

Four Keys to Happy Healthy Marriage

Who could be a better role model for how to love one's spouse than the Ultimate Lover, God? But, just how does God love?

Having meditated on this question, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II discerned four key characteristics of God's love. God's love is always: *free, total, faithful and fruitful*. Each key is also one of the four essential qualities of authentic married love. This brochure will introduce you to these four very important keys for starting out on, or getting back onto, the road to a great marriage. Through the graces that come from the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, together with prayer and regular reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, spouses are given all the strength and power to love each other as Jesus loves His Church: *freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully*. These are the four keys to authentic conjugal love. Through the Sacraments and learning more about the four keys to marital love presented in this brochure, couples can open the door to an ever more satisfying and fulfilling marriage.¹



The first key is Free—For a marriage to be happy and healthy, the spouses must enter the marriage as well as each marriage act freely, giving him/herself to the other and receiving the other without coercion, manipulation, force or compulsion. This key requires self-control and the ability to postpone or sacrifice one's own desires for the good of the beloved. While marital rape is an obvious violation of this key, subtler vices such as impatience, pride, and lust can also interfere with the practice of this key. The virtues of patience, humility and chastity are necessary as spouses must often wait for the other to be ready to love "freely." This key involves realizing that each person may have physical, emotional or work needs that may need to be met, such as the woman's need for a certain amount of time talking and sharing,

or a man's need to relax for a while by "zoning out", before intimacy can happen.^{2,3} For this key to function well, both parties should be free from addictions including addictions to alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, co-dependency, etc.⁴



The second key is Total—Sacramental marriage is a vocation, a calling by God and the primary means by which spouses are sanctified. This commitment to one's spouse should be total, taking first place and coming even before one's commitment to children, one's family of origin, or one's work—which is not to say these are not important.

For marital love to be authentic, all of one's self is given to the beloved; and all is received and accepted from the beloved including one's body, mind, fertility, finances and unknown future health conditions. Hiding or keeping critical information from one's fiancé(e) or spouse violates this key, as do pre-nuptial agreements. Such actions indicate a lack of trust and a decision to share only a part of oneself with one's spouse.

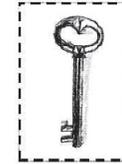
This key does not mean that spouses should lose their identity, meld into each other, give up healthy boundaries, or let themselves be abused. Rather, it means that each spouse brings the gift of his/her total God-given uniqueness and personhood to the marriage.

This key implies realizing and accepting that men and women are different and have different needs, with neither's needs being superior to the other's, just different. For example, men generally have a greater need to be "respected" (i.e. not criticized by their spouse) than to feel "loved," while women have a greater need to feel "loved."^{3,5} Some couples have found it useful to discover each other's love languages, or ways that each feels loved. Some people experience or feel love primarily through touch, others through words such as being told "I love you,"



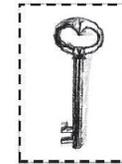
and others by time together. Others may feel loved by being given gifts, or by receiving acts of service, or a certain combination of these means.⁶

Couples who intentionally exclude, damage, sicken or mutilate their reproductive organs, or allow their spouse to do so, violate this key. Their gift of self is not total.



The third key is Faithful—For a marriage to be happy and healthy, spouses must be faithful. This key implies the promise to guard one's heart, eyes, and body, reserving the special gift of sexuality exclusively for the beloved. Flirting with others besides one's spouse, lustfully looking at others, addictively watching soap operas or reading romance novels, looking at pornography, and engaging in extramarital affairs all violate this key.

An important practice for this key is to avoid the near occasions of sin by not putting oneself in any situation with someone of the opposite sex alone, where the potential for temptation might arise, such as lunches, dinners, athletics, other activities, or socially talking on the phone, texting, or chatting online.



The fourth key is Fruitful—Authentic love is always fruitful; it is creative and truly makes more love, and more life. Whenever a married couple engages in the marital embrace, if the act is an authentic expression of love, they are saying to each other and to God (just as they did in their original vows) that they will lovingly accept any children that may result from this union. They remain open to whatever fruit God wants to bring forth from their love. Contraception, sterilization, and abortion prevent a marriage from being fruitful. They are grave sins, and, as a result, bring barrenness, sickness, unhappiness, and death.⁷

While couples must never intentionally render any marital act sterile either before, during or after their union, using natural family planning (NFP)⁸ to avoid pregnancy for serious reasons does not violate this key. A couple may have legitimate reasons

for needing to space their children, and the Church teaches that using the infertile periods in a woman's cycle at such times does not violate this key since every embrace still remains open to the possibility of creating new life. However, NFP can be abused if used without serious reason to avoid a pregnancy, or because a couple selfishly refuses to be generous and open to God's supreme gift of children.

Childbearing is not the only "fruit" that God can bring from a holy marriage. In God's plan, some couples may not be given any children, or as many as they may want. While the good news is that there are cutting-edge scientific, yet morally acceptable, means that can help a large percentage of couples suffering from infertility,⁹ not all will be successful. Couples may be tempted to seek to "have a baby" at any cost including through immoral means such as *in vitro* fertilization or surrogate parenthood. Such means are morally objectionable and sinful because they treat the child as an "object" or "thing" to be created, bought, and sold, the opposite of loving a child into being. Through prayer for humility to accept God's will, and finding other ways to bear fruit (e.g. through adoption, foster care, caring for family and community members), God will abundantly bless with great fruit all couples who follow His Will.

Footnotes

1. See *Humanae Vitae* by Pope Paul VI, *Love and Responsibility* by Karol Wojtyla and *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* by Pope John Paul II for greater development of the ideas presented in this brochure.
2. Nationally acclaimed clinical psychologist Willard F. Harley, Jr., tells husbands to plan to give the gift of at least 20 minutes of intimate talking/sharing time before embracing, to give their wives the time they need to build desire. See *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair Proof Marriage* by Willard F. Harley, Jr.
3. To build intimacy, it is important for couples to learn to make a habit of sharing feelings and appreciations regularly and to learn how to safely deal with conflict. *Intimacy: A 100-Day Guide to Better Relationships*, by highly-respected marriage counselor Douglas Weiss, PhD, is a great place to start.
4. For help in overcoming addictions, it is recommended to make a sacramental Confession and to seek counseling from a priest. To find a Catholic therapist who is faithful to the Church's Magisterial Teachings, go to www.Catholictherapists.com.
5. It is important for wives to learn to show respect for their

husband's efforts, sharing what they appreciate about them, and learning how to deal with conflict in the proper way, without making him feel criticized. To learn more about the important differences between men and women, see *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs* by Emerson Eggerichs.

6. The classic book, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Spouse* by Gary Chapman, has helped countless couples.
7. "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) *The New American Bible, Revised Edition*.
8. To learn more about the various NFP methods and which one may be best for you, go to <http://onemoresoul.com/category/marriage-children/natural-family-planning>
9. Go to www.fertilitycare.com to learn more about the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System and NaProTECHNOLOGY, the effectiveness of which is equal to or greater than *in vitro* fertilization for helping infertile couples achieve pregnancy.

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On a scale of 1 to 10, rate yourself:

How free is your love?

How total is your love?

How faithful is your love?

How fruitful is your love?

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