



**Pursue a lasting love ...
Create hope for the future!**

**Natural Family Planning...supporting God's
gifts of love and life in marriage**

What Does it Mean to Pursue a Lasting Love?

As men and women caught in the responsibilities of daily life, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that we are destined for eternity. The thought that God's love *endures forever* is something difficult for our time-bound selves to comprehend. It's a lofty claim that can be easy to leave on the shelf as an "ideal"—rather than a truth we intentionally integrate into our marriage, here and now.

Because of the consequences of original sin, we do not come into this world knowing how to love as God loves. Instead, we receive and experience God's love for us throughout our lives, even as we learn to model that love in how we treat others. As Pope Francis says:

When a person discovers God, the true treasure, he abandons a selfish lifestyle and seeks to share with others the charity which comes from God. He who becomes a friend of God, loves his brothers and sisters, commits himself to safeguarding their life and their health....
(Pope Francis, Homily, 2014)*

Learning from the Trinity

A key way we can learn more about God's love is by examining the Trinitarian relationship between God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is three distinct persons united in one Godhead. The inner life of the Trinity is interpersonal, self-giving, and communicative.

As Christians, we are challenged to have faith that is "the confidence of what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1). The first step in pursuing a lasting love, with the Trinity as our example,

is the belief that a lasting love is possible—that we truly can and do daily participate in a divine reality that is beyond what can be seen on the surface.

Love is Free, Total, faithful, and Fruitful!

Church teaching maintains that married love must be free, total, faithful, and fruitful. This is exactly how the Trinity loves!

In the Trinity, love is freely given between the three persons. The persons of the Trinity willingly place themselves at the service of their communion. There is no coercion or ulterior motive.

The total gift of each person to the other allows for the one-ness of the Trinitarian relationship.

Secondly, the persons of the Trinity give themselves totally to one another. Though each person of the Trinity retains their unique personhood, they hold nothing back from the participation in Trinitarian love. The total gift of each person to the other allows for the one-ness of the Trinitarian relationship.

Third, Trinitarian love is faithful. The steadfastness of the Trinity is an indispensable part of a love which endures for all eternity. And finally, love is fruitful. The love of the Trinity is life-giving. All of creation, all of mankind, all goodness, all beauty results and flows from the love of the Trinitarian relationship.

The Human Person as Gift

It is only from the foundational understanding of love that we can come to know what a person is. The human person is made by love and for love. St. John Paul II phrases it beautifully in what is known as his personalistic norm. He states that human beings are subjects and not objects. Objects are meant to be used. Subjects are meant to be received as a gift. When we see our spouse and our children as gifts, the way that we relate to them shows just how much we value them.

Our families are especially called to be an icon of Trinity—where our hearts are stretched by loving one another and we are prepared to participate in eternal love. Then, spouses are called in a unique and intimate way to enter into a lasting love through the reception of one another as a gift in the sexual embrace. Spouses are called to open their hearts to God in marital intimacy such that each marital act be oriented towards the openness to life and the good of one another.

Natural Family Planning, an Expression of Love

With this end in mind, it is also important to note that there are times when, for serious reasons, it may not be prudent for a couple to have a child. In keeping with the vision of a lasting love that is free, total, faithful, and fruitful, the Church proposes Natural Family Planning (NFP) as a practical and morally permissible method for married couples to avoid or achieve pregnancy.

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, practicing NFP allows spouses to be responsible parents and at the same time “respect God’s design for life and love.” NFP is based on the natural times of fertility and infertility experienced throughout the course of a woman’s menstrual cycle. In seasons where it may be imprudent for a couple to have a child due to psychological, financial, physical, or other serious reasons, the couple abstains from intercourse during the woman’s fertile time. At the same time, NFP can also be used to achieve pregnancy.

NFP is not contraception because it does nothing to alter or block the body’s natural rhythms of fertility. Instead, NFP relies on scientifically proven methods of tracking a woman’s menstrual cycle so that a couple can make an informed decision guided by faith and reason.

NFP depends on the couples’ free choice to abstain or engage in intercourse based on the good of the spouses and the good of the family as a whole.

When spouses engage their free will to communicate in this way, they are choosing to see each other and future children as gifts and saying yes to a love that is free, total, faithful, and fruitful—answering the call to be an image of lasting Trinitarian love.

Learn More

Visit the US Bishops’ NFP Program at www.usccb.org/nfp.

To learn more about Catholic teaching on marriage, married love and responsible parenthood, see www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/church-teaching.

Read the US bishop’s document *Married Love and the Gift of Life* at www.usccb.org/resources/Married%20Love%20Final%20Text%20Nov06%20for%20Website%20-%20Copy.pdf

To learn more about NFP see www.usccb.org/topics/naturalfamily-planning/what-natural-family-planning.

Want to learn a method of NFP? Visit www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/nfp-national-providers.

*Quote from Pope Francis’ homily during Mass on the occasion of the Feast day of St Ann, Patron Saint of Caserta (26 July 2014).

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140726_omelia-caserta.html.

Questions?

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