

2 January 2004

Dr James Dobson
Office of the President
Focus on the Family
Colorado Springs, Co 80995

Dear Dr Dobson,

I am a specialist physician living in Texas. I have been in practice for twenty years and my patient community includes the full range of ages from infants to geriatrics. All of my employees are Christians and we try to live out our commitment to Christ every day as we serve our patients' needs, whether they are physical, emotional or spiritual. I have 4 children (3-13), with a fifth due in March, and I have read many of your books and publications with great appreciation. I am very grateful to you for your ministry to families—you have been a tremendous help to many.

This is a very difficult letter for me to write because I feel that I must challenge you on some erroneous statements and positions that your ministry has made public. I'm sure, however, that you will have a listening ear and an open heart to what I have to say. I know that you cannot read all of your mail, so I make an appeal to your staff to hand this to you directly for your personal response.

I am creating a website* that will feature an evaluation of what I believe to be erroneous criticisms you have made about a fellow Christian and I want to give you an opportunity to clarify (and retract as needed) your position before I make the posting on the Internet. I know that your staff most likely does your research, and I want you to be aware that from my perspective, someone in your organization has made some grievous errors in their reporting—both in your written position statement and in comments made on the phone. You have personally reiterated these same statements in a radio interview, according to a transcript of a Focus broadcast that is available on the Internet. While you may not have personally compiled the faulty research, unfortunately, you bear the responsibility—especially where those errors have damaged the life and ministry of a brother in Christ. I hope you take this letter as an attempt to fulfill the intent of Matthew 18:15, Proverbs 18:17, Exodus 23:1, and others. I only wish that you (and your staff) had approached this Christian brother in person to give him an opportunity to clarify and answer your concerns before your posting. I also hope that this painful experience (for all involved) will end in unity among Christians instead of further division.

I am specifically addressing Focus' August 20, 1999 position statement on Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo and Growing Families International (GFI). My wife and I have been with the GFI ministry in a teaching capacity for over eight years. We are very familiar with the teachings in all the curricula and we know the Ezzos personally, having stayed with them (and them with us) on a number of occasions. We have also taught at GFI

national conferences and discussed changes, updates, etc. needed to improve or further clarify the teaching material. We consider the Ezzos personal friends and, as such, we are aware of most of the strengths and shortcomings they may have. Obviously, I am telling you this just to let you know the perspective from which I am able to evaluate GFI material and the Ezzos personally. Please bear with me as I present my case.

“...It seems to us that their philosophy of childrearing is far too rigid.”

Referencing the second paragraph in your position statement, “*First, it seems to us that their philosophy of childrearing is far too rigid.*” There is no explanation for this statement, no references, no examples, no data to back it up. Certainly, as a doctor, you understand the necessity of backing up your assertions with facts. I think you owe the Ezzos that much just as a matter of civility, but certainly, as a believer, a higher standard prevails here. These types of claims are not only intellectually dishonest, but discredit the Ezzos with what essentially is gossip and slander. After leading 18 Growing Kids God’s Way classes, I am frankly more and more impressed with the flexibility of the parenting philosophy presented—and cannot see any rigidity taught—implicitly or explicitly. Therefore, I take issue with you on this statement, and I challenge you to objectively review the curricula (video lessons and workbooks—which are designed to work together and not be used independently) and without pulling statements out of context, find examples of rigidity being taught. Certainly, individual parents might apply the principles legalistically or rigidly, but that is a danger with ANY teaching on parenting—including your own. The real question is, do the Ezzos promote a rigid parenting philosophy?

I would argue that they do not. The first 9 lessons give a very thorough coverage of biblical ethics in general. They overview what the Bible says about respect for authority, respect for parents, respect for age, peers, nature, personal property (for ourselves and others). They also discuss the importance of relationship building within the family, the importance of the husband/wife relationship, the need to be LIVING what we are teaching to our children, and so on. They discuss a few possible practical examples of the biblical principles taught—how they might be applied in the home—but always with the clear distinction between the biblical principle being taught (the absolute), and the possible practical application of that principle (which will vary from family to family and culture to culture).

In the chapters on “Discipline with Correction” (11) and “Consequences and Punishment” (12) there are probably 25 different options presented for parents to use in the correction of their children...the use of any one of which is dependent upon the age of the child, the overall characterization of behavior of the child, the context of the moment, and so forth. Throughout the material again and again are discussions of how to avoid legalism, how to be “fair and flexible,” how make sure that we as parents are discerning heart motives, and not just behavior, how to take into account all the variables before deciding upon a game plan for correcting a child’s behavior—and also how to make sure that our correction, as much as possible, is reaching the child’s heart. If a parent walks away from a GKGW class with a rigid mindset toward parenting, that parent has only himself to blame, and the

Ezzos cannot be faulted for they have done everything reasonably possible to make sure that flexibility was emphasized. I certainly do not fault the Word of God for the way some of God's children rigidly (and sometimes mistakenly) apply biblical truths in their lives. I simply chalk it up to a lack of maturity and realize that none of us is yet perfected!

Preparation For Parenting and *Babywise* likewise stress flexibility, not rigidity. The method is so flexible, and so far from rigid, that it is almost unthinkable that someone who is evaluating the curricula objectively could possibly find rigidity in there. Frankly, in our experience, it is those who have no personal knowledge of the Ezzos' teaching who usually levy the accusation that the Ezzos promote a rigid feeding schedule. They have not read the books or taken the class, but have made their evaluations based upon someone else's opinion, or their observation of how someone else is applying the principles. Here are some examples of the emphasis on a "flexible" routine for a baby found in *Preparation for Parenting* (with page numbers):

"It is our experience that both baby and mom do better when a baby's life is guided by a flexible routine . . . It [PDF] has enough structure to bring security and order to your baby's world, yet enough flexibility to give mom freedom to respond to any need at any time." (43)

"The mother who insists on watching the clock to the minute lacks confidence in decision making. The clock is in control, not the parent. The hyper-schedulist insists on a strict schedule, often nursing her baby no more often than every four hours. Enslavement to the clock is almost as great an error as a mother who is in bondage to thoughtless emotions." (98)

"Your baby's normal feeding periods fall between 2 1/2 and 3 1/2-hour intervals. But there are times when you may feed sooner than those time increments." (113)

"There will be times when a situation will dictate a temporary suspension of the [PDF] guidelines. Remember you are the parent, endowed with experience, wisdom, and common sense. Trust these attributes first, not an extreme emotion or the rigidity of the clock. When special situations arise, allow context to be your guide." (114-115)

"Most of your day will be fairly routine and predictable, but there will be times when you may need more flexibility due to unusual circumstances. Your life will be less tense if you consider the context of each situation and respond appropriately for the benefit of everyone." (116)

"Remember, unplanned disruptions will come into your day. Count on it. But also take comfort in knowing that flexibility is a natural part of a healthy routine." (196)

“We are aware that the authors proposals regarding controlled feeding schedules for infants are highly controversial...”

We find it interesting that the Ezzos’ infant care recommendations pretty much parallel those recommended by the AAP (See http://www.gfi.org/java/articles_aapc.jsp for a statement by statement comparison). They also promote almost the exact same feeding guidelines as found in Focus’ book, “*Complete Book of Baby and Child Care*.” And yet, your statement says, “Also, we are aware that the authors proposals regarding controlled feeding schedules for infants are highly controversial. Some critics have suggested that they might possibly result in child abuse if applied legalistically, inflexibly, and without regard for circumstance and the special needs of the individual children.” ANY recommendations (your own included), if applied “legalistically, inflexibly, and without regard...” might result in child abuse! The statement is true, but applied (as Focus did) to the Ezzos’ teaching alone it is misleading and intellectually dishonest—if not downright slanderous. Take demand feeding for example. The *Wall Street Journal*, *ABC*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *Primetime Live* all reported on injury to infants and several deaths resulting from parents following La Leche League recommendations to demand feed their babies. Does that make them liable because someone didn’t use common sense and applied their principles too rigidly or inappropriately? If someone applies YOUR recommendations inappropriately, does that make you a baby killer, as critics have labeled the Ezzos? I can go on with this but I am going to trust that your psychology background and your Christian testimony will lead you to reevaluate your position in this regard, and that if you have other questions you, personally, will contact the Ezzos.

“Growing Kids God’s Way has an unnecessarily exclusivist sound about it.”

Focus criticizes the title “*Growing Kids God’s Way*” as having an unnecessarily exclusivist sound about it, as if there were only one “correct” and godly way to raise children and that all other methods were “unbiblical.” While some have taken issue with the title, others have not seen any problem with it at all, especially when taken along with the subtitle, which is “*Biblical Ethics for Parenting*.” As to the Ezzos intent, however, that is not up for debate, but is made clear in the introduction (text and video), and it has NO ring of exclusivity about it at all: From the text - “As was the case with the previous edition, this curriculum is not intended to give all the answers or provide the reader with all he or she will ever need to know about the process of raising a child. Therefore, parents guided by their own convictions have the ultimate responsibility and duty to research parenting philosophies available today and then make an informed decision as to what is best for their family. *Growing Kids God’s Way* is just one resource out of many available to guide parents along the way.”

In contrast, quoting from an advertisement for one of Focus’ books: “The *Complete Book of Baby and Child Care* is the only comprehensive credible guide to child-rearing from a Christian viewpoint.” “...offers a complete child-raising approach...” “...it’s everything you need to raise healthy, happy, holy kids.” (Emphasis mine.) (Never mind

using the Bible!) If one wanted to make an argument as to the intent of exclusivity, it could as easily be made against Focus!

Could some parents walk away from GKGW teaching and behave in an “exclusive” fashion as a result of the way they processed what they learned? Certainly they could, and very likely some do. However, “exclusivity” is NOT taught explicitly or implicitly in the material—certainly not when it is taken in context. Therefore, one can no more hold Mr. Ezzo responsible for occasional “exclusivist” tendencies in alumni of his classes than we can hold the leaders of such an organization as “Walk to Emmaus” responsible for the exclusivist tendencies in many of their alumni—(and we have seen this as well). In fact, we have seen this type of exclusivity rampant throughout the Christian community—people behave exclusively and judgmentally based upon doctrinal beliefs, educational choices, family size, etc. From where I stand it seems to be a human problem, and not one that is particular to alumni of the Ezzos’ curricula. I trust that you will agree.

Curiously, other notable Christian authors have also chosen to use the words “God’s Way” in the titles of their books, and have not (to our knowledge) drawn criticism for such use. In fact, a random search of Amazon.com produced some very interesting results. Out of 67,000 results returned with the term “God’s Way,” 25 out of the first 60 results had the exact phrase “God’s Way” in the title. This included such well-known authors as Charles Stanley, Stormie Omartian, and Kay Arthur. The “exclusivity” argument has always been weak and I am surprised to see it on your position statement. Mr. Ezzo makes it clear (in his introduction, quoted above) that he believes there are many ways to raise children, and that parents have the ultimate responsibility of deciding which philosophy to use. So, when you say in your position statement, “In contrast to this, Dr. Dobson believes that there are many different approaches to raising children...” you can see that you and Mr. Ezzo are saying essentially the same thing and your position is not in “contrast” to Mr. Ezzo’s. Hopefully with the information I have provided, you can reevaluate these statements and consider removing them from Focus’ position statement.

“The Ezzos use of biblical texts is, in our view, a second cause for serious concern.”

“They have, for example, cited Matthew 27:46—“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”—in support of their teaching that mothers should refuse to attend crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met...”

I’ll use GFI’s own words to respond to this concern (from a GFI response to the CRI article, which references the same verse).

“...the Ezzos don’t for one minute believe or teach that Jesus hung on a cross to teach us that mothers should refuse to attend crying infants. The context in which the Ezzos used Matt. 27:46 was dealing with the false notion popularized by some attachment parenting proponents that God responds to us “on demand.” Speaking to that false assertion, the Ezzos were pointing out that our heavenly Father’s nonintervention in the suffering of His son is the ultimate example that speaks against the fraudulent notion that love always requires immediate intervention. Non-action does not always equate to a lack of love....”

“The Ezzos were not providing an exegesis of the text. They were not saying ‘This is what Matthew 27:46 means.’ What they did was to extrapolate a legitimate secondary application of the text (God’s non-intervention at Calvary) to demonstrate a broader reality that God is not a celestial genie that responds on demand to every cry cue. In addition, the *Preparation for Parenting* workbook clearly states: “This example is not meant to minimize the significance of Christ’s crucifixion nor to justify letting a baby cry under any circumstances, but it is used to demonstrate that God does not always respond to our cry-cues immediately and without thought as some attachment parenting mothers insist.”

The above explanation pretty clearly lays out the context for the Ezzos’ use of this scripture, and while I’m not a theologian, I can use the common sense God gave me to see that this is not a mis-use of scripture. It may not be the way you or I would illustrate the same point, but is certainly an acceptable use. Please also note that, when they realized how out of context this was taken, they removed it from the text. This was done several years ago. If you have other examples of scriptures are being misused in the GFI curricula, I would encourage you to take them directly to Mr. Ezzo. You will find him easy to talk to and very open to correction—contrary to what you might read in the negative press about him.

“...in support of their teaching that mothers should refuse to attend crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met.

While criticizing Mr. Ezzo’s misuse of biblical texts, Focus makes a statement (as if it were fact), which is false and insupportable based upon the Ezzos actual teaching. Focus asserts that the Ezzos teach that “mothers should refuse to attend crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met.” Nowhere, in ANY of the Ezzos writing on infant care will you find a legitimate, in context quote that supports this statement. It simply isn’t there. They NEVER assert that a mother should “refuse” to attend a crying infant...only that a mother should be aware that there are at least 6 different types of infant “cries,” and that a mother (when it is clear that the infant is not in immediate danger), should try to stop and assess the reason for the cry (if possible) before acting. It could be that the baby is trying to settle down for a nap, in which case it might be wise to let it fuss for a moment or two, it might be a cry of pain, in which case the parent would act to help relieve the pain, it might be a cry for comfort, in which case the child would need to be held, it might be a cry of hunger, in which case the child would need to be fed. It is very disturbing to me that Focus would carelessly put such a false and misleading assertion into their position statement, couched in a criticism of the Ezzos’ use of biblical texts.

Finally, you stated that your ministry has received numerous letters from parents, pastors, midwives, physicians, and lactation professionals regarding failure-to-thrive syndrome in infants subjected to the Ezzos’ program. Certainly, you understand that there are those opposing the Ezzos’ flexible feeding schedule that have gone to extremes to target major Christian ministries such as yours, saturating mailrooms and telephone lines with

duplicity, demagoguery and frank gossip and slander. Many of these criticisms are part of a highly organized attempt to discredit the Ezzos' teachings. Most of these smear campaigns seem to come from those who hold to the La Leche League "attachment parenting" philosophy. Criticisms also come from those who have never personally been through a class or read the Ezzos' materials for themselves, but may have made judgments on what they have heard or seen. Still, some may have legitimate questions as they hear about or try to apply their recommendations. Many of the critics do not hide their intent to destroy the Ezzos' ministry, aggressively attacking through the various forums of the media often using quotes such as yours for ammunition. They have even disrupted the proceedings of GFI conferences. These critics constitute a small group of people (some with influence in the professional groups that you mentioned above) with a powerful voice, but not necessarily based on Truth.

There has never been a reported case of infant death resulting from parents following the Ezzos' infant care teachings. There have been stories and frank gossip, but never has someone actually brought such a case to the Ezzos. When third party stories are brought to their attention and they have attempted to investigate, no details were forthcoming, no one would actually talk with them about it, and no lawsuits have ever been filed claiming damage to an infant - which seems rather strange in such a litigious society if so many cases of babies in danger actually existed! It is our suspicion that no lawyer worth his salt would take such a case because the evidence is just not there. Some babies will fail to thrive no matter what feeding philosophy is followed. The safeguards built into the teaching include healthy baby growth charts as well as a firm admonition to take the advice of one's pediatrician if there are ANY concerns about a baby's growth or overall health. The Ezzos' teachings emphasize "FLEXIBILITY" not rigidity, common sense not a blind idealism. The Ezzos have always been willing to be called to accountability by anyone, even to the point of notifying the major critics through an open invitation to present their case. This was recently done under the auspices of The Peacemakers Ministry. Curiously, not one of the critics accepted the invitation. What more can the Ezzos do?

I can say factually that there are also many parents, pastors, physicians, attorneys, judges, psychologists, and other professionals that have used the programs very successfully and highly recommend them to their family, friends, patients, clients and congregations. The Ezzos really use as many safeguards as they can think of to insure that people do not misuse their recommendations, but some always will despite what they are taught. I am guessing that you experience unjust criticism of your ministry as well. Should a church, or your ministry for that matter, be condemned (or trashed on the Internet) because there are those who misinterpret your teaching or have an ax to grind because they simply disagree with your philosophy on parenting?

If you believe the Ezzos' teaching is ungodly, medically unsound, or dangerous in any way, then, it seems to me that as a brother in Christ, you have a responsibility to confront him personally (first), not on the Internet or otherwise publicly. I personally am coming to you as a brother offended since I am intimately involved in the ministry in a number of ways. Your criticism of the Ezzos' teaching is unjust and it appears to rely on third party reports rather than first hand evidence. Have you ever talked to the Ezzos about your

concerns? If not, I would be happy to arrange a call between you both. If you will give me a number where he can contact you directly, I will make the arrangements with Gary. If you prefer, you can simply call him yourself one day and that might just help to clear up these matters. However this takes place, it would certainly follow the path of love and reconciliation rather than division and judgment. A harder path to be sure but it is the higher road, don't you think?

Yours in Christ,

(name withheld for web publication)

*This website will be for the purpose of refuting and clarifying all of the erroneous statements that have been made about the Ezzos, their teachings, and the GFI ministry. Every effort is being made to avoid further damage to the Body of Christ by accusatory or inflammatory statements. Instead, with God's help, the truth will be spoken in love. Sadly, because of the efforts of one individual (who has made it his self-professed goal to destroy the Ezzo's ministry), a vast arsenal of negative information is readily available to anyone who takes the time to read it on his Ezzo.info website—including your position statement. We believe this to be unbiblical and profoundly disturbing—especially since the creator of that website is a professing Christian, and has never personally brought his concerns to the Ezzos or given them an opportunity to answer the critics. Our own website is a personal effort. It is not in any way endorsed or backed by the GFI ministry. We hope you will respond to our concerns in a timely manner. If we do not hear from you by launch time (expected in January), we will post this letter along with a statement that you have chosen not to respond.