

## “My Wife is Greater Than...”

A capable wife who can find? Well I can! Blue eyes, blonde hair, Scandinavian heritage with a touch of Irish for fire, hard working, well educated, a wonderful grandmother and best of all—she love me. In fact, I have the greatest wife in the world. Now my father had a great wife, my son-in-law has a great wife. But the greatest of them all is the one I chose (or the one who chose me). So what does that say about me? Basically, I am greater than you ... just kidding, not the part about my wife, but about me.

But I think this is the essence of the reading we heard from the book of Proverbs. “A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” (Proverbs 31:10–12)

It is a man sitting with the rest of his cronies at the city gates bragging that he has a life of leisure because his wife “seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.” (Proverbs 31:13–18)

Now there is a wife! She works from sunrise to sunset while the husband lounges around the city gates drinking a frappachino. He is a postmodern feminist that believes women should rule the world so that in the words of Leonard Cohen, men can devote their time to poetry and music.

So there is this group of guys following Jesus. No mention of their wives in this passage— I guess they are out in the fields working from dawn till dusk. Anyway, Jesus has just finished telling them “The Son of Man

is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” (Mark 9:31) And off they walk to Capernaum where Peter lived. Now it seems that along the way they had been arguing about who was the greatest. Imagine the conversation.

Peter says, “I am the greatest because Jesus picked me first.” Andrew says, “No you’re not. I’m greater because I’m the one who introduced you to Jesus in the first place.” Then Thomas speaks up and says, “I’m the greatest because I have all the money.” Thaddaeus says, “I’m the greatest because I pray more than the rest of you.” And Matthew says, “My writing is the greatest.” Then Philip shouts, “My wife is better than your wife.”

Then “Jesus sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”” (Mark 9:35–37)

Last Wednesday in the evening, my granddaughter Savannah who is not yet two, came to where I was watching the evening news with my shoes in her hands. She dropped them in front of me and said, “Walk, walk, walk.” Her mother says to me, “I usually take her for a short walk, just half a block.”

So because I want to be the greatest grandfather in the world, I put on my shoes, put on Savannah’s shoes and we head out the door. Now right away it became clear that I wasn’t taking her for a walk, she was taking me. She took my hand when we crossed the street— maybe someone told her that you should help old people cross the street. She immediately headed north along the sidewalk—saying, “go, go, go”. I caught up just in time to see her stop, bend down to a flower and say, “smell, smell, smell.”

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Now it wasn't because I suddenly remembered that in life's journey you should stop and take time to smell the flowers—it was suddenly thinking of the gospel passage and realizing that I had better experience the world as a child. So at her command I smell the flowers, once, twice, three times.

We continued on. Then suddenly there was a stick lying on the sidewalk. To examine this stick she lay prostrate on the ground like a medieval monk in the presence of a holy relic. She touched it as if it was a fragment from the cross. Then rising we were off again, but with a new chant, “park, park, park.”

I took her hand and indicated that we should turn around and go back home. She repeated the mantra, “park, park, park.” And looked at me like I was turning back from the way to the Promised Land to languish in the fleshpots of Egypt.

Again she said, “park, park, park.” Another family came by. Savanah gazed into the eyes of the one year old in the stroller, while I asked the adults, “Is there a park up there?” They assured me there was but it would be dark by the time we would get there. My granddaughter gave me a look that said, “Oh ye of little faith.” And said, “park, park, park.”

So what is a grandfather to do? We went to the park, she slide on every slide, climbed every ladder, swung on every swing all the while with a new song, “fun, fun, fun.”

Then suddenly it was eventide, the darkness deepened and it was time to go. So I picked up a reluctant child, placed her on my shoulders in the way a shepherd would carry a lamb and we walked slowly back — me knowing that something had changed within me.

Biblical scholars point out that Jesus was not trying to tell the disciples that they should welcome children because they are cute and cuddly because they are not. In the time of Jesus children were considered unbridled little bits of chaos. They were not considered naive, innocent, sweet, and trusting; ancients regarded children as terrible nuisances who were to be disciplined and tolerated until they became useful, reasonable adults.

So it is not about getting in touch with your inner child. It has more to do with living in the present moment. If you are truly living in the ‘now’ then questions like “who is the greatest” is not part of the equa-

tion. Being the greatest either refers to past glories that have faded away or future vain hopes.

To know eternal life is to move beyond memory of the way things were or might have been. To know eternal life is to let go of future dreams and conquests and be totally in the present moment with the one you are with. Eternal life is to know the other as God's most precious gift and it is to know that you are God's most precious gift for the other.

When I truly know that truth, I will have—not the greatest wife—but a great marriage. When we know that, we will have—not the greatest church—but a great ministry.

In preparation for a time of reflection, let us listen to the words from the epistle of James.

“Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.

Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.” (James 3:13–18)

May it be so.