

Be Fruitful and Multiply

by Anne Elliott

As early as 1855, researchers began to document changes that occur each month in a woman's body. During the next 75 years, clues to a woman's fertility began to open doors to understanding how hormones work in her body. Scientists discovered that hormone levels are much more stable and predictable than they originally thought. They also discovered that when a woman experienced patterns that were *not* stable, observable symptoms that she noticed in everyday life could provide valuable clues as to what was wrong. In other words, a whole new world of hormone understanding opened up, paving the way for scientists to discover cures and treatments of problems that used to simply be thought to be "in her head."¹

Despite these observations by multitudes of scientists, the 1900s brought with it a renewed interest in controlling fertility and preventing pregnancy. Many methods of birth control were invented that covered up signs of fertility. The knowledge of how a woman's hormones work wasn't passed on to the general population until the last 30 years or less.

Yet in the beginning, God's first words to mankind contained within them an excellent tool that men and women can use to determine the state of their overall health.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it..."²

God gave them a *blessing*, the blessing of being fruitful and multiplying on the earth. Fertility is defined as "the property of producing abundantly and sustaining vigorous and luxuriant growth."³ The ability to bear children has been seen as a blessing by both God-fearing and pagan cultures alike since the beginning of time. Note the attitude that is seen toward fertility in these Bible verses:

Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God

¹ Retrieved May 04, 2007, from Fertility Friend website: <http://www.fertilityfriend.com/Faqs/A-brief-history-of-fertility-charting.html>

² Genesis 1:27-28

³ fertility. (n.d.). *WordNet*® 3.0. Retrieved May 04, 2007, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/fertility>

shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.⁴

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.⁵

And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:⁶

And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.⁷

As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception... Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their wickedness is

⁴ Deuteronomy 7:12-15

⁵ Deuteronomy 28:1-6

⁶ Deuteronomy 30:5, 9

⁷ Jeremiah 30:19

in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes are revolvers. Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even the beloved fruit of their womb.⁸

There is no command against birth control in Scripture, but for those who are willing to look, it isn't hard to see what God's original intention was. God intends to bless us by increasing us. Proverbs states, "In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want [or lack] of people is the destruction of the prince."⁹

Better than physical or economic blessings is the fact that many godly offspring bring blessing to God Himself by increasing the number of His ambassadors throughout the world. The Bible says that one of the primary reasons for a man to remain faithful to his wife is that "she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? ...And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed."¹⁰

Ephesians 5:31-32 compares Christ's relationship to the Church with the relationship of a man to his wife. Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."¹¹ Bearing fruit is considered the *norm* in God's Word, whether the context is referring to a garden or a marriage. Bearing no fruit is always seen as a cause for concern.

Before we see how fertility can be an important marker of our overall health, let's take a look at some of the dangers of purposely impairing our fertility.

All methods of birth control work by either preventing the implantation of a fertilized egg in the uterus of a woman, by changing the hormones of a woman's body to prevent her from being fertile, by preventing a man's sperm from ever reaching an egg in a woman's body, or by simply preventing the union of a man and woman during times of the month when she is fertile.

The Bible teaches in Genesis that men and women were made in the image and likeness of God.¹² The Bible also teaches that the obvious "fruit" of the union of a man and woman is the creation of a new life, a new being that is also made in the image and

⁸ Hosea 9:11, 14-16

⁹ Proverbs 14:28

¹⁰ Malachi 2:14-15

¹¹ John 15:1-2

¹² Genesis 1:26-27

likeness of God.¹³ For this reason, God has taught us to have respect for human life. We understand that when a man and a woman become “one,” the amazing creative result is immediately also a human being who is made in the image and likeness of God.

However, our culture would prefer to simply redefine life. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists published a statement in 1965 that defined life as beginning, not the moment that a man’s sperm unites with a woman’s egg (“fertilization”), but 8 to 10 days later, when that fertilized egg finally implants within the lining of its mother’s uterus. By changing this simple definition of when conception actually occurs, a wide possibility of birth control options opened up to women everywhere, without any further thought of moral or health implications.

Yet when we ignore God’s original design for His creation, we must suffer the consequences. The IUD is a popular method of birth control that works by preventing implantation, not true fertilization. In other words, it does not allow a new life to survive in the dangerous environment created by the IUD in the womb. Its common side effects include...

Hormonal methods of birth control, including the popular birth control pill, are the most common of all forms of birth control, used by millions of women in the United States each year. Ideally, they are intended to prevent a woman from ever releasing an egg (“ovulation”) in the first place, yet they also work to prevent implantation of a fertilized egg by making the lining of the uterus inhospitable to the tiny life. These hormonal methods of birth control are fraught with danger because they try to fool the body into thinking it is not fertile. These side effects include abdominal pain, chest pain, headaches, eye pain, nausea, breast tenderness, weight gain, and increased risk of some types of cancer.¹⁴

Barrier methods of birth control prevent a man’s sperm from ever reaching a woman’s egg in the first place. These include condoms and cervical caps. Although morally these are much more acceptable, they still show disregard for the blessing of fertility that God gave us. Most side effects are related to the “spermicides” that are often added to these products. Studies have also shown that if a father’s semen is not allowed to enter a mother’s body, to prepare it for a new life, her body may not recognize her fertilized baby later and may attack the child as a foreign object.

¹³ see Genesis 4:1, 25

¹⁴ http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/sexual_health/ssc/bcps.htm

“Natural Family Planning” (NFP) is a type of birth control that has gained great popularity in evangelical circles because it has no harmful side effects and is morally acceptable. However, for NFP to work as birth control, a couple is required to abstain from sexual relations (or use an alternate method of birth control) for extended periods of time each month – basically, any time that she might be fertile. However, believers must carefully check God’s Word to see if abstinence for the purpose of avoiding pregnancy is what God intended.

The Law of Moses lists one time that abstinence was required, and that was during a woman’s monthly menstrual cycle or at any time when she was bleeding because of hormonal or other health disorders. Whenever a woman had “an issue of blood,” she was to remain unclean (and abstain from relations with her husband) for seven days.¹⁵ Issues of blood that were unrelated to her monthly menstrual cycle required that she remain unclean for an additional seven days past the time when they stopped, mostly likely to prevent her from conceiving at a time when she was not healthy enough to carry a child.¹⁶ The amazing thing is that when abstinence during a woman’s period is practiced, a man’s fertility is increased and they come together again at the time of month when a woman is also most fertile. God’s ordinances were for the protection of the couple and *also* intended to increase the number of children that would be conceived by that healthy couple.

The New Testament lists only one additional reason for abstinence within marriage, and that is for prayer and fasting.

...To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.¹⁷

¹⁵ Leviticus 15:19-24; 18:19

¹⁶ Leviticus 15:25-31

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:2-5

Sickness, fatigue, headaches, and irritability are all common reasons given why couples practice abstinence. Yet the Bible teaches that we are to “treat” sickness first by going to the Great Physician, with prayer and fasting and by asking Him to heal us.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.¹⁸

The Psalmist wrote:

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them...¹⁹

Children are a heritage, a gift from God. The fruit of the womb is a reward from God, a sign of His blessing on our lives. We need to change our mindsets to see these blessings as a source of happiness and joy in our lives.

Heman was a prophet during King David’s lifetime. You may not have ever heard of him before, but God thought highly enough of his spiritual service that He rewarded him with fourteen sons and three daughters.²⁰ If you had seventeen children, would you consider that a blessing?

Another man who served God during David’s reign was Obedom, a man who had eight sons “for God blessed him.”²¹

God is the author of all life. As the giver of life, He knows what is best for us. He wants only to bless us and to give us abundant life.²²

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all

¹⁸ James 5:14-16. See also Psalm 35:13, Matthew 17:15-21, Mark 9:20-29.

¹⁹ Psalm 127:3-5

²⁰ 1 Chronicles 25:5

²¹ 1 Chronicles 26:4-5

²² John 10:10

things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.²³

Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?²⁴

As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.²⁵

Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me...²⁶

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things...²⁷

Many times we are afraid that bearing seventeen children, as Hemen's wife did, would actually cost us our health. Throughout our online health classes, I'll be discussing many other ways in which God designed His creation to sustain our health, and it is important that we remember *all* of God's design for optimum health. However, it seems to me that we can trust God's wise design for fertility and truly begin to see the ability to conceive children as a first sign of health.

We have often been taught, rather, that the more children we have, the more we are seriously risking our health and even our lives. We are advised to use medical knowledge "appropriately," meaning to control our hormone levels and to prevent conception of a child at all costs. However, notice God's opinion of knowledge when it goes against His design:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.²⁸

²³ Colossians 1:16-17

²⁴ Job 31:15

²⁵ Ecclesiastes 11:5

²⁶ Isaiah 8:18a

²⁷ Isaiah 44:24a

²⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.²⁹

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.³⁰

Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.³¹

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ...Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men... But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty....³²

When a man and his wife understand fertility and how God designed their bodies, numerous health benefits result. First of all, they understand what “normal” is and are therefore prepared to notice when something departs from the norm.

For a man, it is normal for him to desire to be “one”³³ with his wife every 24-48 hours. It is normal for him to have steady hormones and a brightly burning passion and care for his wife. It is normal for him to desire to protect and provide for his wife and children as a result of the loving process of becoming one. Any departure from these norms should cause him to try to find out what is wrong, whether it be in his health or in any part of their relationship.

For a woman, it is normal for her hormone levels to fluctuate over a 28-30 day period that closely approximates the cycles of the moon. More than twelve hormones have been identified as playing a role in this cycle, but four hormones especially play a key role.

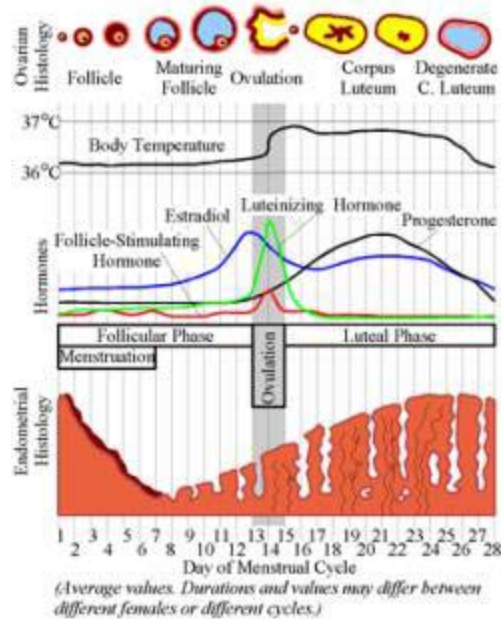
²⁹ Proverbs 14:12

³⁰ Proverbs 3:5

³¹ Isaiah 29:14

³² 1 Corinthians 1:20, 25, 27

³³ See Genesis 2:24 and 4:1 for the biblical terminology used.



The first half of the cycle is called the “follicular phase.” I can easily remember this because “follicular” starts with F, for the “first” phase. This phase gets its name from one of the hormones that is working very hard: follicle stimulating hormone, commonly known as FSH. Its purpose is to prepare one of a woman’s ovaries (they generally alternate months) to release an egg from its follicle. If FSH is not functioning properly, she cannot ovulate. FSH works quietly, without any noticeable symptoms for the woman, but if she encounters stress or sickness during the first two weeks of her cycle, FSH will halt any release of a new egg. It seems that God has designed her body to only be fertile when she has the physical strength to sustain a new life.

Another hormone that plays a major role in the follicular phase is B-estradiol, which is in the estrogen class of hormones. The purpose of this estrogen is to build up a healthy supply of cervical mucous. This cervical mucous was first studied in the late 1800s, and it was noticed that the most fertile type of mucous had the consistency of egg whites. When a man and his wife become one sexually, a man’s sperm “rides” on this slippery mucous and can reach the woman’s egg more successfully. If a woman notices any cervical discharge that is white, creamy, or even clear, approaching the consistency of egg whites, she will then know that she is about to release an egg and is very fertile indeed.

It is also interesting to note that the key hormones of this first, follicular phase increase a woman’s desire for her husband, making their union more pleasurable and making the conception of a baby more likely.

It is also very amazing that women who sleep in darkness except for light from the moon will most likely ovulate during the full moon. The reason for this is that melatonin, the hormone we discussed previously that is released by the pineal gland, will be slightly suppressed from the light given by a full moon. This suppression of melatonin increases her follicular-phase hormone levels and raises her chances of fertility.

A woman can simply take note of the quantity of any cervical mucous she experiences, plus the depth of desire she feels toward her husband, during the first part of her cycle to determine if her body is preparing to ovulate. If she lacks sexual desire, if she is not producing ample cervical mucous of an egg-white quality, or if her days are filled with extraordinary or prolonged stress, she should be concerned about the health of her body as a whole.

In the meantime, the estrogens a woman is producing are also working on the endometrial lining of her uterus, thickening it to a depth of 3-4 millimeters and turning it into a warm and inviting place for a new life to implant.

Luteinizing hormone (LH) has been quietly working in the background as well, and after an egg is released from a follicle in a woman's ovary, LH orchestrates the production of an amazing formation of cells known as the corpus luteum. The corpus luteum begins to secrete large amounts of a fourth hormone, progesterone.

Progesterone has been called the "pro-gestation" hormone, or the hormone that promotes life. One of progesterone's jobs is to increase a woman's body temperature so that any new baby will be kept warm inside her womb. Within hours of the release of an egg from her ovary, progesterone's affect on her body temperature can be noticed, even if she does not conceive. Many women check their body temperature each morning, before they rise from bed or in any other way cause their temperature to elevate artificially. They simply reach over to their bedside tables, pop a thermometer into their mouths, and quietly doze while it records their temperature. The morning after ovulation, progesterone will have caused a temperature elevation of at least four-tenths of a degree above what it averaged during the follicular phase.

Progesterone will remain active, continuing to keep her body warmer, for a very consistent period of 12-16 days in a non-pregnant woman. If a woman tracks her morning body temperature (also known as a basal body temperature) consistently, during each day of her menstrual cycle, she will be able to easily see if she is producing adequate amounts of progesterone to sustain a new life. If she happens to notice a cycle

in which her temperatures remain elevated for an extended number of days, usually longer than 18, she will also know that she is pregnant.³⁴

By observing symptoms, emotions, and signs such as body temperature, a man and woman can know what a normal body does and can be alerted at the first sign of any deviation from normal. By being aware of the cycles of the moon, she can see if her body is following the “times and seasons” ordained by God at creation.³⁵ She can educate herself as to which hormones are involved in her monthly cycle and what the signs of proper levels of those hormones are. She can be aware of cervical mucous and of her body temperature to be sure her hormone levels are adequate to conceive a child. Finally, she can carefully keep charts and diaries so that if anything departs from “normal,” she will have a record that will help her healthcare providers know what is wrong.

David wrote, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”³⁶ God’s design for our bodies is wiser than our understanding, and his blessing is always for our good. We can trust Him and His plan, knowing that it will bring us only delight.

³⁴ For a more detailed explanation of her fertility signals, hormones, and methods to increase her chances of conceiving, she should study the book *Taking Charge of Your Fertility: The Definitive Guide to Natural Birth Control and Pregnancy Achievement*, by Toni Weschler.

³⁵ Genesis 1:14-19

³⁶ Psalm 34:8