You can have a successful marriage by . . .

Setting Godly Goals

When you get married, the two of you face the question “What are we going to do with our life together?” Even if you have decided that your goal for your marriage, more than anything else, is to please God and go to heaven,¹ you will still face questions. “How can we best serve the Lord?”; “What kind of work will we do?”; “What do we hope to achieve in our individual professions?” You will have to make decisions about long-range plans: where you will live, whether or not you will cultivate a tract of land or build a business, and what you will do to care for yourselves in your twilight years. How will you make those decisions? How can you set goals for your marriage?

RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO SET GOALS

Recognize the need to set goals. Someone said, “If you aim at nothing, you will certainly hit it.” The ultimate goal for the Christian couple is always to serve God and go to heaven. While every other goal may be subject to change, there is value in looking to the future and thinking about what you want to accomplish with your life together. H. Norman Wright said,

Goals will give you a sense of direction. . . . Because they are future oriented they can lift you from some of the difficulties of your present situation. Your focus can be upon positive hopes to come. . . . Goals will help you use your time more effectively, for they help you sort out what is important and what is not.²

SET GOALS FOR EVERY AREA OF YOUR LIFE

Consider setting goals for every area of your life together. You would do well to set goals in each of the following areas:

1. Your spiritual life. What do you want to accomplish together for Christ and the church?¹
2. Your personal life. How can you develop your God-given talents and interests?
3. Your marital life. What kind of marriage do you want to have in the future?
4. Your education. What kind of education do you want and need for yourselves? What education goals will you have for your children?
5. Your work or business. What do you hope to achieve in your work?
6. Your social, civic, and political life. What do

The person who has a goal is willing to work hard for a prolonged period of time to accomplish that aim. For example, one who desires to be a school teacher may postpone full-time work and continue studying in order to earn a degree and be able to do more good on a long-term basis.

³Paul had a goal. He said, “One thing I do: . . . I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13b, 14; see 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27). Evidence that he accomplished his aim is given in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. Among your spiritual goals should be “to become conformed to the image of [Christ]” (Romans 8:29); “to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15); to be presented “complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28); and to become like Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21). You should plan to do your part in fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission by teaching the gospel to others (Matthew 28:19, 20). The Christian’s ultimate goal on earth is to be able to say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20b).

¹Review the lesson “Building Your Marriage on a Spiritual Foundation.”
²H. Norman Wright, So You’re Getting Married (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1985), 114.
you want to do for the community in which you live? What relationships do you want to form?

DEVELOP LONG-RANGE AND SHORT-RANGE GOALS

Have both long-range and short-range goals. Your ultimate goal should be to serve Jesus, do God’s will, and go to heaven. In addition to that goal (and contributing to it), you should have some long-term goals for this life: what you hope to achieve in your work, what you want your marriage to be like many years from now, and what you will do as an elderly couple. Then you need to set short-range goals which will help you to achieve your long-range goals.

For example, if your long-range goal is to have a happy, lasting marriage, your short-range goals might include reading several books or articles about marriage each year and arranging times away from everyone else when the two of you can be alone.

DEVELOP A MUTUALLY SATISFYING GOAL-SETTING PROCESS

Utilize an effective goal-setting and decision-making process. Since your goals and decisions will affect both of you, you should agree on a system that is mutually satisfying.

The Role of the Husband and the Wife In Making Decisions

Who should dominate the decision-making process? While, from a biblical standpoint, the husband is the leader of the home (see Ephesians 5:22–24), he should make major decisions affecting the family after considering his wife. The Christian husband should always do what he thinks is best for his wife!

That principle, however, becomes somewhat complicated in practice. In a Christian marriage, each partner wants to submit to the other; but the husband is ultimately responsible for making the decision. He should make that decision with his wife’s desires and needs in mind. At the same time, he must do what is required to enable him to lead and provide for his household in a godly manner. Over time, what may be best for her, for the marriage, and for the family is for him to achieve his own short-range goals, even if they do not coincide with her desires.

The Problem of the Wife’s Goals

In submitting to a husband, a Christian woman sometimes experiences disappointment regarding her personal goals. What can be done to help a woman in a way that will be pleasing to God and will be mutually satisfying to her and to her husband?

(1) She might adjust what she wants in life. It may be possible for her to change her goals so that she finds her satisfaction in her husband’s successful work and in her own role as a Christian woman and wife. In other words, she could redirect her ambition toward being the best full-time Christian wife and mother she can be.

(2) She might postpone certain goals. This is a common choice for a Christian woman to make with her husband’s approval. While the children are small, the mother remains in the home full time; then, when they are older, she pursues her interests. With her husband’s encouragement, she can try to fulfill her ambitions.4

(3) Her goals might become dominant, at least for a time. A third possibility is that the wife might pursue her area of work with the husband’s encouragement. Sometimes the wife’s profession serves as the family’s major source of income. The husband may work at a job that brings in less pay, or he may be the primary caregiver for the children in the home. Such an arrangement would not necessarily violate the Scriptures.5

ALLOW FOR CHANGING GOALS

Realize that your goals will probably change with time. The only unchanging fact about life is

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4 One possibility for the Christian woman was passed on to me by Cynthia Guy, an adjunct instructor at Heritage Christian University. One of her teachers in college proposed that a woman might divide her life into three approximately twenty-year periods. The first twenty years could be spent growing up. The second twenty years could be devoted to her family, encouraging her husband and helping her children grow up. The third twenty years could be focused not only on her family, but also on others; she might work full time to benefit the church and society. (Cynthia Guy, personal conversation with author, Heritage Christian University, Florence, Alabama, August 2005.)

5 Even if the wife provides the primary income for the family, the husband can still be “the head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:22–24) and she can still be subject to him and “keep house” (see 1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:5).
its changeableness. As time passes, people change. Both husband and wife will develop new interests. In addition, circumstances change. The job he prepared to do may be eliminated by technological advancements. Unforeseen employment opportunities, economic setbacks, personal problems, the coming of children, sickness, family problems: Any of these events may upset the smooth current of the couple’s life together.

When changes occur, what can you do about your goals? Your goals should be adaptable. For example, it is fairly common for a man to leave one job and begin another type of work. Often, as a man ages and his situation changes, he may change his focus from trying to make as much money as possible to working at a job in which he can help others—for instance, as a preacher, a teacher, or a counselor. Obviously, when that happens, the family’s goals have changed. For the Christian couple, the concern is to make the decision for any major change in a mutually satisfying way.

Since goals change with circumstances, it is a good idea for you and your spouse, as a couple, to re-evaluate your goals on a regular basis. A couple could plan every year to discuss specific questions: “Are we meeting our goals?”; “How should our goals change?”; “Which goals should we drop?”; “What new goals should we add?”

SEEK GOD’S GUIDANCE

Take God into consideration when setting goals and making decisions. Serving and pleasing Him should be the first concern in every decision you make as a couple.

(1) Pray for His direction as you think about setting goals; seek His leadership. Tell Him that you want to do what He wants you to do. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

(2) Plan on His help in meeting your goals. Make big plans for God and for the growth of the church. Try to achieve more than you think possible, believing that God can do with you more than you can imagine. Take into consideration such passages as Philippians 4:13 (“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”) and Ephesians 3:20 (“[God] is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us”).

(3) Prepare to accept His providential guidance. Christians believe that God is active in His world. When you pray concerning your plans, He may close some doors and open others. While it is impossible to know for sure what God is doing in your life providentially, you should view those opened doors and closed doors as being God’s way of helping you to know what He wants you to do.

For example, a Christian couple should be aware that they may experience setbacks, disappointments, and even tragedies in trying to accomplish their goals. However, God providentially guides His people through difficult times. Whatever happens in your life, you can firmly believe that God can and will somehow work out everything that happens to you in such a way that good will result (Romans 8:28).

CONCLUSION

When you get married, you and your spouse can choose between drifting through life or living according to a purpose. Sometimes, by God’s grace, wonderful blessings come to people who do not plan for the future—but you should not depend on that happening to you. Rather, in your marriage, the two of you should plan together to accomplish mutually satisfying short-range and long-range goals that will provide fulfillment for each of you and bring glory to God. To neglect to do so is to invite personal and marital failure.

Coy Roper

The Blessings of Marriage

“An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.” Proverbs 31:10

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