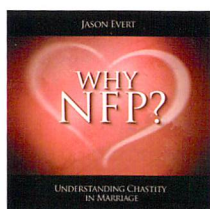


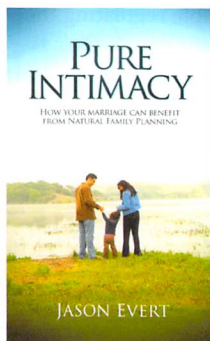
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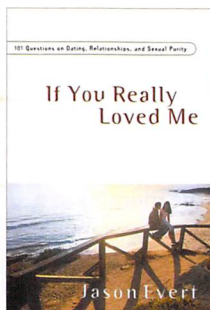
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BIRTH CONTROL

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Many couples wonder why the Church seems “hung up” over the issue of contraception. As a result, some assert that the Church has no business in the bedroom and wonder what a bunch of celibate men could possibly know about enhancing marital bliss. If the Church allows the antiquated “rhythm method” to avoid pregnancy, the argument goes, then why not the Pill?

These are legitimate questions, and they deserve serious consideration—which is the purpose of this tract.

People sometimes struggle to understand the Church’s teaching because our culture has driven a wedge between the two purposes of sex—procreation and union, or babies and bonding. The two are not designed to be separated. Imagine a husband and wife who engaged in intercourse only for the sake of procreation while trying to avoid all emotional attachment. Anyone would be able to recognize how unnatural that would be. Contracepting couples do the opposite: They seek pleasure and emotional bonding while sterilizing the sexual act. Neither action conforms to God’s designs for the gift of sexuality.

When a husband and wife stand at the altar on their wedding day, they promise that their love will be free, total, faithful, and will welcome new life. On their wedding night they speak those same vows

“Let the marriage bed be undefiled.”

—HEBREWS 13:4

and promises with their bodies. Every time they engage in the marital act, their vows are renewed and made flesh. Just as newlyweds cannot imagine using their bodies to contradict their vows of fidelity, they should also keep in mind their promise to remain open to the gift of life.

The Church’s teaching on birth control is nothing new. Although the use of contraception pre-dates Christianity, even the earliest Christians refused to take part in the practice.¹ Even the Protestant Reformers unanimously condemned contraception.² In fact, every

Christian denomination for the first nineteen hundred years of Christianity considered the use of birth control immoral. However, in 1930, one Protestant denomination changed its mind on the matter and virtually all others followed suit. Yet, the Catholic Church remained faithful to the historic Christian position.

What’s wrong with wanting to plan your family?

The Church is not opposed to a couple regulating the number of children in their family. If a couple feels the need to space out the births of their children, the Church understands that legitimate factors may be shaping their decision. Things such as finances, emotional stress, health, and other issues often weigh upon the minds of husbands and wives as they look toward the future of their family.

“It is also to be feared that the man, growing used to the employment of anti-conceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.”

—POPE PAUL VI, HUMANAE VITAE, 17

But valid motives do not determine the morality of a couple’s actions. For example, imagine two women who wanted to have slender figures. The first abstained from fatty foods and exercised self-control. The second ate whatever she wished and then practiced bulimia in order to avoid the consequences of her actions. Although these two women had the same goal, their methods of attaining it were very different.

In much the same way, the married couple who chooses to plan their family is faced with a choice: Do they engage in the act that creates life, then block the life-giving ef-

fects, or do they practice self-control and abstain on fertile days? Through the use of Natural Family Planning, the couple who wishes to avoid pregnancy is able to pinpoint the times of fertility and express their love in nonsexual ways during those times. When used correctly, NFP—not to be confused with the out-dated and ineffective Calendar-Rhythm method—is over ninety-nine percent effective.³ In addition, couples who use it have an astonishingly low divorce rate (under three percent).⁴ They are also free from the harmful side effects of contraception.

What’s healthy about birth control?

Birth control has been a part of human history for thousands of years. Ancient cultures fumigated a woman’s uterus with smoke or used animal skins as barrier methods of contraception. An Egyptian papyrus dating from 1850 B.C. describes a mixture of dough and crocodile dung that was inserted into the woman to prevent pregnancy.⁵ Medieval contraceptives contained lead, mercury, arsenic, and strychnine; even as late as the 1930s it was recommended that women use Lysol and athlete’s foot medicine to prevent pregnancy.⁶

Nowadays, many physicians proclaim how safe and effective birth control has become. However, few women are adequately informed of the risks. For example:

- *The Birth Control Pill* can increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer⁷ and permanently decrease her sex drive.⁸
- *Depo-Provera* thins out a woman’s bones.⁹ As a result, the makers of the drug are being sued for over \$700 million.¹⁰ The drug is so effective in decreasing libido that some states prescribe it as a punishment to be given to rapists and child molesters!¹¹
- *The Patch* has been so dangerous that its makers are facing over four thousand lawsuits related to numerous injuries and deaths.¹²
- *Implanon* warns women using the device that they should call their doctor immediately if they begin coughing up blood or experience complete blindness or unconsciousness.¹³

After reading this, one should wonder, “What is so wrong with a woman’s fertility that it needs to be subdued with synthetic and dangerous sex hormones?” Fertility is a gift, not some kind of disease against which a woman needs a vaccination.



Contraception is not just a health risk for the mother, either. One of the ways that hormonal birth control works is to thin out the inside of a woman’s uterus. Should she become pregnant while on birth control, the baby will be unable to attach to her womb and may be aborted nearly a week after conception.¹⁴ Although many doctors fail to inform their patients about this abortifacient effect, the facts are in the *Physicians’ Desk Reference*, which is found on every doctor’s bookshelf.¹⁵

Even nonchemical forms of birth control have negative consequences. For example, women who use barrier methods of contraception, such as the condom, are deprived of the beneficial effects of over two dozen biological ingredients in semen.¹⁶ These have been shown to elevate a woman’s mood and decrease the likelihood that she will experience pre-eclampsia during childbirth because her immune system is more able to recognize her mate and his offspring.¹⁷

“[Natural Family Planning] is nothing more than self-control out of love for each other.” —MOTHER TERESA

God has designed a man’s body to work with a woman’s body in a magnificent way as they cooperate with him in the creation of new life. There’s no

need to tinker with his perfect design. He has already built into a woman's body the ability to space children without the use of drugs or devices.

The Supreme Gift of Marriage

Our culture has indoctrinated couples with the idea that contraception is a harmless, liberating, and essential element of life. "After all," they say, "you don't want to complicate your life with too many kids. One or two, and you're done." What is needed as an antidote to this impoverished view of the family is not simply for couples to switch to Natural Family Planning instead of contraception. Rather, a culture of life will only come into existence when couples recognize the meaning of their sexuality and choose to welcome children with the attitude of Christ himself. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."¹⁸ For this reason—and for many others—the Church proclaims children to be the "supreme gift of marriage."¹⁹



What greater gift can you give than the gift of life? In exchange for your generosity, you will discover that your children save you from yourself, will give you unimaginable joy, and will teach you to love.

The Church's teaching on birth control is not easy to accept and practice. At times it can be a very demanding sacrifice.

But, by taking up the cross and following Christ, your fidelity to him will be rewarded not only in this life, but in the life to come. Do not be afraid to open your heart to God's original plan for married love. In the words of John Paul II, "The Church and the world today more than ever need married couples and families who generously let themselves be schooled by Christ."²⁰

For more information, visit www.chastity.com. This online resource offers a wealth of information on how to practice the virtue of purity. On the site, you can read answers to your specific questions, watch videos, download inspirational audio files, browse a library of articles, shop online, and more.

(Endnotes)

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