



A Tale of Two Couples

By Fr. Nicholas Ashmore

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Imagine with me, for a moment, two couples. Both are in the mid-sixties. Both are Catholic. Both live in the Midwest, and both had three children, two boys and a girl. They sent their children to Catholic Schools and participated in the life of their parish. There is one crucial difference, however. One couple used contraception. The other used NFP, Natural Family Planning.

Imagine, then the couple who used contraception having a conversation about the number of children. What would that conversation look like? It might go something like this: “Honey,” says the wife, “why’d we stop at three?” “You know,” says the husband, “it just somewhat happened. We were so tired after Johnny was born, that you got back on the pill, and we never talked about it again.” “Oh. Well, what would have happened had we had another?” “I’m sure we could have handled it somehow. We did with everything else.” “I sometimes wonder,” she says, “what we would have named the other one. Whether it would have been a boy or a girl. Whether, she’d have my hair or yours.” “You did?” “Yeah.” “Why didn’t you tell me you wanted one?” “It never came up.” “I wonder what our family could have looked like.” “Year.” I wonder if God had wanted us to have any more.” “I suppose it’s possible.” “But, we never even asked.” “No, we didn’t.” “Don’t you think that’s sad?” “Yeah. I suppose it is.”

Now, imagine the other side, the couple who used NFP, having that same conversation.” Honey,” the wife says, “why did we stop at three?” “You know why, babe. We always had so much trouble with making ends meet, and then I lost my job for a while, and it just didn’t seem like the right time.” “Oh, yeah, that’s right. Then,” she says, “when we got things together, we started using the fertile periods again, but it didn’t seem to happen.” “Remember praying to God,” he says, “Asking him what he wanted?” “Yeah, we prayed for weeks, didn’t we?” “Eventually, I guess we got our answer. God wanted us to just have three.” “Yeah.” “We were open, but I guess we just weren’t called.” “I’m really glad we gave God the chance.” “Yeah, me too.”

From all outward appearances, these couples look the same. But, ask the crucial question: “Why did we stop at three?” and immediately differences appear. The first couple realize that they never really talked about their fertility. All their decisions about family size just somewhat happened. The wife admitted to always wanting more, but never bringing it up. Moreover, they both realized that they never included God in the decision. Contraception caused them to neglect an important part of their relationship with each other and with God. And, what is the result? After they pass their child bearing years, they are left wondering; What if? And, that question, what if, always hurts.

The second couple, however, used NFP, and this forced them to have tough conversations. It forced them to tell each other about their wishes and desires. At every step of the way, they were able to check in with each other and make sure they were on the same page. Moreover, they gave God a place in the decision. Thus, when they asked that question, Why? They are left with a very different answer. They know that they did the right thing.



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They know they gave God a say. In confidence, they can know that there is no “what if.” If God had wanted, he would have supplied.

This situation speaks to one of the fundamental reasons for the Church’s teaching about contraception. Contraception breaks the communication between the couple. It puts a lie between the two. When a husband and wife come together in the marital act, they say to each other, I give you my entire self, body and soul. But, when they are contracepting, they say, I give you everything except this: my fertility. This I keep for myself. This, often, breaks down communication in the rest of the marriage, too. It introduces suspicion. Is my wife really taking her pill? Is my husband really using that condom effectively? Contraception, then, breaks down what we call the unitive aspect of the marital act, the beautiful way that the two unite as one, body and soul. The body is not fully given, and neither is the soul. Contraception, moreover, attempts to take God out of the occasion. When a child is conceived, the husband supplies the sperm, and the woman supplies the ovum, but God supplies the soul. Every conception, then, requires the creative act of God, who creates on the spot a new soul. Contraception tells God: no. You cannot enter here. You have no part in this decision of mine. Contraception, then disrupts also the procreative aspect of the marital act; it attempts to take God’s creative power out of the equation.

What’s more, contraceptives do harm. The birth control pill is listed as a class 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organization, along with asbestos and formaldehyde. Even beside this fact, it can cause severe side effects, such depression, headaches, irregular bleeding, and even blood clots, heart attack and stroke. Many forms of contraception, too, are abortifacients, when means abortion causing – so that if a child is conceived, it makes the uterine lining a hostile place for the child to implant. In this case, the child dies. Contraception, simply put, can potentially cause great harm to the life of the woman and can even cause the death of newly created, fragile children.

NFP, however, avoids all this. By only coming together in the infertile periods, a couple can avoid pregnancy with no artificial hormone, devices, or surgery and without the danger of abortion. It causes no potential or actual damage to the woman’s body. NFP, when used correctly, is anywhere between 98 and 99.5 percent effective in avoiding pregnancy.

NFP encourages communication between the couple. It makes them a team in their family planning. Moreover, it allows God to have a say. NFP gives God room to act; it never stiff arms Him. Although the methods are very effective, because the couple are only using their bodies as he designed them, and not placing a chemical or physical barrier, it cooperates with his plan, making him part of the conversation. NFP, though it is difficult, though it demands sacrifice, absolutely, improves the couple’s relationship with each other and with their God.

Now, a common question arises when a priest talks about this: What does this have to do with you, Father? And, I’ve heard priests go so far as to say that they don’t have a horse in the race. But, to address this, I’d like to take a look at this picture (show picture of my family). This is a picture of my family. Can you guess which one is me? I am number 7 of 9 children. My family is a non-standard family, his, hers and ours. Before my parents got married, my mom had a tubal ligation. When they got married, they decided to attempt to reverse it. Thank God, it was successful. A year or two later, I came along. If my parents hadn’t chosen to reverse her sterilization, I wouldn’t be here. Now, the Church doesn’t teach that everyone who is sterilized must get it



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reverses, but my parents, talking to God, chose to do so, and because of the conversation they had with each other and with God, they chose a greater more sacrificial path. An, I'm really thankful they did. What does contraception or sterilization have to do with me? Everything. No one here who is breathing is the result of contraception. We are the result of contraception not being used or it not being effective. If you were born, you have a horse in this race.

Think back to the original couple. Which one would you like to be? Would you like to be the couple who peacefully knows that they did God's will? Or, do you want to be the couple who put their bodies souls and even their children's lives at risk, and still wonder, What if? My brothers and sisters, as Moses said to the Israelites before they entered the promised land: I place life and death before you. Choose life. Choose NFP.



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