

# Live the truth and beauty of God's plan for married love!

*Creation overflows with God's life and love! Make no mistake about it—God made you and our world out of His great love! Let's consider how this truth includes marriage. And let's take a look at how the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) honor the truth and beauty of God's plan for married love.*

## ***It's about love.***

From the beginning, God created Adam and then a suitable partner for him, Eve. The first human relationship ever created was that of marriage! "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2: 23). The two give themselves to each other to become one. Giving of one's self to the other is a hallmark of marriage—there is no "I" in marriage, but "We." It is part of God's plan for the good of humanity. That is because marriage reflects the love of God—permanent, faithful, and fruitful. And, with the coming of our salvation in Jesus, marriage reflects the love of Christ for His Church.

The methods of NFP honor and even have the potential to protect and strengthen a married couple's ability to reflect God's love. That is because NFP requires communication and cooperation between husband and wife. NFP methods, which are rooted in science, make use of education and behavioral change for achieving and avoiding pregnancy. When learned and used correctly, they are an effective means of responsible parenthood.

As a couple learns about their combined gift of fertility and understands the best time to either conceive or postpone conceiving a baby, they are better able to discern God's plan for their marriage. If delaying a pregnancy, they will abstain from the marital act. They then will do nothing to harm God's gift of fertility. The use of NFP often requires self-sacrifice as the spouses explore other ways to show affection for each other when periodically abstaining to postpone pregnancy. As they work together, a husband and wife will find that this may deepen their emotional and spiritual intimacy as spouses.

## ***It's about life.***

God created men and women in His image—male and female. Human sexuality is part of God's plan. It is woven into the fabric of each man and woman. Human sexuality carries within it the two-fold powers of love and life. The essential nature of this two-fold truth should be appreciated and respected.

In marriage, husband and wife deepen their love for one another through celebrating the truth of their sexual union. The marital embrace is a spousal gift with a two-fold purpose; to draw the spouses closer together, to be unitive and to be procreative, to be life-giving.

Procreation is the Lord God's awesome invitation and a sacred duty for husband and wife to share in His creative power! Sometimes a couple is unable to have children through no fault of their own. Their challenge is



to offer their marital love as a blessing in the community in service to others.

Marriage is the foundation to build families—children are “the supreme gift of marriage” (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 50), and marriage creates a secure home for children. God’s procreative invitation to husband and wife extends past pregnancy and calls parents to steward their children: to nurture them, to teach them to love God and neighbor.

The Church has always understood that God wants parents to be open to life and to care for their children. To be a parent is a life-long vocation! It is why the Church can say that married couples receive “a kind of consecration” in their marital duties (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 48).

NFP methods support God’s gift of procreation because they value new life. Unlike contraception, which exists to deny human fertility, NFP respects natural fertility. NFP education enables husband and wife to understand their window of fertility—when they are most likely to become pregnant—and therefore, can also be used to help them achieve a pregnancy besides postpone one. NFP respects God’s power of life. Contraception cannot do that!

### *It’s about freedom.*

Free will is one of God’s gifts to men and women. When God created humanity, He made the human person as a “rational” being—who can initiate, control, and decide how to act (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1730). Freedom of conscience is a gift from God that allows each person to grow in maturity and to be able to love Him and neighbor freely. At the same time, the Catholic faith tells us that true freedom can only be found when we choose to love God. Freedom, therefore, is not the arbitrary ability to do whatever we’d like at any time.

True freedom is the ability to *recognize the good and do what is right*. If a person chooses to live a life in which he or she makes choices only thinking of his/her own happiness and fails to do the good to which God calls him or her, the person creates a type of prison for themselves (see *Catechism*, no. 1740). Doing what is right in life often requires personal sacrifice for a greater good than one’s own desire or pleasure. And, this good is liberating!

As applied to marriage, the decisions of spouses can either build up or tear down the heart of a marriage. How the spouses exercise their individual freedom within the marriage cannot be made in isolation but must be made in recognition of each other’s needs, that of their children, extended family, and other obligations and responsibilities outside the home.

Healthy marital communication is especially important regarding conjugal relations. Sin affects us all. It is deceptive. Sin can twist the good of the marital embrace.

Spouses can be selfish in how they treat each other. Wholesome inter-mutuality that is rooted in the love of God and each other strengthens a couple’s marriage. Spouses need to support each other in striving to honor God’s design by rejecting anything that can injure their marital love. It is the reason why the Church opposes contraception. It strikes at the heart of marital love.

The methods of NFP provide useful information on the woman’s fertility cycle. NFP helps a husband and wife determine whether their lovemaking may result in bringing a new life into the world. The practice of daily charting the wife’s signs of fertility can spark deep conversation about God’s plan for their marriage. The practice of NFP can promote mutual growth in self-mastery, foster emotional, and spiritual maturity, and lead to a more authentic life lived in the freedom of God’s design.

### *It’s about gift.*

God is love. In His great love, God created men and women in His image to share His divine life. When our first parents turned away from Him, God sought them. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Every human life is a gift from God, and, in turn, like our Heavenly Father, together we are gift to each other. We cannot fully discover who we are as persons “except through a sincere gift” of ourselves to each other (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24). Human beings are able to be fully human only when we reach out to our neighbor to form a network of loving relationships of life and love. We are all sons and daughters of the one family of God!

Marriage is a particularly unique gift from God. Marriage is not “the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love (*Humanae vitae*, no. 8). God designed marriage to bring a man and a woman together in the one-flesh union that Scripture so eloquently teaches (Gen. 2:24). It is because of marriage that families come to be.

Today, we are fortunate to live in a time where human reproduction is well understood. The reliable methods of NFP stand upon solid research about male and female physiology. NFP science has confirmed the fertile signs of the woman’s menstrual cycle and marked the parameters of a man and a woman’s combined fertility, which creates the fertile window. NFP can be a moral means to either achieve or postpone a pregnancy. And, for women, NFP charting can provide insight into the health of her reproductive system. With so good a gift in our world, why not learn more about these healthy and ethical methods that support God’s plan for married love? Visit [uscbb.org/nfp](http://uscbb.org/nfp). And remember “live the truth and beauty of God’s plan for married love!”

