

This week we learned that Jesus had a wife. In an article titled, “Five big questions about the 'Jesus' wife' discovery,” we read: The so-called "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" presents a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, said Karen King, a well-respected historian of early Christianity at Harvard Divinity School.

The fourth-century fragment says, "Jesus said to them, 'My wife ...,'" according to King. The rest of the sentence is cut off. The fragment also says "she will be able to be my disciple," according to King. The discovery that some ancient Christians thought Jesus had a wife could shake up centuries-old Christian traditions, King suggested.

But even King acknowledged that questions remain about the receipt-sized scrap, which contains just 33 words and incomplete sentences.<sup>1</sup>

Questions remain indeed, but for this week, let's imagine that Jesus had a wife. What would Mrs. Jesus be like? Marriages were arranged by the parents in Jesus' time, so what sort of woman would they choose? Parents down through the ages have believed that “not just any girl is good enough for our son,” but when your son is the Son of God, any girl will not do.

Proverbs 31:10 (NRSV) *A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.*

And yet, just as I suspect the “discovery” that Jesus had a wife has far more to do with post-modern perspectives than it does with understanding the historical Jesus, so too, I suspect Proverbs 31 has more to do with the kind of person we are than with the woman our son marries or what it means to be “a capable wife”. I suspect Proverbs 31 presents us with a prototype of excellence and invites us to examine ourselves: How do we measure up?

## ❶ A Prototype of Excellence

“I really hate that woman.”

<sup>1</sup> “Five big questions about the 'Jesus' wife' discovery”

Written by Daniel Burke and David Gibson -- ENInews/RNS

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People say some strange things to us ministers, and this was one of them. I was at the memorial luncheon following one of my first funerals; the service for Martha August, a remarkable wife, mother, and woman of God; and in celebrating her life, I referenced Proverbs 31, and another of the grand ladies of the Pleasantville church said to me over punch and cookies, referring to the wife of Proverbs 31, “I really hate that woman.”

And why not? What’s not to hate? She *“works with willing hands... brings her food from far away... rises while it is still night ... her lamp does not go out at night ... and [she] does not eat the bread of idleness.”*

She’s Miss Manners meets Ann Landers thanks to Hints from Heloise!

Meanwhile, her husband is sitting at the city gates basking in all the respect (and gain) she garners for him!

Work, work, work! Can’t a gal take a nap? Perhaps she will, right after she puts her hands on him!

Mrs. Jesus sets a high standard. She measures up to the person of excellence that is the goal of the Book of Proverbs. She is the desired outcome of the wisdom tradition. This is demonstrated by the following two verses: Proverbs 1:7 (NRSV) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* Proverbs 31:29–30 (NRSV) *“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”*

A woman introduced us to wisdom last week. A woman is the prototype of wisdom this week. Her gender is not insignificant or accidental; there is a message there, a sermon for another Sunday, but for this Sunday and this sermon, our focus is on quality (not equality). The quality of life that we experience when we “fear the Lord” and respect “wisdom and instruction.”

## ② Measure Up

“Integrity” and “integration” both come from the Latin term *integer* meaning “whole, complete.” That’s what the dictionary tells us. We witness to it when we say that someone “has their act together.” They know who they are and what they are about.

They’re the people we seek out when we need wisdom.

Integrity commands respect, because integration, the process of getting our act together and discovering who we are and what we are about, is hard work.

Mrs. Jesus is a hard-working woman. There’s no getting around it. After Proverbs tells us, Proverbs 31:12 (NRSV) *She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.* Proverbs proceeds to describe in some detail how long her days are, “*she rises while it is still night ... her lamp does not go out at night,*” and the many things she does during those days. But she is not praised for her productivity; this poem in her honor is not a call to be a workaholic; she doesn’t have to prove herself by what gets done; she’s not measured by the bottom line. No, she’s measured by a higher standard; and she measures up.

Mrs. Jesus is a person of integrity. Proverbs 31:30 (NRSV) *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

Mrs. Jesus “fears the Lord.” She is faithful, humble, and teachable. As competent as she is, she is always mindful that the process of integration is never ending. Class is always in session.

As a result, as busy as she is, Mrs. Jesus lives a balanced life. She’s a business powerhouse, but there’s more to her than “just business.” She’s a loving mother and wife, but as vital as these relationships are to her, there’s more to her than home and hearth.

How about you? How are you doing? Are you living a balanced life, or is your life leaning a bit heavy toward work or home? How balanced is your life? How do you measure up?

Mrs. Jesus is a prototype of the quality of life we lead when we live in “the fear of the Lord,” which is to say, with reverence, when our relationship with God is the center of our lives, the core of who we are and what we are about.

God’s presence charges all our activities with glory. According to Brother Lawrence, in his classic, *Practicing the Presence of God*, “our sanctification does not depend as much on changing our activities as it does on doing them for God rather than for ourselves.”

Only this kind of spirituality allows for holistic, lively participation in all the mundane duties of life. We don't stop eating, drinking, working, bathing, and sleeping just because we are Christians. Instead, we now eat, drink, work, bath, and sleep with God, and thus, to God's glory. Externally, the difference is not observable; a casual observer could hardly tell the difference between a Christian and non-Christian doing the same things. But internally, the difference is real.

G. K. Chesterton embraced this holistic spirituality. We would do well to imitate his spirit:

You say grace before meals. All right.

But I say grace before the play and the opera,

And grace before the concert and pantomime,

And grace before I open a book,

And grace before sketching, painting,

Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;

And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

It is the greatness of the love we have for God, not the greatness of our work, which God recognizes. “We must never tire of doing little things for the love of God who considers not the magnitude of the work, but the love” (98).<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Jesus sets a high standard. She's a person of integrity who has the courage and the faith to do the hard work of integration. Admire her and saints like Brother Lawrence, but don't stop there. Measure up. Learn from their example. Do your own work of integration, and in the presence of God, you will become a prototype of excellence. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.theconcentric.com/spirituality/myetics/practicing\\_the\\_presence\\_of\\_god.html](http://www.theconcentric.com/spirituality/myetics/practicing_the_presence_of_god.html)