

Q. Does the Bible say that wives should place their husbands ahead of their children?

A. Thank you for your thought-provoking question. I must admit that in nearly thirty years of answering Bible questions, I cannot recall that I have ever been asked this question before.

I don't know of a specific Scripture that explicitly says that a wife should place her husband ahead of her children. Also, we need to be careful not to overgeneralize the idea of placing one person ahead of another as, in any family, focus changes from one person to another depending on circumstances and need. However, I do believe that the general principle of a wife putting her husband ahead of her children is implied by a combination of Scriptures.

Ephesians 5:22-24 states: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (Ephesians 5:22-24; see also 1 Corinthians 11:3). If the husband is the head of the wife, then he ultimately, under Jesus Christ, has responsibility for the children. To put it another way, if the wife is under the headship of her husband, then her care for the children is really on his behalf and under his direction.

In 1 Corinthians 11:9, we read, "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." This Scripture hearkens back to God's creation of Eve. God made her as a fitting helper and companion for Adam (see Genesis 2:20-25). In Genesis 3:16, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God told Eve that she would bring forth children (albeit with labor pains), that her desire would be toward her husband, and that he would rule over her. So, even when childbirth is mentioned, God closes his statements to Eve by telling her that her husband would rule over her.

Eve means "life giver," and Genesis 3:20 tells us that Adam named her that because she was the mother of all living (persons). So, a woman's

role as a mother is certainly important, but it is never placed over her role as wife.

For example, notice this family relationship in Colossians 3:18-21: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." The primary responsibility of the wife is to submit to her husband in the Lord (she is not to submit to demands that are contrary to Scripture—see this same principle in Acts 4:19 and 5:29). The husband's responsibility is to love his wife. The child's responsibility is to obey both parents. But it is the father who has the primary responsibility for the family's goals and methods of parenting, because it is he who is ordered not to provoke the children to anger. The Bible never says anything like this to mothers. This does not mean that she is free to provoke her children to anger. It simply assumes that she parents under her husband's leadership.

In Titus 2:3-5, Paul directs that the elder women teach the younger women to "love their husbands [literally: "be husband lovers"], to love their children [literally: "be children lovers"], To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient [submissive] to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." So, while wives are to love their children, they are also to love their husbands and submit to them.

Putting all of this together, then, I would say that the Bible teaches that a wife's primary responsibility and loyalty is, after God, to her husband. She should not place the children ahead of him. Of course, if he is abusive or completely negligent, this would be contrary to the Word of God, and she would have to make some tough decisions concerning their welfare. Each such situation is unique and would have to be handled individually.

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