

Natural Family Planning

It's worth it.

Join the Revolution!

By Jill Cherrey

In marriage preparation programs, couples frequently ask: “What is the difference between contraception and Natural Family Planning (NFP)?” Although I am happy to explain, I often realize that words are inadequate. I try to encourage them to ask a better question: “How can a couple have ‘authentic sexual intimacy’ and responsibly plan their family?” The difference between the two questions is deep and wide. The answer has to do with joining a revolution—God’s revolution!

God’s love is revolutionary. It is freely given. It is permanent, total, faithful, and fruitful. And, God shares His love with us as gift. When man and woman marry, they make a vow at the altar to love each other as God loves. In their consent, the “I” becomes “we!” And, there is more. God’s gift of sexual relations to husband and wife gives them a particular way to “seal” or “perfect” their vows in a physical reality where the “we” can become “us” in a child.

With NFP, spouses say, “I love you *freely*” because the time of sexual abstinence demonstrates that they can say “No” and do no harm to God’s gift of fertility. This makes their times of “Yes,” more meaningful. To put it another way, if we cannot say “no” to our sexual urges then we are not truly free and our “yes” really means nothing. When a couple jointly respects God’s gift of fertility rather than seeking to manipulate it, they offer the *total* gift of their persons to each other. A *faithful* gift is one that is always in the best interest of the person, and NFP allows a couple to say, “You are amazing just the way you are” (remember, when using NFP, the couple does not seek to alter their fertility through chemicals, devices, or procedures). In addition, the discipline of periodic sexual abstinence helps couples to resist temptations that offend sexual fidelity and the virtue of chastity. NFP allows the couple to give God the final word on whether their sexual union will result in pregnancy. In turning over physical fruitfulness to God, the couple practices spiritual *fruitfulness* as they open their hearts to God who is love.

A revolution is not an easy endeavor. It can be exciting, but it inevitably will require personal sacrifice and even suffering. NFP is no different. Accepting God’s invitation to live His plan for married love is both humbling and wondrous. It involves many blessings. And, yet, it will also have its difficulties. For example, when postponing a pregnancy, some couples may experience prolonged periods of sexual abstinence due to unclear fertility signs—and they will feel the loss of their physical intimacy. When facing the challenge of postpartum and breastfeeding or during perimenopause, other couples may wonder if their efforts are worth the trouble. And, sadly, some couples may be tempted to give up when receiving disapproval from friends or family. At times such as these, it will be important for NFP couples to know that they are not alone. They can seek help from their NFP teachers and local diocesan leaders. The

diocesan NFP community has access to resources, including spiritual directors and appropriate medical professionals, who can help couples who are in need of assistance.

Most importantly, when facing challenges, NFP couples should be encouraged to turn to God in prayer—as individuals and as a couple. In my own life, I have both worn down rosary beads and the path to the Adoration chapel during spiritual battles in my life- and God never failed to give me consolation and direction!

In my mind's eye stands an image of a heart with the caption, "Sacrifice is the Metric of Love." We know this truth in the deepest part of our being. Unfortunately, today we live in a culture that has tried to redesign love and in particular, sex. In doing so, it has eliminated the language of love which is the language of self-sacrifice. NFP supports the language of love. It stands against any notion that love is about self-satisfaction to the exclusion of self-donation. NFP allows couples to honor God by respecting His design. It both respects man and woman as created by God, and values God's gift of fertility. NFP therefore values the child as gift.

What is God's design for men and women but that which is love and life, babies and bonding, unitive and procreative, together! With NFP, a couple can *trust the gift* as it was made, and when they do so, they can truly renew their vows and invite love, God's love into their marriage. This is a revolution worth joining!

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