
“Be her Joseph!”

By
Tom Mealey

When we first married, my wife, Misty, and I were the typical secular couple. We relied on hormonal contraception. Due to bad side effects, that didn't last long. Misty found out about Natural Family Planning (NFP) through a Catholic friend. Admittedly, I was suspicious of all the “hocus pocus” involving thermometers at o' dark-thirty in the morning and observations written down in cryptic symbols on the NFP chart. That would all change in surprising ways once we got into living the NFP lifestyle.

Before having children, Misty had been an atheist and I had been an agnostic. With our first child, the miracle of life spurred a spiritual awakening in us. We realized the Holy Spirit had already led us into a Catholic life. Even after our conversion, however, NFP grew our relationship with each other and with God in ways we never expected.

We studied Pope John Paul II's “theology of the body” and became excited about living out our faith and sharing it. It was thrilling to learn the compelling reasons behind the Church's beautiful teachings on sex and marriage.

Much to my surprise, I also learned how grateful my wife was that I was willing to learn how her body worked. Sharing the family planning responsibility, as well as finding non-sexual ways of expressing affection and intimacy when we had good reasons to postpone pregnancy, strengthened our marriage and made me a better husband and father.

When we became Catholic, I knew I wanted to be the spiritual leader of our family, but I didn't understand what that entailed besides herding our children to church on Sundays. Through NFP and Scripture, I discovered that I had a choice in the kind of man—the kind of husband—I was going to be.

We often blame Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. But in Genesis, we learn that after taking a bite, she turned and offered the fruit to Adam, who was with her. Adam didn't stop her and say, "This is a bad idea, let's go." He did not protect his wife, but stood by silently while the serpent convinced her to surrender her holiness and damage her relationship with God.

Then there was St. Joseph. When Joseph obeyed the angel who told him to bring Mary into his home, he was accepting the public shame and embarrassment of a pregnant fiancée. He sacrificed his personal honor and reputation to obey God and protect Mary and Jesus.

The choice for a husband is clear: he can be his wife's Adam or he can be her Joseph. A man can stand by silently and allow his wife to suffer the physical and spiritual consequences of contraception. Or he can defend her virtue, body, and soul by using NFP. Today, contraception is accepted and expected. Any man who forgoes it for NFP will likely be exposed to ridicule and criticism. But as St. Joseph taught us, there are some things more important than the opinion of others. May we husbands choose to be Joseph to our wives!

Tom and Misty Mealey have four children and live in the Diocese of Richmond.