

Planning your family / Wisdom

Storyteller: In the ancestors' time, it was good to have many children. Maybe a lion might eat one. Two or three might die in a war with the next tribe, and another two or three might die of diseases. Great grandmother might have had 12 children and only 2 of them survived to look after her when she was old.

Tammy: Hello my friend. I'm Tammy and this is Women of Hope. How are you today?

Carol: Hello! Do you have children? I have two, but my mother had six. What do you think is a good number of children to have? Or do you just think you can't control how many babies you have? We're going to talk about this topic today. But first, let's listen to this story.

Storyteller: Linda was a strong, healthy woman. She had one child, Susanna, and now she was expecting another one, but she was beginning to wonder how many babies she and her husband John should have. She talked with him about it.

John was thoughtful. "Well, we want to take good care of our children. We need to think about how we will provide clothes and food for them. And I would like my children to have a good education; that might cost a lot of money. I'm glad you're thinking about this, Linda," he said. We both need to talk about it because it takes a lot of work for you to care for children. I know you love being a mother, but I love you and I want you to be happy and healthy as well."

Later that morning, Linda set off for the market with her friend Diana. Their neighbor Jasmine was sweeping in front of her house. She was getting married in a few weeks. "How are you, Linda? ...Susanna will have a little brother or sister soon, eh?" she

asked, patting Linda's large stomach."

"Yes," answered Linda, "in two weeks, and I'm tired. It's exhausting chasing a small child around when you have a stomach like this! (gently laughing)"

The three friends sat down in the cool shade as Linda continued, "And how about you Jasmine? Are you planning to have children after you marry?"

Jasmine smiled. "Well!" she said, "we both have teaching jobs at the same school in the hills, so for the first year, we'll save our wages, then we hope to build a small house and start a good garden. Mariko and I are still talking about the right time to have our first baby. It may not be right away!"

Linda listened, then she said, "My John and I are thinking about how many children we should have. We think we could take better care of two than we could if we had four or six! And I would like to help John in the hardware shop. I really want to sing in the church choir and help in some of the community programs too. I think it's very important to *plan* your family. I'm glad we're talking about it. And it's good that you newlyweds are thinking ahead!"

"I do want children!" said Jasmine. "But at the right time! We really want to make our relationship strong first. We want to get experience in our work. We're young and there's always time later to have children, when we can afford to look after them well. We've decided to use family planning medicine for the first year while we both teach at the school. Then we'll stop using the family planning when we're ready for me to get pregnant. That's our plan, anyway."

Diana had been quiet, listening to her friends as they talked. Diana already had four children and she felt she couldn't manage with any more. And she would never

consider having an abortion because she believed every life is sacred. She felt a little embarrassed, but she asked her friends about it. Jasmine told her about some of the family planning methods, then she said, “But I think that you and Freddie need to visit the health center and talk with the medical staff about it. They can answer your questions and suggest the best methods for you.”

Diana decided: “When my husband gets home, I’ll tell him everything we’ve talked about today! I know he’s been worried about how we’re going to cope. Oh Jasmine, I’m so glad we saw you today!”

Jasmine laughed. “Yes, it’s good to think ahead and plan! Hey, let’s go to the verandah and have a cool drink. And I’ll show you my wedding dress!”

Diana’s husband was not so sure about planning the family - some of his friends said it would make him less of a man. But he agreed to go with Diana to the health center and asked the staff nurse for information.

The nurse explained, “You get pregnant when a tiny egg in your body meets a sperm from your husband’s body, and together they grow into a baby. So you have to prevent the egg and the sperm from meeting.” She turned to Diana’s husband. “Let’s think about what a husband can do. You can have a very small operation at the health center. It stops the sperm getting out. You will still have the fluid, and all your functions and feelings as a husband will be normal, except that there are no sperm in the fluid, so your wife will not become pregnant.”

He nodded that he understood. The nurse went on: “The operation is very small and you can go home right afterwards. Or you can just use a condom to catch all the sperm when they come out. You’ll have to buy condoms, and then remember to use them every time. Occasionally condoms fail, so the little operation might be better for you, if you’re really sure you’re ready to stop having children. You’ll find your wife is more relaxed if she’s not worried about getting pregnant.”

The nurse turned to Diana, and said, “But there are also several things that the wife can do instead. You can stop the sperm by using a female condom; but that’s also a nuisance, too, if you need them for the next 15 or 20 years...until you’re not able to have children any more. You can take special notice of your temperature or the stickiness of your fluids during the month. We can tell you how to do that. That’s not completely reliable, and you can’t have marriage relations on the days of the month when you’re able to get pregnant.”

The nurse showed Diana some pills and explained: “These contain hormones, similar to the ones your body makes naturally. The pills stop your body from producing any eggs. You need to take a pill every evening. As long as you always remember to take that pill at the same time each day, you will not get pregnant. Or you can have an injection of the same medicine once every three months.”

The nurse showed Diana and her husband a drawing of a woman’s inside parts where a baby grows. She pointed to the part called the uterus and explained, “If you decide that you *never* want any more children, you can have a small operation at the health center. The medical worker cuts off the tubes where the eggs come down into the uterus. It’s quick, and it’s permanent...you can never become pregnant again. So you need to be sure.”

Diana’s husband finally said, “Thank you so much for all this information. We’ll need to talk about this together.”

Two weeks later, Diana had the woman’s operation, rested at the health center for a while and went home with just a little cut on her abdomen. She felt well, and pleased that they had made a good decision for their family.

Three days later Diana heard that Linda had a baby boy. She called to the house next

door, “Jasmine! Jasmine! Linda has had her baby! It’s a boy! Let’s go and visit her!”

Linda was happy to see them. She showed them her healthy, beautiful boy.

“His name will be Samuel,” said Linda. “And I’m going to take the pill for a while till we decide whether we want to have another baby.”

Jasmine added, “Of course we only want something that’s temporary. I’ll have an injection every three months, and then when we want to have our first baby, we’ll just stop the injections. And if God wants us to have a baby, we’ll have one when it’s a good time for our family.’

Tammy: On Women of Hope today, we are talking about planning your family. Do you think it’s good to plan your family like that?

Carol: It’s good to be able to plan, but we can’t always have complete control. Even some methods are not 100% guaranteed and some don’t suit everyone.

Tammy: These days we have more information to make wise choices. It’s a really big decision to bring a new person into the world, isn’t it? What would you need to think about?

Carol: There are lots of questions to ask. Like do you both *want* to have children? You should talk about that *before* you get married... You would need to think about whether both parents are healthy. And do you have work - and enough money to provide food and health care for the children. And can you give them an education? Who will look after the baby if the mother needs to work or study? Do you have family around to help?

Tammy: Yes ...and also, is your marriage strong? It’s foolish to have a baby to try to fix

an unhappy marriage! That seldom works! You may need to take time to build up your relationship first, so the baby has a happy home.

Carol: You know, I think it was a really good thing that Linda, Diana and Jasmine were each talking with their husbands about having a family. Your marriage is very important and it takes hard work to keep it strong and happy. And wasn't it good that their husbands listened and considered their wives' opinions? In some places men think that they must have many sons to be real men, and sometimes their wives suffer having so many babies.

I think we can find some help in God's word, the Bible that speaks about this thing. It says: 'Be considerate to your wives. Honor them; respect them, as they might not be as strong as you are. But you share together in the new life of God's grace, so treat your wives as equals so nothing gets in the way of your prayers.' (1 Peter 3:7) At the same time, he wrote telling women to be respectful and give themselves to serve their husbands.

Doesn't that give us a good picture of how our marriages should be? And if we keep talking to each other with love, and thinking about the things that each other needs, we'll find the way we should go.

We're together on Women of Hope...and we've been talking about planning our family. It's important for a husband and wife to talk together and share how they both feel about things before making any big decision.

Tammy: Don't we need to be *wise* in our choices? Many people make important decisions just by the way that they *feel*. That may work sometimes. But often we have to make a big decision in life and we need to use our brains as well as our feelings. We need to think carefully about the decision.

Carol: That's so true. God gives us brains to make good decisions about what we do and when we do it. He gives us talents and skills, as well. So we need to think carefully about how much time it takes to care for a family and how much we can use our talents and skills to work and help others in our community.

Tammy: There are some words in the Bible that have really helped me. They were written by James, one of the leaders of the first Christians. He wrote, 'When you don't know what to do, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. Ask him to show you what is wise, and he will give you wisdom.' (James 1:5)

James wasn't talking just about having children. It's a much bigger promise than that. It tells us that if we *really want* God to make us wise, he will. God's wisdom is more than being smart or educated. It's more about how we live our lives, and whether we value the same things God values. Let's listen to what James wrote to his friends, a bit later in his book.

Carol: James wrote: "Do you want people to think you are wise? Here's what to do: *live well, live wisely, live humbly.* It's the way you *live*, not the way you *talk*, that counts. Selfish ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to *sound wise* isn't wisdom. It's just the bad side of human nature, coming from the devil, not the spiritual nature coming from God. Whenever you're trying to look better than others, or get more than others, things go wrong and soon everyone is fighting.

Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and tries to live in peace. It thinks about others, it's ready to give way, it shows mercy and blesses others; it's fair and open and honest. If you want a harvest of goodness and peace you have to sow seeds of peace like this. (James 3:13-18, based on The Message)

That reminds me of an old story from God's word. King David had died and his son

Solomon was the new king over God's people. Solomon's father David was such a good king and the people loved him. Solomon faced a big responsibility that was put before him; to rule the entire nation.

Well, after Solomon was crowned king, he went to a special place to worship God. That night, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and God said, "What can I give you? Ask me."

Tammy: Wow! Can you imagine someone saying that to you? "Ask for anything, and I will give it to you!" What would you ask for? Would it be money? Health? A new home? Children? I think each one of us would ask for something that we long for deep in our hearts. Do you wonder what Solomon asked for?

Carol: Well, here's what God's word tells us! Solomon said to God, "You have shown great kindness and love to David my father, and he lived faithfully in your presence, he treated people justly and his heart was right. And now - this very day - you have given him a son to sit on his throne.

And now here I am: God, my God, you have made me, your servant, ruler of the kingdom in place of David my father. I feel just like a child! I hardly know what I am doing. And yet here I am king of your people.

This is what I want: Give me a heart that hears you, God; make me *wise* so I can lead your people well, understanding the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is able to lead your people?"

God was pleased that Solomon wanted to be wise. So God replied, "Because you have asked for wisdom so you can govern my people fairly, and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies - I will give you what you asked for! I will

give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow me and obey my laws and my commands as your father David, did, I will give you a long life too.”

Tammy: Solomon wanted to do what was wise and right. And that pleased God so much that he gave Solomon more than he asked for. Solomon became famous as a wise and wealthy king.

My friend, God has promised each one of us the gift of wisdom, if we really want to please him. Let me say those words from the Bible again. ‘When you don’t know what to do, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault. Ask him to show you what is *wise*, and he will give you *wisdom*.’ (James 1:5)

Carol: Let’s do that now! Will you join me?

God, our Father in heaven, we thank you that you have promised to help us. You have told us that when we need wisdom we should just come to you and ask. We do that now. Please help us as we face important decisions. Thank you for your love for us. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ; Amen

Tammy: We need to go now, but we’ll keep praying for wisdom for you, and for ourselves.

Carol: We look forward to our next time together, until then have a great week filled with God’s blessings!