

Why do we love NFP? Here are 10 reasons.

Even before our wedding, John and I were curious to learn more about natural family planning. What surprised us was that—despite the skepticism I encountered when I casually mentioned it to a few friends—it turned out to be straightforward and effective.

There are sound, absolutely wonderful moral reasons for couples who want to have God at the center of their marriage to practice NFP rather than using artificial methods. But today I'm not talking about morality—even though that's why we chose NFP. Instead, because it is Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, I thought I'd share 10 reasons John and I came to love NFP.

1. It's scientific. This is not the rhythm method that assumes that every woman's cycle is the same. Today's NFP is the symptothermal method, in which couples monitor the woman's signs to know when she is fertile and when she's infertile. It's absolutely fascinating! And all you need are a thermometer and a chart.



2. It's 98 percent effective. The symptothermal method is as effective as most forms of artificial birth control—as long as couples read the woman's signs (easy enough to learn) and abstain during her fertile times (more challenging, but definitely doable). Here is a terrific post by a Catholic author whose books I recently discovered and enjoyed.

3. It has no negative side effects. There is no packaging with a list of warnings. There's no pill to take. Yesterday, I turned on the TV briefly and saw two commercials warning me of the frightening risks of using two different forms of artificial birth control. Blood clots? Stroke? And the jury's still out on the breast cancer risks? Count me out.

4. It can be used either to prevent pregnancy or to help a couple conceive. When you do try to conceive, you will be confident that you know the best times to try because you know your own body better than any doctor does. Couples who have trouble conceiving sometimes start charting to figure out the woman's fertility; couples already practicing NFP have a

jumpstart—never mind that when you’re using contraception that plays with your hormones, you can throw your cycle off and make it harder to figure out your fertility signs later.

5. The responsibility of understanding a woman’s fertility is shared equally by the couple. Instead of the wife having to remember the pill or the husband needing a condom, the couple undertakes this joint endeavor together. The husband can even take an active role in charting his wife’s fertility. Then each of them has a voice in the conversation about whether to abstain until a less-fertile time or leave it to God.

6. Let’s talk organic. Tell people you eat only organic fruits and vegetables, and they nod and smile—and maybe even start trading tips on where to shop for the best cage-free chickens. But tell them you practice natural family planning, and eyebrows go up. Why are we more worried about hormones in our beef than in our bodies?

7. It’s free. We haven’t spent a penny since we bought a book and thermometer and paid for a Couple-to-Couple League class eight years ago. We don’t need a prescription. We don’t even need an HHS mandate to make our insurers pay for it.

8. It adds romance to your marriage. Because there are times you may feel you need to abstain, NFP helps a husband and wife find other ways to express their love for each other. This is part of the joy we hadn’t anticipated, and it really has strengthened our marriage. Especially now that we are parents, it’s become even more important for us to find small ways to show our affection throughout the day—and we’ve already had some practice.



9. It helps a couple realize the beauty of God’s gift of sexuality and marital relations. Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder. NFP can help you appreciate your spouse’s strengths and needs in a new way. As Blessed Mother Teresa said, “In loving, the husband and wife must turn the attention to each other as happens in natural family planning, and not to self, as happens in contraception.” What a treasure God gives us in joining two people as one, and how beautiful when He is part of the most intimate moments of marriage—the moments in which new life can be created.

10. Because Blessed John Paul the Great loved it too: “[Using] the natural methods requires and strengthens the harmony of the married couple, it helps and confirms the

rediscovery of the marvelous gift of parenthood, it involves respect for nature and demands the responsibility of the individuals.” Oh, and he said so much more, but you can read it yourself.

The decision about whether to practice NFP is a decision a couple can only make together through prayer. Granted, for us, we realized fairly early on that we would be using it to try to conceive rather than to avoid conception. But the method, the philosophy, and our shared enthusiasm for it have been important to the foundation of our marriage.



When we were dealing with our infertility, one thing that made the emotional struggle easier was feeling certain that that we had never said “no” to God. We had never interfered with His plan through chemicals or other means. We had always left the door open for Him to entrust us with a child. And eventually He did—twice—though not in the way we thought He would.

Aren’t God’s plans amazing? How blessed we are to be able to embrace them as His—and ours.

Joining Theology Is a Verb and Reconciled to You for Worth Revisit Wednesday on July 22, 2015.