

The Spiritual Discipline of Emotional Chastity: Spiritual Formation in Romance, Marriage, and Parenting Pt. 2

By John Coe

Dr. John Coe:

Let's begin with this fifth question. God open our hearts. What can be done to counteract this lust for romance that ultimately leads to relational lust? Now let me say here as we think of some practical things, I don't want you to think of these as like laws. You know, like laws written on the- on the Torah that we're to obey. I want us to think rather just to open to God in this. Kind of in Willard's way, I'm trying to kind of present a vision to open to God, and- and also a vision just to open your heart of just what's the truth. Those of you who are in dating or want to date or those of you who are married now, regardless of what I'm saying, whether it's true or not, is just to open your heart, "God what's the truth about this?" And then ask the Lord "where's the discernment? What- what- what are we to do? How am I to live in light of this?" But I'm going to give you some of my thoughts as I have, you know, thought about this now.

A) This is general advice. This is kind of the general advice now I see. And I would say something like this: Do not date; or again when I talk about date I mean pairing off, going face to face, until you've determined the following. And here's the- here's- here's the following that- that once you've done this. OK fine. Then do this. Until one that you're ready to marry, that- that in your own mind and your own heart, maybe the advice of parents or friends, you feel like, you know, "I'm ready to marry. I think it's time, I'm ready for this." Secondly, that you think the other person is ready. That you think, "yeah, that other person seems ready yet as I've talked to others and I've looked at their life, I look at the things; seems ready." And three: that you're reasonably

convinced that this is a good potential partner. They're like "Yeah! I do." Because, you know, the truth is you don't know. You don't- you know, we're not going to have certainty about these matters but you're looking and going, you know, "this is- this is- I think I'm ready. I think they're ready. I think this is a possible person."

And then four: that the circumstances are such that it seems to be a wise and ready time for marriage. You know, there's things to consider like finances, the kind of jobs you have. Have we done the things that we wanted to do before marriage? Did we- we get our-. Well, I'll have to say when I saw Greta "whoa!" and I got twitter-pated. You know once twitter-pation takes place. Um, you don't think so well. Because all of a sudden I woke up two weeks after marriage going "wow, what the heck am I going to do? I'm 19 years old!" But when you're twitter-pated, you don't think about that. If you don't know twitter-pated, watch Bambi. -So to have the wisdom to see "yeah, the circumstances seem right." And so number five: when all seems ready, THEN it strikes me as wise to begin more face to face time. I can't develop a policy just reasonable, wise; enjoy and practice seeking the other's welfare. If you decide in marriage that maybe this is a partner, you know, you're outside of marriage and you begin to go in that- that relationship, I'll even say here, spend time beginning to seek the other's welfare. And still exercise emotional chastity in order to protect yourself and the other, if, in fact, it turns out you're not to be marital partners. Save some of this for exploring the one that you are going to marry.

Now, why do I say these things? Because I don't think you want to get in a place where you're exercising your spirit in unfaithfulness, where you're practicing romance prior to commitment and responsibility. I don't think you want to get into a romantic situation where it's potentially

going to lead to physical union too fast, pull back. Or to a situation where you discover "I'm not ready. I'm not ready for marriage." But- but you're in it. I know individuals who have pulled out of relations that they know are right to pull out of. But then they really miss that person deeply because once you've tasted just even a little bit of the core, it is hard to let that go, and to go back to not having someone that you can experience in the deep again. Or maybe you'll discover that you get so close and then you break up and part of you will feel lost to that person. So why experiment that way? Why not be wise?

Six: now how do you know if you're ready? I'm sorry, I can't tell you. All I can do is quote Proverbs 24:27, very interesting little Proverb; because there's no certainty on this right? Here's what it says, interesting little proverb, "Prepare your fe- your work outside, make it ready for yourself in the field, and afterwards, then, build your house." Very practical advice, right? Get your lumber. Get everything you-. Get your wood. Get your screws. Get everything ready. And, now, when you have all the stuff; now go build your house. The application is this: A lot of us want something way before we've got all the materials ready. A lot of us want something; "I want it now. I want a house now! I want a great job now! And I'm only 22." That's not gonna work that way. The Sage says "No, no. You got to get- you prepare things; you get things ready. And then when it's already, then you say 'okay, now we do it.'" So the application here with marriage: get everything ready, emotionally, spiritually, financially, do the education you want, the travel, the experiences; do those things. See what you're ready- and then here's a choice. Now I think I'm ready for dating, if you want to say that, for more face to face.

Now, I say that but also I will say marriage is still a crap shot. (laughter from audience) Lucky Sevnnn! Seven Elevennn! Oh. So-, because you will wake up sometime after you're married and the woman will say "I did marry a Peter Pan." And the man will wake up some point, some say "I think I married a part Cinderella." Because in marriage you're going to see a lot of stuff. And so again, we're just trying to look at wisdom. My point here is just this: those of you who are thinking of marrying, you're thinking of dating, you're in dating; you need to determine marital readiness before you get in one of those relationships because I'll just tell you when you're in that relationship, it's going to be hard to have good judgment and disinterest. It's going to be har-, once you're in the relationship and you're twitter-pated, it's going to be hard to have real clarity. I can't tell you how many individuals have gotten married and then afterwards said "What did I do. What did I do?"

And so I say, in general, B) practice the spiritual discipline of emotional chastity. Practice the discipline of emotional chastity. How can we do this? And again, this is a vision. I don't know how you will apply it. Here's for women. Here's some thoughts. Number one: begin to see yourself as a natural resource to be protected, to be prized, to not just be given away. Begin to see part of your soul. This is a resource. I'm not just going to give this away to anybody. Beware of the temptation to be explored to the depths before the time, even if it feels good.

Two: your earthly father or your Heavenly Father needs to help carve out that space. And if you can't do it with your earthly father anymore, then find your Heavenly Father or find other wise believers, to begin to carve out a space in your heart, a place in your deep, that's only for the one who's willing to really commit themselves to you. You need to find a place where you've been

loved and known, and you're saying "I'm not going to let anybody in there; just anybody. Because now I have been loved." But to the degree that we have not been known and loved is the degree to which this one will feel "God, I need somebody, and I'll even settle for something like this just because I want to be loved and known." That- if that's going on in your heart, that is a call, that is a call to God. That is a call to other relationships to open that place in your heart.

Third: Commit yourself to not tempt the man to know you deeply without some inclination that there's possible marriage, that it's reasonable; don't tempt the man to come in; don't open so much to him to bring him in. Four: Commit yourself to be an emotional virgin. Don't give yourself to a thief. I can't tell you how many young women have told me that they allowed someone to come in deep, they broke up, and then part of them was over there. And the person even knew, "I know it's over, and I know that's not the person I should be with but gosh! Part of me is over there." This is hard. And I say beware of the Peter Pan. The Peter Pan comes in all kinds of degrees. He looks like an adult but is in fact still a little boy because he wants to fill himself with you. Not so that he can be responsible for you, to seek your welfare, but so that he can feel alive, and then go on and do what he pleases. And this will really happen in marriage. The Peter Pan feels so good before marriage, and then after marriage, you know what you'll discover? He's off doing his thing. Does he want all of you without taking responsibility for the relationship? Can he take a no? Can I say no? You must learn to say no.

Back to those scenarios in romance-. You know, in psychology, there is a place for a time with a little child about three or four years old, you know what they'll do? They'll come running in to momma, hold mommy, and then they'll go running outside. And then when they're outside a

while, they realize "wooa I need mommy," they come running back in, grab mommy's leg for a while, and then go running outside. And that's great- that's great for little boys. Those of you who are mothers who do that let them go. That's fine. But you know something? You don't want your husband to do this. And that's exactly what happened to many of us when we got married. In dating, "Oh I love you I love you I love you Mommy Mommy Mommy Mommy Mommy Mommy Mommy. I want to experience life on my terms. And then when I get married you know what happens? I got mommy. And now I'm off going to school, pursuing jobs, pursuing my career, pursuing. Why? Because there's Mommy over there. I got-. And whenever I need her I can come back and hold onto her. And she's sitting there, "what happened?" He's a little boy.

Or that guy who awokened from his romantic slumbers when the M word was shared. He's a little boy; Peter Pan. (in a childish tone)"I don't wanna get married. I want to play. Will you come out and play with me?" Wow. And I'll say this in number 6; If you've already given out part of yourself to the other. If you've already done this and that relationship's gone or it's going on right now. This is a time to find God in that hole; in that place where you have a wound. That's the very place that God wants to come. That's- and if it's- if it's hard to find God in that place then I tell you, you need to go with some wise saint to help you find God there; a therapist, a soul friend, a spiritual director. Because that's a call. You need to let that secret grow again.

Some of you are in relationships right now and it's heavy; "mmnn" maybe now pulling back. And if you're married, and if you find you're married to a little boy, then I just say find God in that. Find God in that. Find-, again a wise person who can take you on a journey and what took

place in all of that. And then I really would encourage you, if you have married a little boy and you realize it, help him. Don't rescue him, that's for sure. But help him.

Some specific ways for a man to practice emotional chastity. Number one: if you're tempted to be one of those emotional pollinators, "it tastes so good." If there's a desire to explore the woman without price, to cleave to the woman pri-, you know, it's so simple to cleave to the woman prior to marriage. And it's so difficult afterwards. It's so easy before, without responsibility. If that's the case, then realize perhaps you're being a thief. Let this go. Let this go. That may not be your wife. Why should you do this to her? Two: rather commit yourself to protecting her secret. Think about that. If you're, you know, getting close to woman, commit yourself to protecting her secret for the one that she'll marry, whether it's you or somebody else. Let her be. Give her space. Let her find God. Number three: for men, avoid the vice of curiosity. Curiosity in the medievals was a vice. Coriositas was the desire to know something that you should not know. If you are not married to her, then I'll say this, then you're not ready to know her at the deepest emotional level. I'll say that again, if you're not ready to marry, then you're not ready to know her at the deepest emotional level. It's just the way it is. Let somebody else enjoy that. Let her spouse enjoy that.

Number five: Oh I'm sorry. Number four: beware of tempting the woman to be found out. Beware of the searching eyes. Beware of the questions that draw her out. Beware of you luring her out because you want to experience her. Let her be. Let her be. I really think that is a kind of emotional fornication. It's deep. It's deep because we're made for union. Now five: beware of being lured into the woman who has no boundaries. It will feel so good in dating but not in marriage. It will ravage you. So you should ask (inaudible) dating a Cinderella who can't say no.

Help her to say no. Number six: if you've already or are presently failed to practice this, if you're experiencing this right now, I probably would encourage you maybe to pull back. However, it's probably going to have to be with some apologies, with some repentance. There may be times in life to let something go. I don't know. Perhaps, there's even a time where it's time to get married.

Now I say that but I want us to be very cautious about this because you don't want to marry into more chaos if you can avoid it. You can just look at this text later. This is Exodus chapter 22 verse 16 to 17. In Exodus 22:16-17, you know, sexual sins are pretty serious in the Old Testament; Adultery, bestiality, same-sex acts. You were- you were killed. But when it comes to fornication-; now, rape you were killed as well. But when it comes to fornicating with your- your consenting partner, you were not killed. You can look at that text and you know what that text says. It says that if- if- if a man and a woman lie in a consent, together in a field, what they're to do is this, they're to go to their parents-; Now this is not a law for you anymore but this is the wisdom of it. -They're to go to the parents and the young man was to pay the man, the father, a dowry that he was supposed to have received if he married her, and then they were to lay down the freedom that they had to make their choice of their own spouse. And it was up to the father of the daughter to decide whether he wanted them to get married.

So if the father said-. So let's say these two have sexual relations and you shouldn't have done it. No no no. I, as a father, could say "ah- good guy; marry. But give me some money. I'm not- I'm not giving you a dowry because you've shamed the family." But I might say "he's a jerk, come." I say that just because um- if you've gone too far that doesn't mean you should marry. That doesn't mean you should marry. If you've gone too far and you think you should marry, you need

counsel. Because you're probably a bit messy. And when you have two messy's getting married. Take a guess what you have. If you're married, and you find your wife is very needy. And you find you're even a little bit of a boy too. This is a call from God to grow up.

When I got married at 19, that was an incredible call to this little Peter Pan to grow up. And what is it to take responsibility and turn back to Greta and to try to cleave her, to try to cleave, to pick her in, rather than to pursue my things. Wow, that was the main challenge in my life. That was one of the main spiritual challenges. Here's some general thoughts. Now again, a hundred years ago I wouldn't need to say these things but society has no traditions and structures for this anymore. There's nothing. So we are almost like starting a new-. How do we do this? And so I would just say number one: if you're not committed to marriage with someone then don't act like it; then don't act like it. Don't place demands on the other; set boundaries, give the other space. If you're not married to them then don't act like you are. You don't have to be around her all the time and jealous if they're not with-. Let it be! Give space. And I would just say number two: in general, beware of seeking out the private moment of pairing off too quickly. Find other opportunities to do gender exploration. I love-, I mean gender exploration, that's wonderful. Find wiser ways to do it so that you don't slowly get into the place where all of a sudden wisdom and judgment go out the window. Because you're really in the deep now, and that deep feels really good, and you're really not sure that's the one.

Number three: respect others' boundaries. Don't try to break them down. Seek the other's welfare.

Number four: be open to knowing the other person while allowing for some mystery. Allow the people to-, the other to take some mystery into their marriage so that something goes on in that

partnering in marriage that has not been experienced anywhere else. That's a good. Five: practice saying no to oneself and the other. You're with another person and you're-, and as a male or a female, you're about to ask that question because you want to plummet a little more. Practice emotional chastity, you don't have to do this. Just say "no, I'm not going to do it." I could ask that other question because I just want to "mmn, I want to taste her a little more. Hmmn, not going to do it." Or he just- he's- he wants to go into some place and talk about some- "I'm not going to go there; I'm not going to-" You know why? You don't have to do that. But it's good to do it because it's good to see can-, am I really in control of my own vessel in sanctification and honor. It's practicing the spiritual discipline of emotional chastity.

Number seven: be open to making a decision to begin a more serious relationship with a partner that "well, you think maybe this is the one, maybe this is a good person," you know, there's some mutuality there. Be open to doing that prior to full disclosure. You don't need to know everything about the person. There is a little risk. And there's going to have to be a creativity of getting to know a person without full disclosure of is this someone that now face to face would be a good? In general, wait for the deep emotional relating until you're ready to marry. That's what I want to really encourage. In general, wait for the deep emotional relating until you're ready to marry. And the other's ready to marry and wisdom dictates that this may be the person because you want to sh-, you see, you want to bring that into marriage. Rather than having nothing left in marriage then the other stuff. You know, when you get to marry, you see a little bit of the bad of the person too. And if you've tasted all the good before, get this, marriage is actually going to taste- be a little less tasty. But especially you don't know if that's the person you're gonna marry yet.

So here's a thought, I would encourage you to take a wisdom retreat. If you're in a relationship right now or if you're thinking about it or whatever it is, set a date with God, go on a retreat in solitude and explore these questions. "God-," maybe a day, five hours, three hours. And the questions are "God, am I ready for marriage? Are there things that You want me to do or that I'd like to do first? Is this person that I know, are they ready? Is this the person?" And then come back and find some wise people to talk to about it. The key is this: it's so much easier to make these decisions prior to being in a deep relationship. Once you're in a deep relationship, it's very difficult.

Now here's some advice to parents. In the case of parenting daughters, what I would encourage is this, and this goes back to what I said earlier, parents and especially fathers, love your daughters in such a way to give her a deep sense that she's precious. Love your daughters in such a way to give them a sense that this in here is worth saving; there's some part of me I don't want to give away. But then I'll say, parents, not only love but know your daughter. Fathers, let your daughter have the experience of what it is to be loved and being known. For here the young girl and woman discovers how good it is to be appropriately loved in her deep by somebody who really cares for her welfare, not just to get something. Here will be a deep experience that she can then take into other relationships and wait to be loved by one who's responsible just like Daddy. Rather than having a deep desire to be known now. And she can't wait to leave home. Just wanna tell you dads, it's not enough to love your daughter. You must know them. You must know their heart.

And then three, as I said earlier, when your daughter begins to talk about crushes, enter joyfully into this discussion. Don't repress it. Beware of projecting your romance and sexual history onto your daughters. If you, particularly the father, repress the conversation because you're embarrassed or you don't want to think about this yet, you don't want her to think about it, then she's going to get the idea in her deep that boyfriend and crush issues are dirty; they're wrong. And this will become a secret part of her life. And she'll think "my parents can't handle this." See, the degree to which you have not known your daughter is going to be the degree she- she's going to be wondering "can my dad really hear the deep of my heart. Can he really hear my thoughts about this stuff." If that's the case, her guy issues will not become parent issues but their private issues. And that's gonna be a major problem.

What about the case of parenting sons? As I said earlier, mothers, beware of these enmeshed relationships. Beware of the dependency you're trying to create because you really want that son, you want him to stay close to you. No. This will become a real problem. Let me say, also, with mothers, beware of sabotaging the relationship between your son and your husband in order to keep the son for yourself. What we see is this, is we see sometimes that a mother, her needs aren't being met by a father, and so what she'll do is she'll sabotage the relationship between the son and him because she wants that son for herself. Moms, you need to let your your sons grow up. You need to let them become independent of you so that they'll become responsible. And so I say, fathers, don't give all the parenting of the son to the mother. Be a man. Step up. Bond deeply with your son. Seek to know your son in love. And again for parents and fathers, when your son begins to talk about sexuality, the same thing, you need to enter that discussion.

Lemme say this, in general, to parents, those of you who have young children right now. If you have like a quiet time with your children, you know, a time in the Scriptures or whatever, for 20 minutes 10 min-. Let me just make a suggestion, take that quiet time you have, cut it in half. Do what you did prior, reading the Scripture, etc., praying, and then you know what you do with the other half of the time? Listen to their heart. Listen to their heart. Get to know what's really going on in their heart; their joys, their loves, their problems, their crushes, their fears because this is modelling the love of God to them.

D. Thoughts for those already married. Ahh yes. Those of us who are already married. What do we say? For the Cinderella, I would say- I would point to Proverbs 31. You know, the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, her power is not in relationality. That is not her power, that's a given. You know what her power is? It's that she's willing to help her husband. It says here, this is kind of the thesis of this- of the text, 31:11-12. "The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. Because she does him good and not evil all the days of her life." What I want to encourage you to do is, and you do it at the risk that he will not reciprocate, but turn back, find God in this, and turn back and help him. For the Peter Pan, it says this "for this man- for this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother-." You know, there's a lot packed in there. What is it to leave father and mother? What is it to grow up? What is it to now take responsibility that this person is not going to take responsibility for me, I'm going to take responsibility for them. You leave father and mother-. I think most people need to have a soul friend to take them into that. And then cleave to your wife. Here's what I encourage you, find God. The virtuous man is not the one who goes out to IBM to conquer the world. He doesn't go

Coe: The Spiritual Discipline of Emotional Chastity Pt.2

out to the ministry to conquer the world. You know what the virtuous man does? He cleaves to his wife.