

GOD, GUTS, AND GALLANTRY

Discussion Questions for Seniors

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

Note: The other adult question sets found at www.willjoslin.com/major/questions are also fully relevant for seniors.

As I write these questions, I am a senior, sixty-four years old. I am looking forward to finishing my Christian race well as Major Coker did. When Sue died in 1904, Major Coker was sixty-seven years old. In the years that followed, he was aware he was getting older, but he continued his Christian leadership at Coker College and in his church, while still advising his various companies. Simpson wrote, “There was no evident falling off in his capacity to do several jobs well.”ⁱ In 1910, the Major said, “Whatever we old folks find in our hearts to contribute must be attended to without delay.”ⁱⁱ He was conscious of the need to pass on the baton of business and church leadership to the very end.

Strength in Weakness

As we get older we seniors may complain weaknesses. But as God did in Major Coker’s life, he does with us. In his infinite wisdom, He actually turns our weaknesses into something powerful and useful!

For fifty-five years, Major Coker had the constant weakness of his shattered left leg, yet he did not complain, for he knew God’s power was made perfect in his weakness. Upon his brother Charles’ death in the Civil War in [Chapter 4](#), James referred to 2 Corinthians 12:9 in a letter to console his mother, saying: “the sweet promises of the One who is good even while He afflicts, presented themselves to me and I felt sure you would have grace sufficient and could give unto our Father praise and thanksgiving – for have we not, Mother, many causes for thanksgiving...?”ⁱⁱⁱ

Fifteen months later, when his left thigh was shattered at Lookout Mountain, James would claim the same promise for himself: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Have someone read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 aloud to the group.

1. Why did God give Paul his thorn in the flesh?

The Major was a man of extraordinary ability – in business, intellect, relationships, and leadership.

2. Why do you think God allowed him to become weak with his shattered leg at age twenty-six?
3. What physical weaknesses do you have? What other kinds of limitations do you have? What is your attitude toward these weaknesses and limitations?
4. Should we boast in our weaknesses? Why?

Mentoring

Some churches tend to try to segregate people by age groups. This is not what the word of God teaches. Titus 2:2-8 reads:

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

5. Why do you think God's word tells us seniors to train the younger generation in the faith?
6. What do these scriptures say about how older women are to train the younger women?
7. How can you, as a Christian woman, encourage younger women to love their husbands, to be sensible and pure, be subject to their husbands, and be workers at home?
8. Do you talk about these subjects in your women's small groups or your women's retreats?
9. What do these scriptures above say about how older men in the Christian faith are to train the younger men?

10. How can you, as a Christian man, encourage the younger men to be sensible, to be a good example, and to remain sound in doctrine and speech?

11. Do you talk about these subjects at your men's retreats or men's small groups?

Finishing Strong

Despite the biblical teaching on finishing our race well, some senior Christians in America tend to ease up on serving God, preferring to coast into the sunset, playing golf, bridge, and tennis, traveling, and the like. There's nothing wrong with these things, unless they eclipse our time and desire to make intentional investments into the younger generations. If they do, we lose an eternal perspective and cease to obey God's call to invest our acquired wisdom into those who need it. Contrast this loss of focus with Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson's statement, "The Christian life is a long obedience in the same direction."^{iv}

12. The Major continued a long obedience in the same direction until the end of his life. According to your life's current trajectory, would you save the same of yourself? If not, what can you do about it now?

At The Carolina Fiber Company, Major Coker transferred control to James Jr. as chief engineer, to Paul Rogers as secretary/treasurer, and to young Charles as CEO.^v Simpson adds, "These things took several years, and the Major was quite active in the affairs of these companies until he was well past his seventy-fifth birthday."^{vi} Major Coker was also a lifetime deacon in his church and active until very near the end of his life.

Philip Brooks, the pastor who spoke at President Lincoln's funeral, said:

Sad is the day for a man, when he becomes absolutely satisfied with the life he is living, the thoughts that he is thinking and the deeds that he is doing; when there ceases to be forever beating at the doors of his soul a desire to do something large which he seeks and knows he was meant and intended to do."^{vii}

Please review James and Sue's final years from Chapter 14, [The Major and Sue's Final Years and Departures](#).

13. Why do you think the Major did not wish to "coast off" into his sunset years?

14. Have you asked your children's director if your church needs help in Sunday school or Vacation Bible School?

15. Have you asked your Christian education leader if you may lead an adult Sunday school class?

16. What other ways might you serve the Lord?

In 1500 B.C., an Israelite named Caleb was still vigorous at age eighty-five, taking the Promised Land by conquest. In Joshua 14:10-12, 14, Caleb said:

“So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said...’ So Hebron has belonged to Caleb... because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.”

17. Do you want to be a warrior for God like Caleb?

18. Are you still running your race and “fighting the good fight of faith”?

Even after the Major’s strokes, he remained active in his businesses and church until the time of his final stroke and illness. His nurse Lucy Drakeford said, “As long as Major Coker was physically equal to it, he was always faithful in his church attendance. He had a cheery, happy disposition, and even as he grew weaker, he never complained. He was not confined to his bed except during the last few weeks.”^{viii}

At the Centennial Celebration of Major Coker’s birthday in 1937, the Rev. Howard M. Reaves read 2 Timothy 4:7-8 to describe his final years: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all that have loved his appearing.”^{ix}

Paul wrote Philippians from prison toward the end of his life. He said, “Not that I have already obtained it, or already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).

19. Granted, as we are older, we can’t do all that we once did, but we can still do a lot. What, specifically, do you think God would still have you do in this life? What would God want you to say on his behalf to those whom you love? Would it be better if you decided to say it sooner rather than later?

Investing in Children, Grandchildren, and Youth

20. Are you still investing in your grandchildren or great-grandchildren? Please consider using this book's first two sets for children and youth to engage with them and to give them a real Christian hero.
21. If investing in grandchildren is not possible at this point, you could pray for God to bring another younger person into your life—one whom you could mentor in the faith. If your church does not currently have a mentoring program, perhaps you could help start one. This book on Major Coker might give you a good starting point to mentor young lives.

My prayer is that when we seniors see Jesus, He will say to us: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23).

ⁱ George Lee Simpson, *Cokers of Carolina* (UNC Press: Chapel Hill, NC), 1956, p. 173, as he quotes from Major Coker to Major J. J. Lucas, January 12, 1910.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

^{iv} *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* is a book on Christian discipleship by Eugene H. Peterson, (Intervarsity Press: Westmont, IL), 2000, and it may be referenced at <https://www.christianbook.com/obedience-same-direction-discipleship-instant-society/eugene-peterson/9780830822577/pd/822577> (last accessed December 29, 2019).

^v *Ibid.*, p. 174

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Rev. Philip Brooks, as quoted by John Maxwell in his book *Leadership Gold* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville), 2008, p. 128.

^{viii} His nurse Lucy Drakeford Timmons, *Recollections of the Major* (Hartsville Museum: Hartsville, SC), 1997, p. 135.

^{ix} Howard M. Reaves, *Coker College Quarterly Bulletin*, February 1937, "Centennial Celebration of Major James Lide Coker", edited by Sylvester Green, p. 8.