

How can I lead my family Spiritually?

Summary points:

1. Men submit yourself to Christ, make that public.
2. Take initiative in planning everything
3. Include your wife's input seriously.
4. Let your wife submit voluntarily, not forcefully.
5. Repent when you fail.
6. Take full responsibility for everything.
7. Lead in prayer and Bible reading and worship.

"Hello Pastor John, my husband and I are still in the beginning stages of our marriage. Both of us were raised in Christian homes, but unfortunately both of us had fathers who failed to lead the family spiritually. Our mothers did that job. Now, I desire my husband to lead our home spiritually, but we both don't know what that looks like. Does he lead prayer with me daily? Does he read the word with me daily? And what do you do with your family? What did this look like for you?"

Well, my first thought is: I wonder why Kelly wrote to us instead of her husband. I hope it is because they agreed they both wanted to ask and they agreed it was just simpler for her to write in. That is fine. **I hope it is not because he is dragging his feet and she is having to pull him along.** So my first suggestion is that she go get her husband right now. Turn this off. Go get him, and listen to this together, rather than her becoming the mediator here and turning it into something he may not like.

Let's put one passage of Scripture, at least, in front of us so that the assumption isn't taken for granted. [Ephesians 5:21-25](#), "[Submit] to one another [husbands and wives] out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her."

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So the picture we have is that in loving each other and serving each other and submitting to each other's needs and longings in a kind of loving and humble mutuality, the wife takes her cues from the church as the church is called to follow Christ as its leader. And **the husband takes his cues from Christ as the head** of the church who gave himself up for her. One of the reasons this whole issue of headship and submission in marriage matters is that God intended for marriage to represent the covenant love between Christ and his bride, the church. That is what we are trying to flesh out when we are working on this matter of headship and submission.

There are differences and there are similarities between the relationship between the wife and the husband on the one hand and the relationship between Christ and the church on the other. And both the similarities and the differences shape the way we flesh out this drama of Christ and the church.

For example, one similarity is that Christ wants the submission of the church to be free and joyful with a full understanding of who he is and what he stands for and why he is doing what he is doing. Christ does not want

slavish obedience or joyless compliance or mindless submissiveness from the church. He wants his church to be full of intelligence and understanding and wisdom and joy and freedom when she follows him. Without this her following, the church's following, would not glorify the Lord Jesus. Mindless submission does not glorify a leader. Similarly, **a good husband does not want slavish obedience** or joyless compliance or mindless submissiveness. He wants his wife to be full of intelligence and understanding and wisdom and joy and freedom when she commits herself to follow him. So that is an example of similarity affecting how we do it.

Here is an example of difference between a husband and a wife on the one hand and Christ and the church on the other hand, that affects how the marriage works: **Husbands, human husbands, are fallible and sinful, and Christ is not.** Therefore, you can never draw a straight line from the way Christ leads his church to the way the husband leads his wife without taking into account this distinction, this difference. His finiteness and his sin have to come into the picture.

Another difference that shapes how we go about this is that both the husband and the wife are submitted to the Lord Jesus as their supreme Lord. And Jesus is her direct Lord, not her indirect Lord only through the husband. The teaching in the New Testament — and you can see this in [1 Peter 2:13–17](#), [Ephesians 5:21–33](#), [Colossians 3:17–25](#) — is that Christians, male and female, first relate to the Lord Jesus as their supreme Master and then for the Lord's sake, as it says, in obedience to the Lord we enter back in, we are sent back into the institutions of the world, like marriage — in relationships that God assigns to us. And we acted in those relationships of submission freely because our supreme and primary Lord has said to. So this submission, therefore, that a woman offers to her husband is done so freely at the bidding of her Lord Jesus.

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So those two differences between our marriages and Christ's marriage imply that **the husband will not presume that his will is infallible and that his wife is less wise or intelligent or insightful than he is.** Jesus is always wiser than the church. Husbands are not always wiser than their wives. It also means, those differences mean, that a mature Christian husband will not express his leadership with childish, proud bullying or one-sided decision making, but will always seek out both the wisdom and the desires of his wife. This is what good, fallen, fallible, yet Christlike leadership does.

Another way to talk about this same reality is to point out that the roles of leadership and submission in the marriage are not based on competence. God never said that the man is appointed to be head because he is more competent or that the woman is appointed to submission because she is less competent. Competence is not the issue in whether a man is head and a woman is submitting. Competence plays a role in how they exercise the roles of leadership and submission, but does not assign those roles.

So the way I define a husband's leadership or headship, as God wills it, is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, to protect, and to provide for his wife. And the key phrase there is “a sense of benevolent responsibility.” He may have a disability, for example, that keeps him from being the breadwinner. But that disability does not keep him from feeling a benevolent responsibility that the family's needs are met, and that sense of responsibility will move him to take initiatives with his wife and children to see to it that the family is cared for. That is the main issue, a sense of responsibility that moves the man to take initiatives in the family so that God's will is done as much as possible by every member of the family.

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So here are some examples, and keep in mind that when I say he feels a special responsibility for initiatives in the family, he is not ruling out the fact that his wife may have important initiatives to bring to the discussion because of his blind spots and his fallibility and her wisdom and her perceptivity.

The point is: She ought not to have to feel that she is constantly doing the initiating, prodding to get this man to talk about things that need to be talked about, plan things that need to be planned, do things that need to be done. So here are some of the kind of things where I think a husband should be taking active initiative:

What is the overall moral vision of the family? He should take initiative, asking that question and pursuing an answer with his wife at his side. What do we believe about God and the world and family and culture? All families stand for something. All families are known for something. All families are called to glorify God according to their gifts. What does that look like? And that is the man's responsibility. Pursue that. Figure that out. A man feels responsibility to take initiatives to form and carry through that moral vision of the family and, of course, he is doing it through the constant interaction with his wife. She would not be thrilled to be left out of that formulation, but I think most Christian women are thrilled that the husband is taking the initiative and drawing her in to see to it that they have such a moral vision for the family.

And this would include initiatives like: Let's **clarify the expectations we have for our children and how they will be disciplined** and then how my leadership will relate to the discipline and your leadership as the mother will relate to their discipline and how they are going to spend their leisure and so on. It includes things like taking initiatives in deciding on where the family goes to church and how they participate and whether they get there or not. It includes things like ministries, what the family is doing in ministry, and how they are involved together in the neighborhood and missions. It includes things like taking initiatives with lifestyle issues for the family, like what are we going to do with social media and television and entertainment and leisure and sports and vacations.

Every family has to make hundreds and hundreds of decisions about these things and **one of the things that depresses a wife is when a lackadaisical husband never thinks about what needs to be done** and has to be constantly prodded to figure things out. She wants, of course, to have input. She has probably got more insight on a lot of these things than he does. But she wants him to take initiative. We need to think about these things. He needs to say: Let's sit down. Let's talk. Let's pray. She wants him to do that.

It includes things like finances and how the family spends its money and what they are going to save for and what kind of insurance they are going to have and retirement plans and pensions and the whole financial vision of the family, including how much they give to the church and all these things. **The husbands should feel a special responsibility to take initiatives** to work it out with his wife constantly being drawn into that initiative. She is going to have superior wisdom on many of these things, but she longs for a husband to take initiative to put the process in motion by which these things can be worked out and problems can be solved and plans can be made.

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Finally, perhaps most important: Yes, the husband should feel a special responsibility to lead the family in a pattern of prayer and Bible reading and worship. And here again the issue is not competency. He may have an eighth grade education and his wife may have a college degree. He can still take initiatives to see that the family is a prayer-saturated, Bible-saturated family by working it out with his wife, how she uses her gifts which may exceed his own in Bible reading and Bible explaining.

So I hope those few examples give a taste of what it means for a husband and a wife to model Christ and the church for a very needy world who needs to badly see it.