**Set 2020 Goals for Your Marriage – USCCB Respect for Life**

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A few years ago, at the suggestion of a friend, Troy and I began the tradition of setting goals for our marriage at the beginning of each New Year. We have always set goals for our family, finances, fitness, business and parenting, but as we began to grow as a couple, we recognized several areas for improvement and began to set ourselves marital goals.

It is common to set goals at work in order to increase productivity, on a personal level to improve health or achieve something of importance like financial security. We know the value of working towards goals because we’ve witnessed what can be accomplished when we’re focused and driven. So why not set goals for our marriage, as well?

Setting goals together as a couple requires you to work as a team towards a common purpose and fortifies your relationship. From day one, Troy has referred to us as a team. I love this concept because it so easy to relate to.

If a team wants to win, each player has to work together with the others, to do it. In marriage, your ultimate goal is to help one other become holy and get to heaven, but I think most couples would agree that being in a fulfilling, happy marriage is a WIN on this side of heaven!

So how do we WIN in marriage? Life happens, we get knocked down and sometimes forget that we are ON THE SAME TEAM! Don’t overlook the fact that you are on the same team if you want to win. Remembering this motivates me to get beyond a grudge I may be holding and move more swiftly towards reconciliation. Determine what you can do daily or even weekly to reinforce the fact that you are on the same team. Perhaps, similar to doing a daily examination of conscience, you can do a marital examination of conscience, either privately in your heart or together as a couple. Reflect on what you did well that day/week to love your spouse and what areas need improvement.

Come up with a marital game plan. Every team has a plan they try to follow that puts them in the best position to win. Good offense – what can you proactively do to help your marriage grow? Good defense – what hedges do you need to put around your marriage to protect it from damage?

Teammates are accountable to one another. If one teammate is in the wrong, it affects the entire team. It is the same in marriage: it is important to forgive, but to also hold each other accountable. There is a difference between holding a grudge and holding your spouse accountable for a wrong that needs to be made right. Until this is done, your team cannot work in sync. If you desire a successful marital team, you need to admit when you are wrong. Your spouse shouldn’t have to pull an apology out of you; it takes away the sincerity of it. Admit when you are wrong so you don’t have to play defense without purpose. If you are the spouse that is offended, forgive to get out of the offensive zone. Make it a goal to be accountable to one another for the sake of your marriage, your family, and your salvation.

In any team, when one player is down, another player steps up to the plate to fill in.  A good goal you may choose to set for your marriage is to better understand how you can support your spouse when he or she is down. Are you loving and emotionally supportive? Do you help pick them up or do you ignore the fact that they are down so you don’t have to deal with it? Perhaps, because of your own wounds, pride or lack of energy, you find it challenging to help your spouse when he or she is down in their game. This is when relying on the grace of the sacrament of marriage gives you the strength to live your vows “in good times and in bad.”

I recently read a story about an experiment off the coast of Brazil. Two bottles were dropped in the ocean off a boat at exactly the same time and right next to each other. One bottle washed up on the coast of Ecuador 100 days later and the other bottle went across the Atlantic Ocean and washed up on the coast of Tanzania a year later. The bottles started off in the same place but ended up a half a world apart. It is the same in marriage – it is so easy to drift apart and not even realize you are doing it! Setting goals together and following through on their development will help you consciously stay close, so that you do not end up half a world apart. If you want to prevent a drift in your relationship, you must be intentional.

Can you set a goal to have a weekly date night or get away together for a few days? Troy and I try to go on a date at least 2-3 times a month  and we also get away somewhere alone once a year for a few days. This “date” time has been a huge blessing for our marriage!

Set realistic goals and be flexible. Do what works for you and be mindful of the season you are in. Periodically take time to reevaluate your goals and redesign your plan if necessary. Life happens and inevitably something will cause you to get off track, but the important thing to remember is to get back on track as soon as possible and make accommodations if a curve ball is thrown your way. Celebrate your accomplishments.

Goal setting as a couple improves communication and assists couples in better understanding one other because it affords each spouse an opportunity to express their personal dreams and desires for the marriage. There is less misunderstanding, resentment, and conflict since each person is heard and their needs validated. This in turn leads to a more fulfilling and happy marriage.

What goals can you set for your marriage in 2020?