

## God's Plan for Marriage and the Current Situation

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**Everyone wants a strong marriage and a healthy, happy family.** That is what God wants for us too. Marriage is the vocation for the vast majority of the human race. You want a strong marriage because you won't be happy unless there is a lot of love, trust, devotion, and commitment in your marriage. And, if parents love each other, then their children feel very secure because the foundation that supports them, which is marriage, is secure.

**As God designed marriage, it takes a lifetime to fulfill one.** You cannot accomplish a marriage in ten or fifteen years. In fact, at the 25<sup>th</sup> Silver Anniversary, a couple should be moving into the richest years of their relationship together. Marriage is an intimate communion of love and life where a husband and wife share each other's destiny, and face the challenges of life together. When marriage is lived well, the couple finds more to love and give of themselves as the year's progress. That is why being a widow, or widower, can be so difficult. The survivor feels like a large portion of their life has been torn from him or her.

Our culture has deviated a long way from God's Plan for marriage and spousal love. It is very sad to say, but there is now a 50% divorce rate among Catholics in the United States, which reflects the culture at large. **That is not God's Plan for marriage.** We all know that a great deal of pain and emotional scars result from a divorce, both for the couple and for their children. There is no such thing as a "fault-free", or "pain-free" divorce. Because of the high divorce rate, many young couples put off marriage or simply cohabit. Nationwide, there is now an 80% cohabitation rate among young Catholics. **This is not God's Plan for young couples.** Eighty-five percent of Catholic couples of childbearing years today are either using some form of contraception or are sterilized. **This is not God's Plan for spousal love.** When we deviate from God's Plan for marriage and spousal love, we simply reflect the values of the surrounding culture, and everyone gets hurt.

**Happiness comes when we know God's Plan for the important matters of life,** and then we put this Plan into practice. *Freedom means* that we are free to pursue the good, the right, and the true. We abuse our freedom when we choose to reject our commitments, walk away from our responsibilities, attempt to redefine marriage and spousal love, and simply reflect the values of the secular culture.

If we want to be happy, then we need to know God's Plan for marriage, for spousal love and for the family. **And this Plan can be known!** God wants it to be known! He gives it to us in divine revelation (think of Genesis 2 and Matthew 19), in the constant teaching of the Church over the centuries, and through the use of good reason. If you think about it, you realize that human nature has not changed much over the centuries; neither has basic human realities like marriage, spousal love, and families.

**Marriage,** according to God's Plan, is meant to be permanent and requires total fidelity. It is "until death do us part". **Spousal love,** as God designed it, is always to remain open to the goodness of love and life. We seriously distort the spousal act if we turn against, or remove, one of these values. The **family** is a group of people who are intimately

involved with one another, where each person is accepted completely for the unique individual he or she is. A family is where a person discovers who he is, and finds all the support and encouragement he needs to develop his personality.

***There is a lot of confusion in our society about what the spousal act is.*** Playboy, Planned Parenthood, and much of our popular entertainment regard the spousal act as a form of recreation, free of any lasting consequences. There are just two requirements: 1) do not get pregnant, and 2) do not catch a sexually transmitted disease. But this view falls way short of God's Plan for the spousal act.

It is important to point out that we at FAF did not design human sexuality, nor did you, nor did Hollywood or the Catholic Church. ***God alone designed human sexuality***, and all the other important dimensions of our human nature. He has a Plan. We can know that Plan. And we can put that Plan into our lives. It is completely doable.

***God's Plan for spousal love is*** that a spouse (let's say Adam) makes the total personal gift of himself to his beloved (let's say Eve). Adam gives himself totally. Nothing is held back; no conditions; and no reservations. He makes the total gift of himself and this includes his fertility. That is what the spousal act expresses, and that is what it accomplishes. Eve accepts that gift to her. Then Eve in turn, makes

the total gift of herself to her spouse, Adam. She loves him with every dimension of her being: with her whole heart, her body, her mind, her Will, her total person, and this includes her fertility. When a couple shares in the spousal act, they are renewing their marriage commitment and they are nourishing their love for each other, the love that sustains their marriage and their family. As God designed it, every spousal act is to be open to goodness of love and to the goodness of life.

***Responsible parenthood is also part of marriage.*** This means that parents have as many children as they can responsibly take care of. This usually means, not always but usually, more than two children. God wants couples to give intelligent direction to their families, which includes the spacing of the pregnancies. But He wants them to always use morally good means, means that never turn against one of the intrinsic values of the spousal act.

This is the role of Natural Family Planning (NFP). Natural Family Planning allows a couple to responsibly plan their family without rejecting, or turning against, any of the essential values of their spousal act.

When a couple knows NFP thoroughly, and applies it correctly, it is 99% effective as a means of spacing pregnancies. ***That is very effective!*** NFP requires that the couple abstain from the spousal act during their fertile periods. Periodic abstinence is completely doable. And there are many benefits that come from using NFP. Because of all the values and virtues associated with it, NFP is more than a method of family planning; it is a way of life.

According to Mary Shivanandan, Associate Dean at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., *"couples who use NFP report increased intimacy, greater communication, an improved sexual relationship and a spiritual awakening or deepening of an already active spiritual sense"*.

Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, tells us *the advantages of the self-mastery that NFP requires*: "Discipline imbues love with a deeper human meaning. Although this requires continuous effort, it also helps the spouses become strong in virtue and makes them rich with spiritual goods.

And this virtue fosters the fruits of tranquility and peace in the home and helps in the solving of difficulties of other kinds. It aids spouses in becoming more tender with each other and more attentive to each other. It assists them in dispelling that inordinate self-love that is opposed to true charity. It strengthens in them an awareness of their responsibilities. And finally, it provides parents with a sure and efficacious authority for educating their children (in the virtue of chastity)" (HV #21).

We began this homily by saying that everyone wants a strong marriage and a healthy, happy family. If we follow God's Plan for marriage, spousal love and family, we shall be as happy as this is possible in this fallen world. The last word goes to Fr. Dan McCaffrey, Founder of NFP Outreach says, "NFP is not a panacea. It brings its own crosses and tensions, but through perseverance and continued love, it increases the bond between a man and woman. It demonstrates a love for one another that they are willing to sacrifice and put their will on hold to do the Will of God. That brings its own rewards".

For more information, see the Physicians Section under Professionals for a listing of NFP Medical Professionals. For a listing of NFP teachers in the United States, go to NFP Outreach ([www.nfpoutreach.org](http://www.nfpoutreach.org)).