

Sold on NFP? (Introducing a springtime for intimacy.)

By Jessica MH Smith

The selling of the American wedding is a symptom of a culture that's lost its moral compass in a morass of misanthropic marketing. The glossy façade of saccharine sales people would crumble in a minute if it didn't have the infrastructure of a 161 billion dollar industry holding it up.

I don't mean to suggest that everyone in the wedding industry is *out to get you*. There are some really lovely people who do genuinely good work in preparing couples for their wedding day. However, there are a lot more people less concerned about your sacramental marriage and eternal happiness than they are concerned about the number of zeroes in your wedding budget.

Rebecca Mead, in her 2007 investigative commentary on the wedding industry, "One Perfect Day: the Selling of the American Wedding," details how the purveyors of wedding day perfection in many cases set out to deliberately extort brides and bridegrooms, making them think it's positively pedestrian to drop forty grand on one's nuptial bash.

I didn't buy it when I got married, and I still don't buy it. The marital marketing machine does a great disservice to society by encouraging couples to spend countless hours over many months planning a day that passes like the rest, but forgetting to encourage fanciful fiancés to nurture the aspects that will endure, to foster authentic intimacy.

How often have you and your fiancé talked about intimacy? How will you as a married couple engage your spouse's entire person—body, mind heart *and* soul? Have you discussed your family planning intentions? Do you know what the Church teaches about family planning and why?

These are all vital questions, and must not go unasked. Marital unity on these matters is essential, and without it, authenticity in your marriage will be lacking. Seek the truth, pray for guidance and find out the answers to these questions.

We are living a long winter of family planning frigidity. Pregnancy is seen as "accidental," a side effect of our sexuality and something to medicate rather than celebrate. Children are no longer seen as the ultimate gift of the Creator, but a burden, an expense to calculate in the credit/ debit register of rationalized life choices—as if you can measure the gift of an immortal soul!

Are you ready to participate in God's creating power by welcoming a new soul into the world?

If, after discussion, you decide you have a just and serious reason (see Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* section 16) to postpone pregnancy when you get married, I encourage you to learn Natural Family Planning, or NFP. Modern NFP is *not* the Rhythm Method, and it's not a certain type of Natural birth control called Fertility Awareness Method, which relies on barrier contraception during the fertile times in a woman's cycle.

NFP allows couples pinpoint the woman's time of ovulation by recording daily changes in one or more of the following biological markers: her resting body temperature, cervical mucus, cervix shape or hormone levels. All the methods are tried and tested, and some of them even allow a couple to see potential fertility-related wellness issues *just by charting for a short time*, thus allowing a woman to resolve potential health problems. In fact, according to the Paul VI Institute of Reproductive Medicine, 80% of couples who experience compromised fertility can achieve pregnancy with one year of charting combined with medical treatment.

Who knew there was such a springtime in the midst of a cultural winter. Every winter has its end, and the forty years of winter desert walking since Humanae Vitae's countercultural appearance in 1968 is bearing fruit.

Scores of families are discovering the Church's wise teachings on marriage and sexuality and the gift of life giving love in their marriages. They're eyes are opening and they're returning to the sacrament of Reconciliation for mercy and healing. Many reverse their sterilizations and often times they're blessed with more children.

The grown members of generations X and Y are learning John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* in droves, and could not be more jubilant about the beautiful and challenging Church teachings. For these generations, including myself, we're open to life in radical ways. Natural Family Planning, if we discern a need to postpone pregnancy, is as commonplace and hip as the Apple iPhone and hybrid cars. It's not just accepted begrudgingly and followed with resentment—young people love NFP! There's a growing movement of NFPers, believe it or not. And watch out when these organic Jesus freaks find each other! There's an instant bond among people of faith who've learned about the importance of cervical mucus viscosity. I'm serious. If you can talk about cervical mucus (this is especially true in marriage), then you can talk about *anything*.

Contrary to popular belief and contemporary despair, true and lasting love is possible. You are not alone when you hope for it. It is absolutely possible and Natural Family Planning, when practiced with an open mind and heart, is a means for spacing children that respects your morals, your body *and* your marriage.

I'm not peddling false hopes for happiness or superficial substitutes for communication. NFP is the real deal. It encourages communication because it is a shared method (meaning it's not just women bearing the family planning burden) and requires mutual discussion and participation. She observes; he charts. Both use NFP. Are you sold?

I invite you to a journey of radical intimacy and reckless hope. It will cost you not less than everything, but in shedding light on those dark corners of fear in your soul, you will find God's dazzling purpose for you. Give your fertility and everything else to God, and He will bring you into a gorgeous garden of ordinary miracles.