith so that we will not be an embarrassment to the saints of old?ⁱ

1. What do you think is causing the church to lose relevancy in our society?

Before proceeding further, please review chapters 6-7 and 10-12 of *God, Guts, and Gallantry*, which tell the story of Major Coker's business, academic, cultural, and church leadership.

Today, whether we look at business, government, or academia, we often find ethical, moral, and leadership disasters. And worst yet, we even find these kind of disasters in the church!

2. What do the secular media and non-Christians tend to say about Christianity when churches or Christian leaders are involved in scandals?
3. How does this affect the greater cause of the gospel?

Major Coker's shining example of leadership in business, academia, and the church towers over the last two centuries as a contrast to the scandals we have seen among both Protestants and Catholics. James had right motives, right manners, and right morals, and his life was an open book. Samuel W. Garrett once said, "We all admired him for his sincerity, absolute honesty, and purity of thought and speech."ⁱⁱ

4. Across his life, how did Major Coker interpret the call to build the kingdom of God so that he made the church relevant to the society of his time?
5. In what spheres did he build it God's kingdom?

Carefully read 1 Peter 2:12 aloud.

6. What sphere of the Christian's witness does it address?

It is well to note that the Major's close friend, Rev. E. V. Baldy, Pastor of Hartsville's First Baptist Church from 1907-1923, was also a leader in the community, serving as the first president of Coker College from 1909-1910.

7. How was excellent behavior, outside the church, evident in the lives of the Major and E. V. Baldy. Be specific.
8. First, Timothy 3:7 says that an elder must have "a good reputation with those outside of the church so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." What does this verse add to the discussion of the Christian's witness in the public sphere?

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), former political leader in India, is reported to have said to some Western church leaders: "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."ⁱⁱⁱ Apparently, Mahatma Gandhi never met Major Coker, but would Gandhi change his mind about Christians if he were to observe your life and deeds?

9. Do you think most believers today command respect for the Christian faith because of their good attitudes, excellent ethics, encouraging contributions, and capable skills, as Major Coker did? If not, in the broader society, how can we earn more respect for ourselves and for the faith?

Of course, Major Coker also led within the church, being Superintendent of Sunday School at Hartsville's First Baptist from c. 1865 – 1904, and teaching Sunday School himself for 34 years.

Former Pastor John Maxwell, who is now a Christian leadership trainer, says, "everything rises and falls on leadership." Relative to church leaders, he goes on to say: "The strength of any organization is a direct result of the strength of its leaders. Weak leaders equal weak organizations. Strong leaders equal strong organizations." He adds, "Slick brochures and catchy slogans will never overcome incompetent leadership."^{iv}

10. What is your definition of competent Christian leadership?

11. Is your definition and practice of leadership clearly scriptural, or is it partly based on the “wood, hay, and stubble” of the world’s leadership trends and fads which tend to focus more on power and size than on servanthood and faithfulness?

12. Let’s look up the verses under A through D below. Does our Christian leadership clearly display Biblical character qualities that the Major had, such as:

A. Active listening to others (James 1:19)?

B. Integrity and accountability (2 Corinthians 8:21, 1 Peter 5:3)?

C. Servanthood (Matthew 23:11)? and

D. Suffering for the sake of your flock (Colossians 1:24, 2 Timothy 2:3)?

Does your leadership prominently display each of the above attributes? If so, where and how? If not, how can you do better?

Author George Lee Simpson wrote that the Major had “an apparently inexhaustible reservoir of spiritual and emotional resource.”^v This was because the Major walked in the power of the Holy Spirit.

13. What does Galatians 5:16, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh,” mean to you?

14. Does walking in the Spirit and yielding to the Spirit affect our personal integrity? How?

15. How are we filled with the Spirit? If verses are needed here, read 1 John 1:8-9, Ephesians 5:18, and Galatians 5:22-23.

16. What causes us to get out of touch with the Spirit? How do we surrender to Him and regain His power in our lives?

In 1 Corinthians 10:12, God warns us about our own vulnerability through the words of Paul: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” James 5:16 instructs us as Christians to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

17. Are you trusting and vulnerable enough to confess your sins to each other?

18. Do you have (an) accountability partner(s)?

19. If not, why not? Will you seek one out?

20. If so, to whom are you accountable for your own integrity and moral purity? Is he or she just a “yes man” or “yes woman,” or are they people with guts who are not afraid to challenge you?
21. When you meet together for your accountability sessions, do you “get real” about the good, bad, and the ugly in your life? Or do you whitewash certain things in your life, omitting them, or softening them with generalities?

The glaring physical weakness in Major Coker’s experience was his shattered left leg. And Paul, the greatest of all church leaders, was not hesitant to reveal that he had challenges, weaknesses, and problems: “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3). In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, he emphasized how his thorn in the flesh humbled him and made him dependent on God instead of striving to depend only upon himself.

22. In your public ministry, do you pretend to be perfect, or do you encourage authentic Christianity by sharing some of your own struggles and weaknesses?

Major Coker believed in the principle of intentional leadership succession. Second Timothy 2:2 says: “And the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

As church leaders, we do not last forever. Whether you are a pastor or a lay leader, intentionally planning your leadership succession, then publicly announcing who will succeed you is very important. It matters for the confidence and welfare of the saints and for the continued stability of the church. Otherwise, confusion, chaos, and needless power struggles may take place after a leader’s death or retirement.

Similarly, in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 2:2 talks about planned, intentional succession of church leaders: “and the things which you have heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

23. How can we apply these mentoring and succession verses to ourselves, to those whom we train, and to the legacy we intend to leave at our business or church?
24. How did the Major apply the principle of planned succession to his life and ministry? From Chapters 10 and 14, name specific people to whom he delegated ministry and business responsibilities.
25. Do you currently have a plan to train your successors or mentors in the spheres of church, business, and family leadership? If not, let’s pray about this now. After we’ve prayed, take a few minutes to write down a couple of steps you can take in that direction to get started on intentional succession.

26. Hebrews 13:7 reminds us to learn from past church leaders: “Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” While retaining our own firsthand faith, how can we imitate the lives of Major Coker and J. J. Lawton?

27. What kind of trained church leadership legacy are we intentionally leaving for future generations?

The Major was not one of those Christian leaders who punts when it comes to mercy ministries and social justice. He lived out Proverbs 14:31: “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” When evangelicals demonstrate no social conscience, it looks like we don’t really care about the whole person, and this tends to undermine the credibility of our gospel message.

28. What was the Major’s attitude toward and response to underemployed and low-income Americans? How did his response translate into actions through his business accomplishments in Chapters 6 through 9?

29. What was his response to public health issues (see Chapter 15, “Actively Involved in Public Health”)?

The Fourteenth Amendment reads: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

30. How did Major Coker’s views compare with those of many Southern whites vis-à-vis the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

Major Coker’s views are addressed in the book in detail in the inset “Historical Background: Southern Reconstruction” in Chapter 6, and in Appendix 4 Please review those sections.

31. How did Major Coker’s views on African Americans compare with those of most other white Southerners of his time?

32. As a Christian leader, what do you think God wants you (or us as a group) to do to let our light shine in the spheres of social justice, racial reconciliation, and mercy ministries in our community?

ⁱ Peter J. Daniels, *A Christian Code of Conduct*, World Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies: Port Vila, Vanuatu), 2009, pp. 21-23.

ⁱⁱ Samuel. W. Garrett, dean of Coker College and Professor of Math, Education, and other subjects, letter in papers from the early days of Coker College, courtesy of South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, Letter 2, p. 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Goodreads, "Mahatma Ghandi Quotes, op. cit.

^{iv} John Maxwell, *Leadership Promises*, (Countryman Press, a division of Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN), 2003, p. 13.

^v George Lee Simpson, *The Cokers of Carolina, A Social Biography of a Family*, (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill), 1956, p. 172.