ON OCT. 31, 2011, WORLD POPULATION HIT 7 BILLION, ACCORDING TO THE UN.

IT TOOK 50,000 YEARS FOR THE HUMAN POPULATION TO REACH 1 BILLION. IT'S TAKEN JUST 12 YEARS TO ADD THE LATEST BILLION.

WE'RE GROWING BY 83 MILLION PEOPLE A YEAR...

...227,000 PEOPLE A DAY!

LOOKS LIKE WE CAN CHECK ONE COMMANDMENT OFF THE LIST.
Behind the Numbers

1.2 billion of us live in wealthy nations...

...5.8 billion in poorer nations.

Numbers don’t tell the whole story, though — lifestyles and levels of consumption are a big part of the picture.

By 2050, we could have from 8.1 billion to 10.6 billion people — depending on what we do over the coming decades.

Almost all future population growth will happen in less developed countries.

An average American has a carbon footprint more than 200 times bigger than an Ethiopian’s and 12 times bigger than an Indian’s and twice as big as a Brit’s.

But as people around the world climb out of poverty, they’ll be using more energy and resources too — and who can blame them?
Some old-school spermos have argued that we need to force people to have fewer kids...

But in most of the rest of the world, birthrates have come down without that kind of arm-twisting.

Today, the average woman has 2.8 kids, down from 5 in 1950.

This big shift has happened as girls have gotten better schooling...

...and women have gotten better economic opportunities and more personal freedoms...

...and better health care, including contraception.
7 BILLION, UNPACKED — A COMIC


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What Goes Down Can Look Up

Lots of good can come from smaller families and lower birthrates...

...like healthier moms and kids, and stronger family finances.

Smaller populations also mean less pressure on water and food supplies.

Slowing population growth could provide 15-25% of emissions cuts needed by 2050 to avoid dangerous climate change.

Fewer people also means more room for all the other species out there.

Name an environmental problem and it would be easier to solve with fewer of us around and harder with more.
SOURCES:
7. By 2050, we could have from 8.1 billion to 10.6 billion people. Source: “World Population to Reach 10 Billion by 2100 If Fertility in All Countries Converges to Replacement Level,” United Nations.
8. Essentially all of the population growth during the rest of this century will take place in less developed countries. Source: “Rapid Growth in Less Developed Regions,” United Nations Population Fund.
9. One American has a carbon footprint more than 200 times bigger than an Ethiopian’s, and 12 times bigger than an Indian’s, and twice as big as a Brit’s. Source: “World carbon dioxide emissions data by country: China speeds ahead of the rest,” The Guardian.
11. An estimated 215 million women in developing countries want to prevent pregnancy but don’t have access to modern birth control. Source: “Facts on Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health,” Guttmacher Institute.
12. We could provide family-planning services to all women in developing countries for about $17 billion a year. Sources: “Population policies, programmes and the environment,” by J. Joseph Speidel et al., Philosophical Transactions B. Correspondence with J. Joseph Speidel, August 2011.
15. Three in 10 American girls get pregnant while in their teens. Source: “How is the 3 in 10 Statistic Calculated?,” The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.
20. For an average person, the most consequential environmental decisions you’ll ever make are whether to have kids and how many. Source: “Reproduction and the carbon legacies of individuals,” by Paul A. Murtaugh and Michael G. Schlax, Global Environmental Change.