

My wife Sarah and I got married when we were 21 and 22 years old. While we were dating and especially once we got engaged, we talked about family planning quite a bit. Both of us had some familiarity with Natural Family Planning from our time in high school and our involvement in our youth group. Being married so young, with a couple decades of fertility in front of us, Natural Family Planning was something we took very seriously. We took a basic course in the sympto-thermal method (one of several NFP methods) as part of our marriage prep and we began using that method once we were married. (Sarah also had been charting for well over a year during our engagement.) The method was very effective for us as we planned and eventually added to our family. After our first was born, we made the move to the Marquette Method. Using a sophisticated mini-computer and test strips, we can track Sarah's fertility cycle with scientific accuracy through daily monitoring of LH and Estrogen hormones. From those measurements, we use the method to make informed decisions throughout the month.

We are huge NFP advocates, and we love to share the beauty AND challenges of NFP.



The challenges: 1) The human body is not a machine. Cycles are cyclic but not perfect. Stress, sickness, changes in age, birth of a child, and much more can throw a woman's cycle out of whack. In those times, NFP becomes more challenging. If we are seeking to delay having a child to a later time, these times of uncertain cycles often mean abstaining for prolonged periods of time. 2) NFP works to delay pregnancy by abstaining during the fertile phase (phase 2) of the cycle. Abstaining for 7, 8, 10, 20, or even 50 days each cycle is difficult. All couples using NFP agree -- this is one of the most difficult parts. The 'ordinary' for marriage is total unity, signified most profoundly by the marital act.

The beauty: 1) We get to discern whether God is calling us to be open to another child or not each cycle, and often multiple times per month. This ensures that it's not our decision alone, but that we remain faithful to God's Will which will ultimately make us most fulfilled. 2) It necessitates healthy communication and cooperation between Sarah and me. 3) It allows us to work WITH our bodies, not against them. We get to know Sarah's body and its cycles and we work with them as we plan our family. 4) NFP treats life as a GIFT. Always. No matter what. A child is a blessing. While we certainly are called to plan our family prudently, we never see "having a child" as a bad thing, an inconvenience, or a negative.