



# Called to the Joy of Love

**Natural Family Planning, Supporting God's gifts of love and life in marriage**

There is a profound and basic truth proclaimed repeatedly in Sacred Scripture. It is a very simple truth: God loves us. In love, God created the world. In love, God breathed life into Adam and Eve as He created them in His image. In love, God the Father sent his son as our Savior. His gift of love became visible in the flesh of Jesus Christ. Through his love, we are forgiven. In imitation of the love that we have received, we are called to embody God's love. This is the cause of our great joy!

## **All are called to love**

Every person is called to the joy of love—just as God has loved us! As St. John proclaims,

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us. (1 John 4: 7–12)

This beautiful proclamation expresses the vocation of all people, which is to be open to God's love and to embody God's love in return. As Christians, it is our universal call to give love and to receive love.

The ability to know, give, and receive love is a gift from God—it is a sharing in His divine nature. Since God is love itself, we were created by love, in love, to love. This fundamental truth should guide all relationships between people, not least those between people called to share their lives in the covenant of marriage.

God's love is at the heart of marriage. Married love is free, faithful, permanent, and fruitful—open to life (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 49–50; *Humanae Vitae*, 9; *Amoris Laetitia*, 74, 125). Married love joins husband and wife so that they become “one flesh” (Gen 2: 24). Within the arms of husband and wife, God desired the perfect environment be created to welcome new life into the world. Marriage creates the family!

## **Chastity helps us to love deeply and selflessly!**

God has written the capacity to give and to receive love into the hearts of every person. One beautiful expression of God's plan of love is that He created us with sexuality—male and female. Human sexuality—whether male or female—is woven into our very bodies, and affects all aspects of human existence, including our relationships with one another.

In a world wounded by sin, the virtue of chastity strengthens us to express love in ways that are holy and genuine—whether we are married, single, celibate, or vowed in religious life. In fact, loving chastity enables us to maintain “the integrity of the powers of life and love” that have been given to us and therefore helps us to respect ourselves and the personal boundaries of other people (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2338). Within marriage, chastity protects the integrity of husband and wife, especially with respect to their gifts of union and procreation. Chastity calls husband and wife to a right order of their love for each other within God's design for their marriage.

## Marriage and parenthood

In marriage, human sexuality brings together the fullness of love and life. The precious gift of fertility is a beautiful participation in the creative Spirit of God as He calls into existence a new person. Of all the various profound forms of human relationship, marriage, or Holy Matrimony, was willed by God as a blessing from the beginning of creation (Gen 2:18–25; Mt 19: 1–6). God did not want the man to be alone. God made a suitable partner for him—the woman. Together, they form the one-flesh union of marriage which has the potential to give life and create a family. God intended marital love to accept and nurture the power of life.

The nature of marriage calls spouses to a sacred stewardship over the twofold gifts of love and life. Within this vocation, a husband and wife celebrate their human sexuality in all its fullness. Their conjugal union is “meant to express the full meaning of love,” as willed by God, “its power to bind a couple together and its openness to new life” (USCCB, *Married Love and the Gift of Life*, 4).

## NFP—cooperating with God's design for married love

In marriage, serious reasons may arise that cause husband and wife to limit the size of their family. These reasons can include financial stresses, physical illness, psychological and even spiritual difficulties. So, what are the moral ways for a couple to accept God's gift of fertility and yet cooperate with God to plan their families?

Authentic family planning honors God's design by supporting the love-giving and life-giving nature of sexual intercourse. It promotes openness to new life and the value of the child. And it helps to enrich the marital bond between husband and wife. Authentic family planning builds healthy and holy families. In the world of family planning, only the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) check “Yes” to all these moral characteristics!

NFP methods make use of fertility education. All NFP education teaches husband and wife about their fertile time (the time of the wife's ovulation when an egg is released from her ovary). NFP methods can be used to either attempt a pregnancy or avoid one. When avoiding, couples abstain from conjugal relations during the fertile time of the woman. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used with NFP. Any woman, no matter the variety in her menstrual cycle, can use

an NFP method. That is because NFP methods help the wife to recognize her unique signs of fertility, which she will observe daily.

## Love, naturally and generously

It is time to consider and embrace all that God has given us. Take the time to learn, reflect, and pray about God's marvelous plan for men, women, and Holy Matrimony. Answer the call to cooperate with God's design for married love. Share God's vision of human sexuality lovingly with your family members, friends, and neighbors. Accepting God's invitation to the joy of love is to embrace all aspects of His divine plan for your marriage. If accepted, it will bring joy to your marriage!

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## Learn more

### Catholic teaching on love and human sexuality

[usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/love-and-sexuality](https://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/love-and-sexuality)

### Catholic teaching on married love and the gift of life

[usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf](https://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf)

### Natural Family Planning

[usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning](https://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning)

### Where to learn an NFP method

[usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/find-nfp-class](https://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/find-nfp-class)

### Useful marriage-focused websites

[foryourmarriage.org](https://foryourmarriage.org); [marriageuniqueforareason.org](https://marriageuniqueforareason.org)

*Cannot find what you need? Contact [nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org).*

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