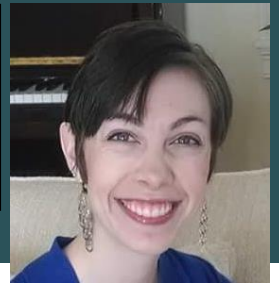


NFP And ME

Issue 4, Winter 2017

This newsletter is distributed free for users of the Boston Cross-Check Method of Natural Family Planning and others interested in general topics pertaining to NFP. If you would like to learn this method, or have further questions, please contact me! summamommaop@gmail.com



NFP TECH UPDATES

If you're anything like me, my workmates are obsessed with Activity Tracker bands. Some of them sport the Fitbit, others have the Samsung Gear—there are a lot of options out there. Yet I was still surprised to find a new tracker band that no one is talking about:

AVA! <https://www.avawomen.com/>

Unlike some other activity bands which perform best when worn all day, AVA only needs to be worn at night. Developers claim that it can track “nine physiological parameters” to predict and detect ovulation. Perhaps we're unsurprised to find that one of the parameters is temperature (convenient!), though it's not testing oral temperature so you might notice a downward shift in your base line. The rest of the parameters are not usually ones that we measure for our own charting (e.g., bioimpedance), but Swiss researches claim that these markers are linked to production of various hormones throughout the cycle.

The tracker syncs to your iPhone—Android users like myself can just read it and weep. Development of the Android App seems to be in the works, but no word on when it is coming. Other impediments to using this tracker are especially long or short cycles (should fall between 24-35 days). It does not work well for women who have PCOS or other similar hormonal conditions, but they claim it can still be effective for women with mild-moderate endometriosis.

So what does this mean for our current method(s) of NFP? In a system like this, there are two degrees of separation between you and the data. The first degree is the “unknown” of how this algorithm functions and our complete inability to overwrite their interpretation. A charting app or charting system should never replace training in a certified method of NFP. Some charting

apps want to impose their own calculations on your temp/mucus charts, but since we know how to calculate the fertile window based on these things, we can override or overlook those auto-features and do it the way we were trained. But I wasn't trained on how to chart and interpret bioimpedance. So I have to trust the tracker and app to do it correctly.

The second degree of separation is the simple fact that the tracker is NOT measuring hormones. To be fair, it measures physiological markers that indicate certain hormone levels, but what are the chances you could get false reads? Does something other than fertility hormones affect your skin response to small electrical voltages, like getting sick might affect our temperature? These things might be important to know for couples trying to postpone pregnancy. Or the sheer number of factors (nine) that the algorithm takes into account might make it the most effective thing on the market. I don't know! But I hope there is a great NFP researcher working on that right now.

Ava currently sells for \$199 on their website.



BOSTON CROSS-CHECK RULE REMINDER:

If you are using the monitor to calculate start and end of fertility, remember that for the **start** of fertility, you count 7 days backwards from the earliest **FIRST** monitor peak. For **end** of fertility, you begin your count of four from the **SECOND** monitor peak day.

Theology Corner- NFP and Discernment

In the summer newsletter, I wrote a reflection on how the practice of NFP allows us to hone different virtues. Included in that list was Prudence, which involves right judgment, or “discernment” of what is the right thing to do. Prudence is one of the four Cardinal Virtues of Classical Antiquity. As Christians, we also recognize three Theological Virtues: faith, hope and charity/love (*see* 1 Cor 13:13).

While the four Cardinal Virtues can be known, practiced and acquired through human action, the Theological Virtues come from and lead to the Triune God. They still require human action in order to be nourished and grow, but they “are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being.” (CCC #1813)

For those infused with these virtues, the *discernment* which accompanies

Prudence must necessarily be informed by the counsel of the Holy Spirit, one of the gifts which is strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Yet discernment is an often misunderstood and under-developed art in our modern world. Abundant distractions, a lack of silence in our daily lives, hyper-focus on the future and the myth of total autonomy all pervade our experience of the Western World today. Each of these is a hindrance to true discernment, but they can be recognized fairly easily and with much effort, can be countered through our own good actions.

What is far more difficult and poisonous to our personal discernment are attitudes within the Christian community which distort *discernment* into a sort of Divine Mind-Reading game devised by a God who lays out a multitude of possible paths and expects us to Pick the Right One... Or Else. Sometimes, discerning the will of God can be seen as a constant stream of crippling choices. I’ve heard friends who have become so focused on Doing the Will of God at All Times that


they worry even the slightest choice they make will lead to a huge diversion from God’s Plan. They see it as a narrow road, laid out specifically for them, which must be walked like a tightrope for their entire lives if they are to succeed in their journey towards Heaven. Perhaps this is not an explicit belief of theirs, but it manifests when they are asked to make a decision, bringing anxiety and scrupulosity

We who use NFP are acutely tuned to the fact that discernment is actually an art and practice required for your entire Christian life. It is not a one-time event associated only with capital-v Vocation questions, but neither is it something that must cripple us into thinking that every little decision must be scrutinized. As with many things, the reality falls somewhere in the

middle. There are a lot of wonderful books, guides and programs available which can teach us about discernment techniques, but so much of it can be pulled straight from the practice of NFP,

which requires prudence and counsel and a huge dollop of faith to keep us going. So for our mutual benefit, I would like to present a few ways in which Natural Family Planning helps us understand and practice the Christian Art of Discernment.

- 1) **Communication is Key.** When we are seeking to do God’s will, we should probably spend a lot of time getting to know Him and asking His opinion first. This is called “prayer.” Successful practice of NFP also requires strong communication between spouses so they can know what each person thinks and feels. By honestly and openly seeking to know the will of our spouse, we also practice the skills necessary for honest and open conversation with God. If we take it one step further and pray together as spouses, we strengthen lines of communication with each other and God at the same time.



“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “and they are really tricky and particular, so you better not screw it up!”
Jer 29:11, BS Version

- 2) **The Holy Spirit often speaks through other people.** Good communication also requires and hones the Art of Listening. When we take the time to listen to the prayerful considerations of our spouse, we can become more attuned to the way the Holy Spirit speaks to us through other people. Sometimes this awareness reveals things about ourselves which were previously hidden: our own motivations, desires and short-comings can be laid bare before us as we discern God's will together. But sometimes this awareness reveals desires that we have not yet expressed even to ourselves.
- 3) **Following God's Will requires an act of our will.** We may think that some people are just naturally clued-in to what God wants. Holiness is seen as a special quality reserved for a few. While it is true that some people seem to naturally have more faith, or hope or love than others, every one of us needs to make the conscious choice to follow God. Following God's will is not purely based on our feeling of "what seems right." It requires a humble act of submission of our own will, and then the fortitude and endurance to carry out His will over and against our own, if necessary. NFP, in particular, is an aspect of Church Teaching that may make total sense to some people, but is completely counter-intuitive to others. For the latter group, NFP runs against our own feelings and teaches us how to submit our will. Hopefully, with this conscious submission, the habitual grace which is received through doing good works will shape our will to be more conformed to God's will over time, making the practice of NFP and the art of discernment easier.
- 4) **We are not usually choosing between good and evil, but competing goods which can all be legitimate options.** NFP teaches us that in mutual discernment, it is possible for prayerful people of good will who love each other and God a lot to disagree. One spouse may feel very strongly that now is the right time to have a child and they present many good reasons for believing that. The other spouse may be hesitant and think that postponing pregnancy is the better decision. At this time, we learn how to respectfully cooperate in following God's will. We see that there could be multiple good options, and come to an agreement about a mutual course of action. Sometimes this requires a submission of one spouse to the other, but this should always be done out of mutual respect, not coercion.
- 5) **You don't have to think ten steps down the line.** God may be asking us to make big decisions, but He's not asking us to try and figure out exactly how all of these decisions will impact the rest of our lives. The cyclical and frequent nature of discernment associated with NFP helps us focus on one decision at a time, asking only the question: "What does God want us to do *now*?" It seems at times that our society wants us to have our family planned even before we get married. I've gotten plenty of questions from seemingly well-intentioned cashiers wondering how many kids I'm going to have, or if I'm done yet. I'm grateful to say that I don't know! I may have a vision for how I would like things to go with our family, but NFP prevents me from clinging too tightly to that vision.



Now, of course, the caveat must be mentioned that absolutely none of this is easy all the time. There is a reason that so much ink has been spilled on the topic of “Discernment.” For each person, the art is ever-new and the experiences completely unrepeatable, because discernment is all about your personal relationship with God and your unique role in the Church. Sometimes, God gives you some clear answers. Sometimes, for whatever reason, He decides not to give you that much input.

In the latter case, I pass along some great advice I got recently from a friend:

If you aren’t sure what to do, make a choice from any number of good options you perceive. Offer it up to God and say, “Lord, if this is your will for me, may it flourish! If it is not, may I discover your will through following this path I have chosen.”

*“KEEP THOU MY FEET; I DO
NOT ASK TO SEE/ THE DISTANT
SCENE—ONE STEP ENOUGH
FOR ME.”*

*LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT
NEWMAN, 1833*

NFP MISCELLANY

- **Catholic Medical Center** just opened the Women’s Wellness and Fertility Center in Manchester, NH. If you’ve been looking for the ever-elusive NaPro professional in New England, this center could be the answer to a lot of prayers! I hope they do well and do lots of good. <https://www.catholicmedicalcenter.org/womens-wellness/>
- Lent is coming and with it, the call to give alms. If you have an interest in supporting women’s health, check out **MaterCare International** (<http://matercare.org/>). They offer comprehensive pregnancy care, with an emphasis on education of local populations. I will never forget the time I got to speak to a MaterCare OBGYN, who explained that in many parts of Africa, it is not a problem with access to medical care immediately post-partum that puts women at risk—it is superstition and fear of touching a woman who is “unclean.” Through proper education and empowerment of local staff, MaterCare has saved and improved the quality of countless lives—all while being unabashedly Catholic in mission and services.
- A few months ago, I started an initiative to form an NFP Ambassador Network, to get the message of NFP out of the comboxes and into real life conversations. We have a (very admittedly inactive) Facebook page where we can post NFP news, sample bulletin announcements, and offer one another general support. If you’d like to join the group, or if you have ideas about how to make the group more active, let me know! In the meantime, check out <http://www.nfpoutreach.org/8>, which is a great Q&A resource for those of us who want to learn more about NFP in general, and specifically ways to help spread the word!