

incredible joy of total trust — walking on water. That would last about two minutes, until I envisioned the real possibility of pregnancy, and then I would sink fast. But Jesus was always there, His strong arm pulling me out of the turbulent water.

Shortly after I hit 40 (it felt more like 40 hit me!), my husband and I took our children on vacation. We cherish family time since we know with two now in college these moments are slipping by all too fast. We looked forward to cele-brating our anniversary on the trip, having had some struggles in our marriage over the last couple years and finally experiencing some real growth and renewal. The morning of our 20th wedding anniversary brought an unexpected gift. A positive pregnancy test confirmed the beautiful truth that had taken us too long to learn — God does have a plan for our lives; it is far better than what we alone could dream, and is not as frightening as we thought.

Yes, we are scared, but mostly we are humbled: humbled that God has been patient with our lack of trust in Him, humbled that He would allow our four older children to be overjoyed at welcoming a new life when other kids might be embarrassed or resistant, humbled that He would consider *us* — frail, weak, stumbling, and rebellious though we have been — as suitable instruments for building His kingdom.

We are now carried along by His grace, though still somewhat in shock. For years now I have “talked the talk,” now we’ll see if I can “waddle the walk.” Our faith is challenged by the knowledge of increased risk of miscarriage and other complications posed by my age. Our youngest will be almost thirteen when this baby is born; we will have a generation gap within our own family. My kids inherited good math skills from Joe, and they are constantly figuring out how old we will be when this baby

*I have “talked the talk,”
now we’ll see if I can
“waddle the walk.”*

starts school, graduates, etc. I find myself wondering if anyone has invented a wheelchair/stroller combo. Joe is back to square one with his carefully constructed budget, which will now have to allow for both college tuition and diapers. But these inconveniences are so small when we contemplate the miracle of life God has created, and, maybe even more amazing, the miracle of selfish, frightened human hearts surrendering to a divine plan.

There are stretch marks on my body from my previous four pregnancies, when the skin stretched to accommodate a new life. In my case, the skin didn’t quite shrink back as I would have liked, and there is now plenty of room for another baby. The marks are unsightly, but I consider them “battle scars” and worth the price. This time around, there are also stretch marks on my heart, from all the work God has done there to get me to this point. These stretch marks I definitely don’t mind, because there is now much more room for Him — and for whomever else He sends along. Anyway, He’s the only one who can see them, and I’m pretty sure to Him they are beautiful.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Faith Elizabeth Heider was born March 30, 2004 - 7 pounds, 3 ounces – mother and baby doing fine (baby sleeping more than the mother!). Mom, Dad, and siblings feel greatly blessed by the gift of Faith.

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ONE MORE SOUL

Stretch Marks: Making Room for One More Soul

by Fran Heider



ONE MORE SOUL

Stretch Marks

By Fran Heider

My husband Joe and I have four children; a good size by today's standards, but paling in comparison to the large traditional Catholic



families we were raised in. We both would have said at the start of our marriage we wanted an even larger family, but as the realities of marriage and parenting set in, we found ourselves overwhelmed, stressed, and losing steam fast for the challenge of more

children. Like many modern Catholics, we decided the Church's teaching on contraception was simply not conducive to our needs and lifestyle, and could be ignored without

consequence, so we took control of our fertility. I wouldn't have considered doing something to permanently end our fertility, as this seemed like "mental menopause," and I really did love kids, especially babies. But after four very difficult pregnancies and raising four children, we were drained. Accumulated stress during those years had left me depressed and anxious. Most of the time I felt like a failure as a wife and mother. My sense of humor had been my lifeline to sanity during stressful times, but during those years I often felt both humor and sanity slipping away, and that was scary.

When our youngest was around 4, God began challenging me in my faith life, and eventually I came face to face with the Church's teachings on contraception, marriage, and family life. Slowly and painfully, after much

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resisting, my stubborn heart acknowledged that we had been denying Him His rightful place in our marriage—in many ways, but largely though contraception. I gradually came to see marriage and parenting as the vocations they are, to be lived out for God, and that only with His grace can we meet the challenges and sacrifices they present. I came to embrace the beauty of Natural Family Planning, and, once my husband was also convinced, we set about trying to share the news with others in our families and parish. It was heartbreaking to see how many Catholics have never been taught the fullness of what marriage and family can be, or to appreciate the wisdom of the Church. We quickly found out this is not a message others want to hear, and we have had to learn that just as God worked on us slowly and patiently, we too had to be patient when trying to reach others.

In spite of all we were learning, we remained hesitant about having more children. Learning the teachings was one thing, putting them into practice was quite another. Years of bad habits in our marriage were not easily overcome, and as the kids grew and the dust settled after the whirlwind of toddlers and diapers, I still had great fears about enduring the suffering of pregnancy and of falling back into the depression and anxiety. I couldn't bring myself to go there again. Yet we had always wanted a larger family, and in spite of many raised eyebrows over "all these children," four just didn't seem like a lot. I can't count how many times—especially at the dinner table—I actually counted heads because it seemed like someone was missing. Even with four kids, things often seemed too quiet.

God continued to lead me deeper on my spiritual journey, but even as I grew in my knowledge of faith, I struggled to live it. I wanted Him to be in charge, yet couldn't give

I gradually came to see marriage and parenting as the vocations they are, to be lived out for God.

up control; I wanted to be able to trust Him completely, but was terrified of what He might ask; I really wanted to embrace suffering for Him – as long as it didn't hurt.

For many years we struggled with indecisiveness over having more children.

During that time, a fierce battle raged in my heart over surrendering to God's will for my life—in all areas but especially in the area of children.

I was truly emotionally exhausted from the battle, but the fear was strong. Yet even as the fear persisted, so did the desire to ultimately do His will, and the passion to let others know about the lies of artificial contraception. Joe and I really worked at being open to whatever God wanted, but that door was open just the slightest crack, and some months we even slammed it shut again. With me approaching 40 and with time running out, God had to take drastic measures. He placed in my path the opportunity to work for One More Soul, an apostolate that promotes the blessings from having children and the benefits of Natural Family Planning. I seized the chance to do more to educate others, even as that fearful, struggling part of me often screamed "run!" I sensed instantly the "threat" that being surrounded by people who were constantly expounding the blessings of children posed to my vulnerable heart; that I was "in danger" of opening up even more. Slowly but surely, my resistance crumbled, and reluctantly I waved the white flag towards heaven, telling God

How many times, especially at the dinner table, I actually counted heads because it seemed like someone was missing.

"you win. I give up." The fear never completely left my heart, but an incredible peace came to live alongside it, the peace of trusting God.

During this time I felt very much like Peter, when Christ called Him out of the boat to walk on water. We would attempt to give God control, and briefly know that