

PREPARATION
FOR
BEHAVIORAL PEDIATRICS?

A Biblical and Practical Critique of
Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo's
*Preparation for Parenting:
A Biblical Perspective*

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Introduction

This critique is based mainly on my study of *Preparation for Parenting: A Biblical Perspective* [3rd edition]. I have endeavored to downplay my own opinions as much as practically possible in the first four sections, because of my desire to let the Bible be my source of authority. The rest contains a lot of my own thoughts and conclusions; you are encouraged to test these against Scripture — in fact, I would urge you to prayerfully test my entire critique against God’s Word.

In addition to my critique of the Ezzo Method, I have presented my own criteria for evaluating teaching on parenting, a comparison of some other Christian views on parenting, a partial transcript of a radio interview with Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo, and a bibliography.

Please be aware that this critique is not at all exhaustive in nature. I have dealt with only some of the most obvious areas of concern. I have not addressed the entire issue of behaviorism, which I believe to be anti-biblical in philosophy and practice no matter how many verses one may use in an attempt to disguise it. My desire has been to attempt to stay clear of debates involving psychology, individual parenting philosophies and practices, and medical issues. Instead, I have sought to address the question, “Is this method of behavioral pediatrics [the authors’ own description] truly as biblical as it purports to be?”

I would argue that, by titling their curriculum *Preparation for Parenting: A Biblical Perspective* and referring to it repeatedly as “God’s plan”, Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo attach biblical authority to a teaching that contains far too much personal philosophy, conjecture, and outright speculation. My concern is that, by placing upon parents a burden to obey a system of laws found nowhere in Scripture, this curriculum robs Christians of the freedom to follow their consciences in those areas where the Bible is silent. (In some cases, because of the Ezzos’ emphasis on the sinfulness of the heart and their teaching on the supposed lack of maternal instinct, parents may be placed in the position of violating their own consciences and even ignoring the promptings of the Holy Spirit.)

Why should it bother me that the Ezzos attempt to call their own philosophy and practices “God’s Way”? I like to think that, as a Christian, God’s reputation is of the highest importance to me. That is why I am concerned when others attempt to “speak for God” — are they speaking God’s truth as revealed in the Bible, or are they in essence attempting to put their own words in God’s mouth? How does it reflect on the reputation of God when error, misinformation, faulty exegesis, behaviorism, and personal philosophy are all said to be part of “God’s Way”?

I would not be as troubled if the Ezzos had chosen to title their curriculum and radio program “The Ezzo Method” or “Growing Kids the Middle Class American Way” — or better yet, “Growing Kids the Nonsecular Behaviorist Way” — and left God and the Bible out of it. Either title would certainly be more appropriate.

It is this claim of a “Biblical perspective” that troubles me. I also have reason to believe that there is some cause to be concerned for some of the little babies

involved. I fear for their parents. I fear for the bad reputation this could give those of us who do raise our children in a biblical manner. The world will certainly all paint us with the same brush; no one will listen to our claims of “But the Ezzos were just twisting Scripture to suit their own purposes — the Bible really says nothing like that!”

My sincere desire is that we all be careful to guard jealously the reputation of God and His Word.

I offer this critique in the spirit of the Bereans.¹ In no way am I attempting to present myself as an authority on the Bible or on parenting. I have studied the Ezzos’ teaching and the Bible, consulted with pastors and various theological references, and discussed my findings with a number of people. I pray this critique will help answer some questions and concerns, and that it will encourage a more diligent and eager search for truth — especially the truth of the Bible. I also pray that God would grant us all His mercy, grace, and wisdom in our endeavor to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

An additional note of explanation: a number of times in this critique, I have chosen to refer to Gary’s and Anne Marie’s parenting philosophy, methods, and techniques as the “Ezzo Method”. This is not a term they themselves employ. I merely adopted it as a convenient way of labeling the sum total of their teaching and recommended practices as detailed in their courses, materials and radio programs, and as expressed to me by their followers. My use of the word “followers” brings up another interesting point. Anne Marie likes to call those who implement their teaching “our parents”. I decided, in the interest of avoiding ambiguity, to use the term “followers”. I suppose I could have used the phrase “Ezzo parents”, but some felt that the word “followers” was more accurate, more neutral, and less apt to be viewed in the wrong way.

¹ “And the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea: and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.” Acts 17:10,11

Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: Proof-Texting and Other Misuses of Scripture

During my initial exploration of what was being taught on the Ezzos' radio program, "Growing Kids God's Way", I was put in contact with one of their teacher/representatives. One of my questions was, "What is the crux of the Ezzos' teaching?" I was told that these points form the foundation:

1. The husband-wife relationship is the priority.
2. God is a God of order.
3. Parents are in charge.
4. Man is depraved; babies are born with a sin nature.
5. The Bible is the basis for the Ezzos' instructional methods.
6. We are to teach our children to repent.
7. We are to practice proper chastisement.
8. Righteousness is to be pursued as taught in Deut. 6.²

Not all of these basic presuppositions are dealt with in the course being critiqued here; some form the basis for the course *Growing Kids God's Way*, which deals with older children. It is the conclusions which *Preparation for Parenting* draws from the first five points that seems to be causing a lot of the controversy surrounding this curriculum. In this section, I will ask a question inspired by point five: if the "Bible is the basis", do the Ezzos in fact rightly handle the Word of Truth in their efforts to support their teachings?

In *Christian Theology*, Millard J. Erickson exposes what I perceive to be a fundamental flaw in the Ezzos' writing, by answering the question, "How do we know how much we should trust a statement about God or about truth?" He describes how we assign authority to theological statements and I have distilled it thus:

1. Direct statements of Scripture carry the most authority, followed by
2. Direct implications of Scripture
3. Probable implications of Scripture
4. Inductive conclusions from Scripture
5. Conclusions inferred from the general revelation
6. Outright speculation³

What this means in extreme simplicity is: If the Bible clearly states something, that statement carries the most weight. However, if I take a verse out of context and claim it backs up my own pet theory, if I draw my own conclusions from Scripture, or if I base my theory on observations of God's creation, that doesn't carry much weight at all: it's just my theory. Throwing a few verses at something doesn't make it true or Biblical. Just saying something is Biblical, without even bothering to give chapter and verse, doesn't make it Biblical either.

J. I. Packer puts it this way: "No meaning may be read into or imposed on Scripture that cannot with certainty be read out of Scripture — shown, that is, to be

² Based on phone call with Cheryl Williams in March 1992; notes on file.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 79-80

unambiguously expressed by one or more of the human writers.”⁴

I will list only four examples that concern me; these are certainly not the only examples I found of questionable exegesis or stretching God’s Word beyond its intended meaning.

EXAMPLE ONE

Perhaps one of the most puzzling and even humorous misapplications of Scripture is the selection of passages used to support the statement, “On the issue of emotions, the Bible calls us to be sober-minded and sensible if we are to make sound judgments when it comes to nurturing our children.”⁵ A footnote⁶ for this statement lists a number of Scripture references, which appear here in full.⁷

But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.” Acts 26:25

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. Romans 2:3

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. II Corinthians 5:13

At this point in my study of the materials, I was actually chuckling. What, I wondered, did Paul’s answer to Festus, a warning that judgment awaits those that judge others, and Paul’s statement to the Corinthians in its context of discussing his not commending himself and his being controlled by the love of Christ, have to do with being called to sober-mindedness and making sound judgments in the nurturing of our children? I read on:

...so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober...But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.
I Thessalonians 5:6,8

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. I Timothy 3:2,11

...be hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled...Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance...Likewise urge the young men to be sensible...instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1993), p. 8

⁵ Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo, *Preparation for Parenting: A Biblical Perspective*, 3rd ed. (1985; rpt. Northridge, Calif., 1990), pg. 50

⁶ *ibid.*, footnote #10 on pg. 54

⁷ I am using the NASB, since that seems to be the version most often quoted by the Ezzos in their curricula; it is also the one with which I am most comfortable.

live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.
Titus 1:8; 2:2,6,12

Therefore gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...The end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer...Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. I Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8

These verses all have several things in common: none of them are written in the context of offering instruction to parents; none of them speak of nurturing children; none of them entirely support the Ezzo's footnoted statement. Yes, other than the first three, these passages do encourage either church leaders or Christians in general to be temperate, sensible, and sober — but they do not speak at all of “sound judgments when it comes to nurturing our children.” (In fact, for the life of me, I can't figure out why the Ezzos included Acts 26:25 and Romans 2:3. Did they even read these verses, or did they merely pull the references out of a concordance?)

Am I being nit-picky here? Am I arguing that we are not to be temperate, sensible, or sober? No, I am merely illustrating the improper way in which the Ezzos use Scripture to back up their statements.

EXAMPLE TWO

The Ezzos' teaching on the conscience seems to be of questionable origin and theology. For instance, they say, “At birth, the conscience of a child is a clean slate on which parents are responsible to write the moral code for life — a code that will help restrain that natural corruption.”⁸ I was glad that a footnote is provided for that statement as well. The footnote reads:

The clean slate theory advocated by behaviorists differs from our usage of the expression. When behaviorists speak of the clean slate in development, they are referring to a personless body that is programmed by strict environmental forces. The person becomes what the environment is. In contrast, when we speak of a clean slate, we are referring only to that portion of a child's conscience that receives moral training. The standard of right and wrong is written on the clean slate in the higher conscience, while the sense of right and wrong is inborn in the lower conscience (Romans 2:15).⁹

Here is the context of the verse, whose reference the Ezzos helpfully provide in support of what was to me unfamiliar teaching and terminology:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else

⁸ op. cit., pg. 22

⁹ op. cit., footnote #4 on pg. 26; emphasis in original.

defending themselves, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.
(Romans 2:14-16)

Notice what is missing: no mention is made of the child's conscience as a clean slate, of the parents' responsibility to write the moral code on it with the effect of restraining natural corruption, or of a higher and lower conscience. Instead, we read that the work of the law is written in the Gentiles' hearts, that their conscience bears witness, and that their thoughts accuse and defend. The purpose of this passage is to answer the question, *But what about the Gentiles who do not have the Law?* It does not speak of anything related to our responsibility to write the moral code on the clean slate of our child's conscience.

Most of what I have read regarding the conscience has led me to believe that it is God, not parents, Who writes on the conscience (the usual interpretation of the verse quoted above). Sin, however, can sear or dull the conscience (I Tim. 4:2) and parents do have a responsibility to teach God's law to their children (Deut. 6:4-7).

EXAMPLE THREE

In a section titled "Starting Solids", in the context of meals being "an important teaching time", Gary and Anne Marie write:

*Your baby will hear you pray before you eat and learn how to fold his hands and be quiet while you pray, eventually learning short prayers himself. Also, it is never too early to emphasize "please" and "thank you" to your little one. As First Corinthians 14:40 says, "Let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner."*¹⁰

Please humor me here. Open your Bible and read the entire chapter. Tell me: what do prophecy, tongues, and conduct during church services have to do with saying "please" and "thank you" during your baby's mealtime?

EXAMPLE FOUR

I wish this example was as humorous as the one above. It's not. I had a number of people read what I consider to be a disturbing example of how the Ezzos handle the Word of God. I only asked, "What do you think of this?" Every reader came to the same conclusions I did.

In the context of discussing how to respond to our baby's crying, Gary and Anne Marie write, "If you're going to work from a biblical mindset, you need to understand how God responded to the cries of His children."¹¹ Now comes the disturbing part:

Praise God that the Father did not intervene when His Son cried out on the cross (Matthew 27:46). If He had stopped the process, there would

¹⁰ op. cit., pg. 149

¹¹ op. cit., pg. 122. They suggest one should do a concordance search of the words "cry", "crying", and "cries", so I did so. I came to an entirely different conclusion than they did. More about that later.

*be no redemption for us today. Our Heavenly Father's non-intervention to His Son's cry at that moment was the right response, bringing peace to all who trust in Him (Romans 5:1). As it is written, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).*¹²

I considered Gary's use of the crucifixion as a means of advocating his parenting practices to be offensive, and I wrote him a rather strong letter stating my opinion. I do not think that a proper exegesis of Matthew 27 could ever turn it into a text "proving" that we should not respond to our babies' cries. I believe that, when we seek to interpret and apply Scripture, we should ask, "What does God mean to tell us in this passage? What is He teaching us?" And in this instance, we need to ask, "What does the crucifixion really mean?" (I think this is the point J. I. Packer was making in the statement I quoted earlier.)

It is interesting that neither my personal study nor any pastor that I asked could uncover one theologian, or anyone for that matter, who applies this passage in the same way that this curriculum does. ("He's comparing oranges with apples here," one pastor said. "This passage does not speak at all to the issue of parents and babies.")

Also troubling to me was that Gary chose to mention Hebrews 12:11 in this context. Several readers wondered if the Ezzos were implying that Christ needed discipline and training on the cross in order to bring forth righteousness. They felt the entire wording of this paragraph could be dangerously misleading. At best, this particular teaching of the Ezzos is merely conclusion or outright speculation and thus lacks Biblical authority.

No, Gary did not clarify his position in response to my letter. He defended his writing on the crucifixion by saying, "That analogy demonstrated the tremendous love our heavenly Father had for us." He missed entirely my point that I find it hard to believe that God included Matthew 27 in our Bibles as a convenient little parenting analogy. Gary concluded his letter by saying, quite correctly, "I doubt any of our answers will satisfy you Rebecca." He went on to say, "There are to [sic] many difference [sic] in our starting points, premises, theological training, years of parenting experience, and Bible knowledge...There is no way we can have meaningful dialogue with such divisions."¹³

I find that disappointing.

What troubles me the most about how the Ezzos appear to use Scripture is that I get the impression that Gary and Anne Marie approached the Bible with the Ezzo Method already firmly in mind and asked, "What verses can we find to support our philosophy and program?" Otherwise, why do they seem to ignore so much of what the Bible does have to say, directly and clearly, about our role as parents? Why do they need to give their method validity and authority by reading their own lessons and interpretations into passages that are not directly related to parents and children?

¹² op. cit., pg. 122

¹³ letter from Gary Ezzo on file

A “Biblical Perspective” Without the Bible: Speculation and Conclusion versus Authority

We have already seen how Scripture can be wrenched from its context in an attempt to bolster personal opinions. Now let’s look at claims of “biblical principles”, “godly laws”, “biblical truths”, etc. How much Biblical authority is behind some of the statements Gary and Anne Marie make? We are going to hold them to the standard they themselves set in such statements as “...our beliefs are legitimately Christian only to the degree that they are truly Biblical”¹⁴ and “Working from a biblical mindset, opinion has little to do with truth. Christians must learn to distinguish between the two if they are going to raise their children effectively and without fear...we must avail ourselves to the established truth in Scripture.”¹⁵ The following selection of the Ezzos’ statements (with my concerns) is by no means exhaustive:

The Ezzos do not believe in instinct or “motherly intuition”. They write, “**Man is unlike the animal in that he is born with drives, impulses, and reflexes, but not instincts.**”¹⁶ This is a matter of opinion, yet they present it as a foundational fact. Some readers of this curriculum have argued that Romans 2:14, with the NASB’s use of the word “instinctively”, indicates Biblical support of the existence of human instinct. In any case, the Bible certainly does not offer evidence against the existence of instinct.¹⁷

“**Depravity affects mankind both biologically and spiritually,**” the curriculum states. “**Biologically it affects the body at birth and continues throughout life. At birth all babies are prone to move into *metabolic chaos* [emphasis theirs]...The parent’s job is to prevent that from happening.**”¹⁸ No biblical or medical reference is given to back up this claim concerning “metabolic chaos” — again, this is a foundational “fact” upon which the curriculum builds.

“**The greatest overall influence you will have on your children will not come in your role as a dad or mom but as a husband or wife. That basic biblical truth has been forgotten and even rejected by our society...**”¹⁹ If this is such a “basic biblical truth”, why do the Ezzos fail to give the chapter and verse where this truth is found? Why has my diligent search for such a passage been fruitless?

¹⁴ Ezzo, pg. 12

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *op. cit.*, pg. 13

¹⁷ It is interesting that the Ezzos recommend the books of Richard Fugate, yet his wife Virginia Fugate writes in *On the Other Side of the Garden*, “Motherly love is naturally responsive...A mother’s natural responsiveness is the radar that enables her to interpret her baby’s cries, noises, and gestures; and motherly love prompts her to respond to her baby’s needs. There is no question that natural motherly love is necessary for the physical welfare of a baby.” She goes on to write that while a “mother’s instinctive love” is “valuable” and “important while an infant needs total care”, the task of raising older children “requires a love that exceeds natural, motherly care.”

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, pg. 15

¹⁹ *op. cit.* pg., 17

“The husband-wife relationship must be viewed as the priority relationship in the family.”²⁰ “A mother can spend twenty-four hours a day loving and nurturing her baby, but she will only be as good a mother as she is a wife.”²¹ Where is this in Scripture? Where does this leave widows? Shouldn’t our priority be placed on our relationship with our Lord and Savior? **“The husband-wife relationship is not a means to an end, but and [sic] end in and of itself.”²² What basis is there to say this? Do the Ezzos mean to imply that marriage serves no higher purpose, no godly function than merely to exist? Where is “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) or the implication that God makes us one because he desires godly offspring? (see Malachi 2:15, footnote in the NASB) Where is marriage as a glorious living metaphor for Christ and the Church? (for example, see Eph. 5:22-27; Rev. 19:7-9)**

“The duty of parents is to restrain the natural corruption by instilling into the child the self-disciplines of life.”²³ What verses speak of our duty to “restrain the natural corruption” of our children and that we can do this by instilling self-discipline?

“The Bible makes it clear that every infant comes into the world tending toward ungodliness. He would become progressively more sinful unless brought under control by the early training of his parents.”²⁴ Are there specific verses that speak of infants becoming “progressively more sinful” or of parents being able to stop this progression?

“Establishing a biblical mindset for infant parenting requires an understanding of feeding practices of the past and present.”²⁵ Perhaps I’m being naive in stating what I think is obvious: establishing a “biblical mindset” for **anything** should require an understanding of what the **Bible** actually says on the topic. That seems not only obvious, but simple. Since I want to establish a “biblical mindset” for infant parenting, I search the Scriptures. There is not a whole lot said about feeding practices.²⁶ My conclusion: perhaps, because God has not directed us otherwise, we have freedom in this area. At the most, one could argue that breastfeeding, because of its creation by God and its endorsement by Scripture, should be the way we feed our infants.

“But primitive societies are the end of the human spectrum because of depravity, not the beginning.”²⁷ This smacks of ethnocentricity and cultural arrogance. Nowhere in Scripture, that I know of, is a primitive lifestyle or culture denigrated in this manner, or equated with a higher measure of depravity. Is not “depravity” a function of our sinfulness, of our inability to save ourselves, of our

²⁰ op. cit., pg. 19

²¹ op. cit., pg. 20

²² op. cit., footnote #3 on page 26

²³ op. cit., pg. 22

²⁴ op. cit., pg. 38

²⁵ op. cit., pg. 41

²⁶ See I Thess. 2:7; Ps. 22:9; Is. 66:11-13; 49:15; and Num. 11:12 for some verses about breastfeeding. None of them seem to support the Ezzos’ parent-controlled feeding plan.

²⁷ Ezzo, pg. 44

rebellion against God? Is American culture, in this post-Christian era, assumed to be less depraved because of its high level of complexity and sophistication? My husband and I are familiar with missionaries in several extremely primitive settings. We know from them that even the most “primitive” people can embrace our Lord and Savior. Sometimes entire villages experience revival in a dramatic way unlike anything most of us have ever seen or experienced — yet they remain “primitive”. Are these brothers and sisters in Christ still at “end of the human spectrum because of depravity”?

“A practical routine similar to PCF [parent-controlled feeding] was the method used during biblical times and most likely the method used by Mary, the mother of Jesus.”²⁸ The Ezzos footnote a “definitive work on the subject”. Again, Scripture is silent; there is no evidence for this claim. Nor is there any biblical indication that we are to model our lifestyles and infant care after ancient Hebrew practices. If so, do the Ezzos also suggest we rub our newborns with salt? (see Ezekiel 16:4)

“Routine and order are gifts from God to man...The four seasons are all part of the earth’s sleep/wake cycle...The reliability of universal order is seen in the reliability of a baby’s routine...Universal order gives us routine without rigidity — PCF does the same.”²⁹ Back at the beginning of the last section, I spoke of Millard Erickson’s helpful categorization of the degrees of authority assigned to statements of “truth”. These statements of the Ezzos that I just quoted fall way down at the bottom of Erickson’s list: conclusions inferred from the general revelation, and outright speculation. This is not part of a “biblical perspective”. Gary and Anne Marie go on to write, **“There are godly laws governing infant parenting, and establishing order [emphasis theirs] is one of those laws.”** It is strange that God seems to have neglected to record these laws in His Word.

“PCF is based on the principle that the husband-wife relationship is the cornerstone of the family.”³⁰ I almost hesitate to list this quote for fear of being thought of as nit-picky. The thing is, my husband and I like to think of Christ as the Cornerstone of our lives, our marriage, and our family.

Gary and Anne Marie have written a section, a little over a page in length, contrasting the “theology” of demand feeding versus that of parent-controlled feeding.³¹ It is interesting to note that not one Scripture appears anywhere in this section. Can we not help but conclude that the “theology” of PCF is based on some other source than God’s Word? A quote of particular interest: **“Mothers who demand feed say they love their children because they tend to their every need. That is not biblical love; it’s idolatry.”**³² This is strong language, a serious accusation that carries with it grave condemnation. (See, for example, Ex. 20:3, Lev. 19:4, Deut. 4:19, I Cor. 10:14 & 20, I John 5:21, Jonah 2:8, Rom. 1:25, etc.) In I Corinthians 6:9, idolaters are listed among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Is demand feeding, as Gary seems to imply, such a violation of

²⁸ op. cit., pg. 45

²⁹ op. cit., pg. 57

³⁰ op. cit., pg. 66

³¹ op. cit., pg. 66-67

³² op. cit., pg. 67

God's commands?

J. I. Packer has a chapter in *Concise Theology* dealing with the subject of idolatry and subtitled "God Demands Total Allegiance". This raises the question: is Gary suggesting that, by meeting all of his or her needs, we are *worshipping* our child and giving God less than total allegiance? Can we not instead view the meeting of our children's needs as an act of service and worship to our Heavenly Father? Apparently the Ezzos would have us believe otherwise; that by leaving some of our baby's needs unattended, we are expressing "biblical love".

This charge of idolatry has offended and distressed a number of devout Christian parents who view their role as mothers and fathers as a special calling and ministry.

"Demand feeding is based upon an existential philosophy that denies man is made in the image of God and now exists in the condition of depravity...demand feeding de-sanctifies the message of Christian motherhood."³³ Again, where are the Scriptures to back this up? If "demand feeding de-sanctifies the message of Christian motherhood", is it not then sinful? What Scriptures does demand feeding violate?

"In contrast to the time we have our children until they are grown, an infant feeding plan may not seem very significant. But it is! It is the first step to successful parenting...The principles [of PCF] work because they reinforce, not violate, the spiritual and natural laws of God."³⁴ Again, the Bible apparently fails to mention this "first step to successful parenting" or these "laws of God" to which Gary and Anne Marie make reference.

In the chapter, "Establishing Your Baby's Routine", we read, **"Your strategy will be made up of three basic activities that repeat themselves throughout the day: feeding time, wake time, and nap time. *Please note* [emphasis in the original]: The order of events cannot be changed during the day. Feeding must be first; wake time must be second; and nap time is third."**³⁵ Notice here that Gary and Anne Marie do not say, "Many families have found that this order of events works best for them", or "In our opinion, this is the best way to schedule your baby's activities". Notice their emphasis. Notice the words "cannot be changed". Notice that there is no "balance" or flexibility here. Notice that there is absolutely no direct statement in Scripture, or even an implication or conclusion from Scripture, supporting this strong statement. I would argue that "The order of events cannot be changed during the day" with its "must...must..." command-like emphasis seems strangely out of place in a curriculum subtitled, "A Biblical Perspective". **"Consider God's plan for your family. Maintain a biblical mindset,"** appears on the very next page, under "General Guideline #1".³⁶ Surely Gary and Anne Marie are not implying that their unchangeable "order of events" is part of "God's plan for your family" — if so, why did God not reveal this in Scripture? And how exactly did He reveal it to the Ezzos?

"Comfort nursing, the belief that a mother's breasts are the primary

³³ op. cit., pg. 66

³⁴ op. cit., pg. 67

³⁵ op. cit., pg. 101

³⁶ op. cit., pg. 102

source of comfort, is more for the mother than the child.”³⁷ Actually, I did find a passage that speaks of breasts and comforting, but I’m not sure if it’s quite the picture the Ezzos had in mind:

“That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts; that you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom.” For thus says the Lord, “Behold I extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall be nursed, you shall be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” Isaiah 66:11-13

In the context of attempting to debunk the concept of mothers and babies bonding at birth, the Ezzos write, **“If anything, continuous close mother/infant contact produces abnormal mother/child dependency.”**³⁸ I find it interesting that God has not chosen to warn us of this alleged danger of “abnormal dependency”.

Further on, Gary and Anne Marie take issue with the idea of allowing baby to sleep in the parents’ bed. **“Rooted in both the doctrines of Freud and Darwin and not the Bible, the theory of shared sleep furthers the unbiblical notion that motherhood is the primary goal in marriage and a separate entity unto itself.”**³⁹ I have read some commentators and translators who believe that Luke 11:7 indicates that the friend (in the parable of Jesus about persistent prayer) had his children in the same bed with him, and that this was a common practice. The footnote in my NASB gives this literal rendering of Luke 11:7: “and from inside he shall answer and say, ‘Do not bother me...*my children with me are in bed* [emphasis mine]; I cannot get up and give you anything.’” Certainly this predates Freud and Darwin; sharing sleeping space was hardly their original idea. Furthermore, this verse would indicate that the Dad in this instance was hardly **“displaced to the couch to get his sleep”!**⁴⁰

On the same subject, Gary and Anne Marie mention the sad situation of I Kings 3:19: “And this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on it.” They use this to illustrate their statement, **“Shared sleep has proven disastrous for nursing mothers since the fear of rolling on top of the baby creates anxiety, thus affecting sleep and milk production.”**⁴¹ What they fail to mention is that the mother in this situation was a harlot, living with another harlot — hardly a normative family situation and thus hardly a reason to promote anxiety in those mothers and fathers who are inclined to tuck baby in bed next to them.

“During biblical times, weaning took place between eighteen and twenty-four months. Three years of nursing was considered rare, as

³⁷ op. cit., pg. 126

³⁸ op. cit., pg. 138

³⁹ op. cit., pg. 146

⁴⁰ ibid.

⁴¹ op. cit., pg. 147. It is interesting to note that there is no research quoted to verify or support this statement; in fact, many lactation experts recommend shared sleep!

was the case with Hannah.”⁴² Although they footnote this statement, they do not back it up with Scripture; there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that Samuel’s situation was unusual. I have found it interesting to speculate how long Moses was nursed — certainly long enough for his mother to teach him about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it seems obvious that Moses knew God and His people.

I was unable to find any direct statements in Scripture that support these teachings of the Ezzos:

- the belief that “metabolic confusion” is a result of the Fall
- the PCF plan
- the belief that we must dictate our babies’ eating & sleeping behavior
- the belief that we should force babies to sleep through the night at six to eight weeks
- the belief that babies 6 months of age & older should be fed only three meals per day
- playpen time, room time, and other aspects of scheduling
- a denial of maternal instinct
- a rigid approach to parenting or a “one size fits all” approach
- behaviorism — as a philosophy or a practice
- the concept of “spiritual inertia” or the belief that controlling biological functions can bear spiritual fruit and set the stage for the Holy Spirit to work
- the view that families should be parent or marriage-centered (they should be God-centered)
- the view that we should respond to our babies cries only when convenient (or that babies “need” to cry)

As I studied *Preparation for Parenting: A Biblical Perspective*, I found myself asking again and again, “Where is this in the Bible?” In fact, the margins of my copy are filled with red pencil marks — “chapter & verse?”, “where?”, “biblical basis?”, etc. My list above was hardly exhaustive; it merely represents examples of how little of the Ezzos’ work is truly based on the authority of God’s Word. I would conclude that Gary and Anne Marie seem to base their teaching on conclusions and outright speculation, and yet attempt to assign to their parenting philosophy the authoritative weight of direct statements of Scripture.

⁴² op. cit., pg. 149

The Issue Of Crying: Towards A More Biblical Response

“Every newborn has a predisposition for continuous nighttime sleep by week eight.”⁴³ Almost a third of them, the Ezzos admit, may need “a little nudge, which may necessitate some crying for a few nights...Crying may be as short as five minutes or as long as an hour.”⁴⁴ Advice for apartment dwellers: “If you’re in a small place and there are times when you need to let your baby cry, try selecting a portion of your living area that is not on your neighbor’s wall. As your baby approaches six to eight weeks of age and you are trying to eliminate the nighttime feeding, there may be a point when you will need to let your baby cry back to sleep. It would probably be helpful to approach your neighbors and explain to them what you’re trying to accomplish.”⁴⁵ “Newborns in the first week of life have a need to cry...In early infancy, crying is a non-cognitive way of communicating both need and displeasure.”⁴⁶ “A normal baby may cry as much as three hours total per day, and five to forty-five minutes in any session.”⁴⁷ “...leaving the room is often the best response...”⁴⁸ “No parent takes pleasure in hearing that sound, and neither will you. This is especially true if you’re a first-time parent because you have never experienced as powerful an emotion as the one brought on by your baby’s cry.”⁴⁹

Gary and Anne Marie teach that, after six to eight weeks of age, a baby should sleep through the night and that parents should then no longer attend to his cries. According to them, if we find the sounds of our baby’s cries distressing, we need to examine what fault in ourselves causes our emotional weakness. They say that mothers and fathers who can’t stand to hear their babies cry without comforting them “are of great concern to us. ..Why is crying such an intrusion on their emotions? Is there something in their past that has not been resolved, evoking a haunting memory each time they hear that sound?”⁵⁰

That is not the example our Heavenly Father gives us in Scripture. “One only needs to do a concordance search of the words *cry*, *crying*, and *cries* to gain such an understanding.”⁵¹ I did so, and came to an entirely different conclusion than the Ezzos did. I would urge you to examine Scripture for yourself. **You will find passage after beautiful passage showing God’s answer to the cries of His children, be they the nation of Israel, or the righteous believers.** When the Israelites in Egypt cried out to God, He “took notice of them.” (Ex 2:23-25) In answer to His children’s cries, God “did according to the word of Moses” (Ex 8:13,14); heard, sent an angel, and delivered Israel out of Egypt (Num 20:16); heard ...healed

⁴³ Ezzo, pg. 74

⁴⁴ op. cit., pg. 80

⁴⁵ op. cit., pg. 130

⁴⁶ op. cit., pg. 120

⁴⁷ op. cit., footnote #4 on pg. 128

⁴⁸ op. cit., pg. 126

⁴⁹ op. cit., pg. 120

⁵⁰ op. cit., pg. 121

⁵¹ op. cit., pg. 122

...delivered, over and over again in the Psalms. “His ears are open to their cry.” (Ps. 34:15) “The righteous cry and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.” (Ps. 34:17) In Isaiah 58:9, “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry, and He will say ‘Here I am.’”. David says that God has put the psalmist’s tears “in Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book?”

However, God does not respond to every cry. For instance, in the case of David’s enemies, “They cried for help but there was none to save, even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.” (Ps. 22:5) About the idolatrous who have broken covenant with God and are under His punishment, God warns, “though they will cry to Me, yet I will not listen to them.” (Jer 11:11) We are told in verse 14 not to pray for these people.

Hopefully, during the night, we do not view our tiny babies as our enemies, ones who have broken covenant with us and are deserving of punishment — because that would seem to be the example Scripture would give as justification for turning a deaf ear to their cries. I hope that, instead, we attempt to give to our children a measure of the love God gives to us.

God’s mercy is described as “tender” in Luke 1:78. In Eph 4:32, we are instructed, “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Paul speaks of tenderness towards the Thessalonians, as well as his “fond affection” for them when he states that, though the apostles could have asserted their authority over them, “...we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.”

God uses the nursing mother and her child as a beautiful word picture of Zion’s future hope in Is 66:11-13: “That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts; that you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom...and you shall nurse, you shall be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.” Is 49:15 says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.”

Since “night is for sleeping”, should a husband ignore his wife if she awakens him at night with her sobs? Or should he remind her of the lesson their two month old has already “learned” and offer to hear her concerns the following day during “couch time” (the first 15 minutes after the husband returns from work — this is stressed on the Ezzos’ radio program). Should he warn her of the sin of desiring “instant gratification” should she want his immediate comfort?

The Ezzos’ teaching on the parents’ response to a baby’s cries seems completely at odds with Scripture, and following it could set a dangerous precedent in our relationships with our children and others.

The Issue Of Control: What Does The Bible Really Say?

Control is a recurrent theme in *Preparation for Parenting*. The Ezzos urge us to control our children's eating, sleeping, and awake times, lest our children control us. I Tim 3:4-5 teaches us that a church leader ("overseer") must keep "his children under control with all dignity" because "if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" **Nowhere does the Bible indicate that part of taking care of the church involves regulating or controlling members' eating and sleeping habits — nor does the Bible mention this as a goal for our children.**

Using the same Greek root as "control" in I Tim 3:4, the Bible teaches us that: we are to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Eph 5:21) and wives are to "be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22, also Col. 3:18, Titus 2:5) Wives are to submit to their husbands (I Pet 3:1-6); younger men are to be subject to their elders (I Pet 5:5); we are all to submit to human institutions in authority (I Pet 2:13). Most importantly, we are to submit to God (James 4:7) Since submission is something God desires (and requires) of us, the implication is that we have a choice — submission requires an act of our wills. Scripture does not command husbands to force their wives into submission, nor does it teach that elders are to control the younger men.

The Bible speaks of the importance of self-control. It is one of the fruit of the spirit. (Gal 5:23) An overseer is to be self-controlled (Titus 1:8). We are to "Run in such a way that you may win" and exercise self-control in order to receive an "imperishable wreath". (I Cor 9:24,25) Satan can tempt us because of our lack of self-control; therefore husbands and wives should not deprive one another and singles should consider marriage (I Cor 7:3-9) **However, the concept that we can teach our children self-control through our control of them, their bodily functions and their environment is found nowhere in Scripture.**

Missing From This Picture: The Inadequacies Of The Ezzo Method

Does this curriculum live up to its name in preparing one to be a parent? I would argue that *Preparation for Parenting* is inadequate in accomplishing what its name implies.

Here are what I consider major deficiencies of the Ezzo Method:

1. There is no instruction or encouragement in the spiritual training of our children; I would interpret this lack to be due to the underlying behavioristic philosophy.
2. No allowance is made for different cultures and socioeconomic levels.
3. No allowance or acknowledgement is made for different personalities, temperaments, stages of development, or special circumstances.
4. The instruction regarding Biblical roles for the mother and father is improper and deficient. There is no indication that we need to allow God to prepare us for these important roles.
5. A doctrinally questionable view of salvation is presented: if we parent by this method, what the Ezzos term “spiritual inertia” should “carry” our children to the point where God “will” take the “reigns of their hearts”. (This concept is more a part of the *Growing Kids God’s Way* curriculum.) However, if we believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, that it is a gift of God and not of works, how can we believe that we can, through proper parenting, be agents in our children’s salvation?
6. The goal of parenthood — eventual “friendship” — is selfish, shallow, and unbiblical.

These topics are completely missing from their “subject index” in the back of the book: prayer, Bible reading or study, parenting as ministry, the father’s role as defined in Scripture, the mother’s role as defined in Scripture, setting an example of godliness for your children, spiritual training and instruction of children, the role of grace and love in parenting, Jesus’ teaching regarding children, the role of the church in encouraging and teaching parents, the role of the family within the local church, maternal employment outside the home — these are just a few topics I have come to expect in baby or parenting books written from a godly perspective. They were lacking in this material.

There was little or nothing in either *Preparation for Parenting* or the Ezzos’ other course, *Growing Kids God’s Way*, about family worship and ministry, about instructing our children in God’s Word, about loving our children, or about modeling a walk with Jesus Christ that is so vibrant and exciting that our children will long to

follow. I must have come to the wrong source. How can “a new course for behavioral pediatrics” teach me how to impart my Christian faith and heritage to my children and train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

This curriculum would seemingly deny us the glorious experience of identifying with Christ’s servanthood as we serve our young babies. We pour out our love over and over. And yet, as we are daily confronted with our inadequacies, as we struggle with our innate sin and selfishness, we stand in awe of the glory and perfection of God’s love for us. My love for my babies has overwhelmed me at times, but it is an infinitesimal fraction of God’s love for me.

Also missing from this curriculum is any sense of the joy and delight — and even fun! — that these wonderful blessings of God bring into our families. “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward.” (Psalm 127:3) Any sense of actually enjoying our new baby is lost amidst behavioral pediatrics, a false dualism of the mother versus wife roles, warnings against emotionalism, and an over-emphasis on parental control.

If I were going to prepare couples for parenthood, I would advise them to seek God diligently with every fiber of their being, to study and meditate on His Word, and to seek discipline and maturity in their spiritual walk both individually and as a couple. I would urge them to become discerning of all the advice with which they will be bombarded, prayerfully testing it with Scripture. I would urge them to flee from advice that caters to inborn selfishness and convenience, that is harsh and unloving, that damages or threatens family unity, that is without biblical or medical basis. God is our example of the perfect parent and thus He should be our best teacher and model. We need to remember that most of the godly parents throughout history have managed, with the Bible as their only “parenting text”, to raise champions of the faith. If we seek God first and foremost, everything else will follow. We will become the parents He wants us to be.

Filling The Void: The Search For Godly Parenting Instruction

How can we evaluate parenting instruction? How can we know whether or not it is true, whether or not it is valuable, whether or not it is for our family?

Here are some of my personal considerations:

1. TARGET AUDIENCE. Does the parenting instruction, no matter what form it may take, claim to be Biblical and/or universal while at the same time assuming its audience represents only a segment of American society, or does it recognize different cultures, socioeconomic groups, childbirth practices, family sizes? Do you consider yourself part of its target audience?

2. BIBLICAL BASIS. Does it distinguish between true biblical instruction and the author's own opinions and cultural biases? Is the author theologically sound in his application of Scripture or does he attempt to "stretch" selected passages to defend his own pet theories? Does he consider the whole counsel of Scripture or merely isolated verses that suit his position? Does the teacher give you freedom to decide what is right for your family in those areas not clearly dealt with by Scripture — or does his advice make you harden or even violate your conscience?

3. SPIRITUAL EDIFICATION. Does the teaching help you to glorify God and enjoy Him? Does it equip you to serve God and others, or does it tend to focus attention on your desires? Does it encourage you to draw closer to God, to grow as a Christian, to become a more godly mother or father, to be an example worthy of your children's imitation? Does it present a biblical view of fatherhood and motherhood or a modern, worldly one? Does it turn your heart towards your family?

4. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. Does it equip you to discern truth from "bad baby advice" and false teaching?

5. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT. Like the Bible, is this teaching universally applicable — or does it only make sense within its target culture? Could this teaching have been applied in Bible times? by Laura Ingalls Wilder's parents? by Haitian Christians? Or is a major tool of implementing this method something not available throughout history or throughout the world? Does the author differentiate between biblical absolutes and cultural "norms"? Has this teaching stood the test of time, or is it "new" and "different"?

6. FAMILY UNITY. Does it teach how to achieve family unity or does it pit parents against children, assume siblings will be rivals, encourage parents to "escape" their children, and discourage spending too much time together with dire predictions of "overdependence" and "abnormal attachment"?

7. GOAL OF THE FAMILY. Does the teaching have an eternal perspective? Does it help your family work toward the goal of glorifying and enjoying God, and being involved in ministering to others, both family members and those outside the family? Does it teach you how to raise tomorrow's Christian leaders? Does it inspire you to become the type of family that God can use now and in the future?

8. AUTHOR'S OR TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE. Has the teacher experienced the type of family life you desire for your family? Is he or she qualified to teach the subject matter? Does he exemplify a godly attitude, demeanor, and lifestyle worth emulating? Does he express a love and enjoyment of babies and children — is the joy of family life stressed or just the work? (Note: When I need advice, I tend to seek out godly parents who enjoy the company of their children. These fathers and mothers must be doing something right! I avoid those who tell me ways to get away from my children, ways to avoid interaction, ways to avoid being “inconvenienced”, etc.)

Who cannot help but become bewildered at the variety of parenting instruction being offered in Christian circles today? Why, if they all claim to be Biblical, do they not agree? Below, I will compare a few of the divergent views with which I am most familiar. In my quest for parenting instruction, my reading, study, and discussion with experienced mothers, especially those of larger families (I define this as families with four or more children), I have discovered interesting ideas within some growing segments of the Christian community.⁵² I have listed these as the “Titus Two” model, in honor of the mothers who have been gracious enough to minister to me in obedience to Titus 2:3-5.

James Dobson--Focus on the Family

Scheduling and routine of baby: To my knowledge, Dr. Dobson does not offer specific teaching on this topic.

Crying: While Dr. Dobson teaches that crying is the baby’s main method of communication, he cautions parents, especially as the baby gets older, to balance meeting the baby’s need with not allowing the baby to manipulate the parents.

Sleeping through the night: Again, Dr. Dobson offers no hard and fast rules on when this should take place. He is not an advocate of the family bed and does offer advice as to how to encourage older babies to sleep through the night.

The issue of control: While Dr. Dobson teaches that parents are to be in authority over their children, he does not emphasize the control of their eating and sleeping habits as the Ezzos do.

Basic philosophy: Dr. Dobson writes and speaks from the perspective of “Christian psychology”.⁵³ He stresses self-esteem, the unique characteristics of each child, and the need for discipline.

⁵² This information is based on over six years of reading and informal interviews within the Body of Christ. Whenever I see a godly family that exemplifies the type of goals my husband and I have for our family, I try to ask a lot of questions. I have gained a great deal of insight from mothers and fathers who have been willing to answer my probing questions about everything from baby’s routine to child discipline to how the mother does so much laundry and where all those kids keep their socks! The reason I have tended to look to larger families for guidance is two-fold. Now that we have four children, my husband and I are discovering that most parenting advice today seems written from a perspective that is unfamiliar with the unique challenges of families with more than one or two children. Secondly, I have found that most mothers of larger families have already successfully grappled with the issues I am currently facing, and they often seem to exemplify more of a patient, joyous, and godly attitude towards their families.

⁵³ I recognize that a growing number of Christians do not believe that psychology can be “Christian”. I include Dr. Dobson because he is one of the best known authors and speakers on the issue of parenting.

William and Martha Sears-- "Attachment Parenting"

Scheduling and routine of baby: Bill and Martha Sears advocate "feeding on cue" or what they recently termed "design feeding". Bill, in his experience as a pediatrician and father of their 8 children, and Martha, in her experience as a registered nurse, lactation consultant and mother, have become convinced that this is God's design for feeding babies. They encourage new parents to learn how to interpret and respond to the hunger cues of each particular baby.

Crying: They teach that, while parents are not responsible for *stopping* or blocking a baby's cries, parents are responsible for responding to a baby's cries and comforting the baby.

Sleeping through the night⁵⁴ : The Sears' are proponents of what is called "shared sleep" or the "family bed". They believe this to be part of God's design for the family. They believe there are medical benefits to night-time nursing and do not encourage "training" baby to sleep through the night.

The issue of control: The Sears' are not advocates of "democratic parenting"; they recognize that God has placed parents in authority over their children. However, they do not believe we are commanded to control the eating and sleeping habits of our children in order that they might achieve self-control or reap spiritual benefits.

Basic philosophy: Bill and Martha Sears believe that the "attachment" style of parenting is most in accord with God's design as they perceive it in Scripture. They stress a commitment to both the spouse and child relationships, bonding at birth, openness to the cues of the baby, prompt response to baby's cries, breastfeeding on cue, weaning the baby when he or she is ready, "wearing" baby or carrying him about in a sling or baby carrier, sleep-sharing, and father involvement.

Debra Evans, certified childbirth educator, breastfeeding consultant, mother of 4

Scheduling and routine of baby: Debra Evans believes that the idea of a "schedule" for a breastfed baby is a misconception and advocates feeding the baby as determined by his or her individual needs. She believes that the Lord designed babies to nurse frequently.

Crying: Since Debra believes that babies cry in order to express a need, she teaches parents that ignoring the cry equals ignoring the need.

Sleeping through the night: Debra discourages "clockwatching" and does not advocate training baby to sleep through the night.

The issue of control: A quote says it best: "Enough has been said and written about roles and structure within the family, but it seems that speakers and authors often neglect that we need to be Christians first and foremost! As we draw closer to

⁵⁴ In the book Nighttime Parenting, Dr. Sears points out, "In sleep studies settling is defined as sleeping through from midnight to 5:00 a.m. To expect a baby to sleep through the night from 8:00 P.m. to 8:00 a.m. is a totally unrealistic expectation for most babies."

the Lord and follow Him day by day, we learn how to behave toward others.”⁵⁵

Basic philosophy: Debra Evans writes with compassion from both a Biblical and medical perspective. Her books and articles often contain a sizable index listing the Scripture references she has used.

The “Titus Two” Model: what older women and larger families have taught me

Scheduling and routine of baby: Although I encountered a wide variety of feeding “philosophies”, the most prevalent among larger families seems to be feeding “on cue” for about the first three months and then helping both baby and family to adjust to a routine that works for everyone. “Flexibility” was a key phrase, especially among very busy families. One mother, quite familiar with the Ezzo Method, laughed when she told me, “Oh, we’re much too busy to be slaves to our baby’s special schedule.”

Crying: Most mothers viewed responding to a baby’s cries as the only godly, compassionate approach. One mother explained, “Sometimes I think, ‘I’m busy; why not just let the baby cry?’ But then I wonder about the example I’m setting for the other children. They can’t stand to hear the baby cry and, frankly, I don’t want them to harden themselves to that sound. I want them to be tender and protective towards the baby.”⁵⁶

Sleeping through the night: Night and sleep issues are handled in a variety of different ways. Few larger families have the luxury of having a nursery for baby; probably most babies are in their parents’ rooms and/or beds at least for a while. Some mothers are eager to have baby sleep through the night; others have discovered through experience ways in which to make baby’s night nursing non-disruptive to the rest of the family. Although I didn’t always ask specifically when babies began sleeping through the night, my general impression was that this rarely happened before three months and that it wasn’t that big of an issue for a lot of families.

The issue of control: It seems that the parents of larger Christian families I know and whose testimonies I read do not see themselves as either “child-centered” or “parent-centered”, but rather strive to be Christ-centered. If pressed to describe this “center” in human terms only, they would probably say they are “family-centered”. To some of them, “parent-centered” sounds too much like “self-centered”.⁵⁷ This does not mean these families operate under some sort of “democratic model” where everyone is on an equal basis with an equal vote. On the contrary, many of these families model what some would consider “old-fashioned”

⁵⁵ Debra Evans, The Complete Book on Childbirth (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1986) p. 169

⁵⁶ This issue seems to take on special importance when there are toddlers in the house. Some mothers fear that if toddlers learn that it’s “o.k.” for baby to cry, they might be more apt to twist baby’s arm or bounce a block off baby’s head without their consciences being pricked; they will be less apt to be compassionate when baby is hurt.

⁵⁷ The struggle of “child-centered” versus “parent-centered” seems to be more of a problem in smaller families. Most larger families do not see this as an issue, perhaps because it has been long resolved or because the parents have grown out of their need to assert themselves and demand their “rights” to a life quite independent of their roles within the family. One mother discussed this in terms of family identity, “When you have only one child, you’re playing house. With two children, you’re a couple with two kids. With three children, you’re finally a family.” (Of course, she wasn’t implying that couples with only one child are not families; she was describing the stronger sense of family identity often found in larger families.)

roles within the family. The roles of father and mother are seen as distinctly separate, yet complementary. However, this is based on what is perceived to be a biblical model as opposed to a cultural holdover from the 1950's. None of these parents believed PCF to be part of a biblical model for parenting.

Basic philosophy: "Children are a blessing from the Lord!" The parents I am describing base their parenting as much as possible on God's Word, recognizing that in a number of areas there exists quite a bit of freedom. It is interesting to me that I do not find their "styles" or "philosophies" of parenting mentioned anywhere in the Ezzos' writings. Perhaps this is because their approaches cannot be easily characterized with a label such as "demand feeding" or "parent-controlled feeding" or "demand parenting" or "child-centered" or even "attachment parenting".

The bottom line on parenting...

When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Mt. 22:37-40) He also said, in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

In Focus:

A Response From Gary And Anne Marie Ezzo

In July 1993, Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo appeared on a local radio program⁵⁸ as a rebuttal to an earlier program that had featured three women with concerns about the Ezzos' parenting methodology. (I was one of those women.) I feel it is only fair that I include some of their remarks, specifically those that addressed my major points of disagreement with them.

Gary describes what he terms "this ministry" by saying, "We began to disciple young parents... in Biblical parenting and basic precepts of how to raise a godly child and how to help that child live out those precepts. And from that point on, the ministry just expanded to what it is today, now international to three or four, four different languages...it all comes back to some basic principles and basic premises." He then went on to give his view of the history of parenting philosophies, which can be found in most of his writings. He concluded this brief description, "Where Anne Marie and I come from, where we believe the Bible is, is right in the middle...that is, we want some structure in the lives of our children and we want to be concerned with their feelings. And that is what is represented in *Preparation for Parenting...*"

The interviewer stated, "In the area of Bible understanding, the presentation...in your curriculum [of] the Scriptures that you use to undergird the authority of what you have to say...some people do have some problems." He then quoted from a letter written by Focus on the Family: "At the very least, the authors' claim that their particular program represents the one and only correct and Biblical approach to parenting seems to us unnecessarily narrow."⁵⁹ He went on to pose the question, "Are you saying what you're saying from the Bible in a way that tends to bind the conscience of the believing person as if what you're saying is in fact the law of Christ, and if one doesn't follow the method that you've laid down that they're going to find themselves in a quandary, feeling guilty...?"

Gary answered, "I think those are real questions. As an author, with our material now in both cases zooming over a hundred thousand copies going out, a hundred thousand parents in both of the programs by the end of this year coming up, we want to be very sensitive to how we communicate. There's always room for improvement. We certainly acknowledge that. We always take criticism like that as a gift from God...we feel that anyone in the Christian community that can communicate a concern saying, 'I don't understand', to us, that means that we need to go back and if that's an area that we have failed to communicate clearly on, **clearly on**, we need to work on that."⁶⁰ And that's what we're going to be doing in the fourth edition of both *Growing Kids* and *Preparation for Parenting*. I will say,

⁵⁸ Rich Agozino, "In Focus" (Santa Maria, Calif., 5 July 1993), KGDP

⁵⁹ letter on file

⁶⁰ Those who have addressed their questions and concerns in letters to Gary Ezzo might believe that his replies did not reflect his view of criticism as a "gift from God". Someone suggested this is because we did not use the statement "I do not understand" but instead asked "Where is such-and-such a teaching found in the Bible?" or offered information that might indicate the validity of another viewpoint. Someone else (a man, by the way) suggested that Gary responded to us in the way he did merely because we were women; perhaps he would have dealt more graciously with our concerns had we been men or had we had our husbands sign our letters!

however, that I believe that, when listening to the broadcast two weeks ago, that some of the comments seemed to be slightly extreme in that, if we said those things, we wouldn't even want to be part of this program. If there was a confusion, part of it has to do with, there is a circle of understanding, a circle of knowledge, that every individual has. And for some folks, it's difficult to move off of their presuppositional paradigm and to allow other information to integrate that, and so much of the material could be, or some of the material could be, misunderstood. On the other hand, when we look at the other ninety-nine per cent of the people who understand it very, very clearly, you, again you raise the question as to the legitimacy, not so much of the sincerity of their hearts, but the legitimacy of the statements. That in no way means that we're not going to go back and investigate and try to find those areas that may not have been clearly communicated. God gives us principles in His Word. But apart from that, there are no exact how-to's, there is no blueprint to parent. There is nothing in Scripture that speaks about feeding babies. Whether you feed them on a routine, whether you feed them on a hyper-schedulist model, whether you feed 'em on a free feed, cry feed, or demand feeding — there's nothing in Scripture about that. And therefore, what you have is you have freedom from that point on⁶¹. What Scripture speaks about is the character of God. Therefore, what we must do is follow the character of God; we must follow all of the presuppositional bases that govern the basic family relationships, basic husband-wife relationships, and work from there. Apart from that, you have freedom. And that's why we say in all of our classes, especially this class, we ask all of our parents, our young parents, to go out and look, examine all of the philosophies. Look at, in this case, what these three gals are saying, the philosophy they're coming from, the attachment parenting philosophy; examine it closely, and you determine which one is right for you⁶². You determine which one is most representative and then, before God, you make that decision and then follow it. And we have always believed so strongly, in the Christian camp, in choice in parenting. We're here to give another option, a friendly option, to people."⁶³

Anne Marie spoke up, "I would say that would be another key, not only in the classes that we teach and others also, but hopefully it's communicated well in the

⁶¹ Somehow, the Ezzos have failed to communicate this freedom to those followers of theirs to whom I have personally spoken. Judging by the letter from Focus on the Family, they failed to communicate this to them. They failed to communicate this to me and to others I know who have studied this curriculum for over eighteen months. My conclusion to this critique will quote a few letters from additional parents, quite educated parents I might add, to whom they also failed to communicate this.

⁶² My limited personal experience has been that those who are taking and/or implementing the Prep course seem almost defensive and unwilling to listen to any other viewpoint. "I won't debate philosophy," is one response. Family members are often told, "This is what we're doing and we don't want to talk about it." I will speak more to the issue of divisiveness in my conclusion. (In addition, as one of the "three gals", I think my parenting philosophy was incorrectly categorized as "attachment parenting". I believe Gary's assumption might be that, since I parent in a way different from his teaching and use a few elements similar to "attachment parenting" — e.g., carrying babies in a sling, limited use of a playpen, having my toddlers work with me in the kitchen as opposed to being alone in their rooms — that this philosophy is what motivates my husband and me. This is simply not the case.)

⁶³ This friendly option also consists of Gary Ezzo's response to a Christian mother who voiced disagreement with him: "We recall that you based your parenting on the primitivistic marsupial mother approach and not the Bible." (Gary was referring to the mother having mentioned that she had decided to carry her medically compromised infant in a sling and that her decision had been based on prayer and on medical research.) To another mother he wrote, "You obviously realize we are in great disagreement. Your attempts to spiritualize what is clearly a freudian (sic) approach to parenting is part of the naturalistic wave that came out of the 1970's. That wave has just about run its course with failure and is on its way out and a new wave that is bringing parents to a biblical balance is rushing in." Was this written by the same man who says in this interview, "There is nothing in Scripture that speaks about feeding babies...what you have is freedom...we're here to give another option..."?

tapes and in the workbooks, is we want our parents to be thinking parents, and not just to make a decision based on emotions or their feelings at the moment because, and especially after you've had a new baby and your hormones are up and down, and so sometimes, you know, we as new moms won't necessarily make the absolutely right decision about things. And that's just part of womanhood and the hormonal changes that take place. So we do encourage our parents to pray about issues, to ask God for wisdom, and to think long term. That is one phrase in particular that many moms have shared with me is they so appreciate the fact of being encouraged to think long term. What is our ultimate goal in parenting? And obviously it will be to raise a child that will bring glory to God. And it's hard sometimes, when you've got a brand new baby, to think, how is what I'm going to do today going to affect this baby down the road? But it does come into play, and just even addressing that first issue, the question about this being the only way, and I think one thing that we do feel strongly about is reap and sow principles in the Bible. And there are issues, as it says even in Galatians, if you reap to the flesh, then those are the — I mean, if you sow to the flesh, you're going to reap those things. If you sow in spiritual issues, then those are the things you're going to reap also. And so we just want our parents to think, what are we sowing now and what are we going to reap later? If there's things that possibly could be misunderstood, that might be something."

Gary interjected, "I think that we get a very large volume of mail in our offices. It literally is a hundred to one in terms of parents who have been totally converted over.⁶⁴ They've had three children under one philosophy. Someone has introduced them to ours. They've done it and they've responded. Many of them have responded and said, 'You know, if you said it this way in your book, I think I would have responded with baby number three instead of baby number four.' We take those statements very, very seriously. We want to make those changes because we do not want the Body of Christ to be confused as to what is Ezzo and what is the Word of God because there is a big difference between the two.⁶⁵ And there is only one that really counts, and that is what the Word of God has to say."

The interviewer attempted to sum up the first section of the radio program: "You're saying that your philosophy, if you will, your design in using the Scripture as the warrant for authority behind what you're saying is more directed towards the character of the parents than it is to find specific Scriptures that are going to give

⁶⁴ While this statistic might seem impressive, it in no way indicates that what the Ezzos teach is truly Biblically sound. In testing for truth, for Biblical accuracy, one should never ask, "How many are following this teaching? How many have been 'converted'?" By that test, we might be tempted to convert to Islam, since it is the fastest growing religious body in the world!

⁶⁵ My entire point in writing this critique is that Gary and Anne Marie have not made clear "what is Ezzo and what is the Word of God", as they have twisted and misinterpreted Scripture in an effort to provide authority to their own personal, culturally and psychologically-biased, philosophy of parenting. This raises an interesting point: why have the Ezzos chosen to distribute books and materials that so misrepresent what they state in this interview? Why can they not communicate more effectively in writing?

warrant for method or technique.”⁶⁶

“Exactly,” both Ezzos replied. Gary elaborated, “Again, there’s a difference between the principle of God’s Word and the vehicle. There are many, many vehicles...” He went on to describe a technique the Ezzos teach parents for their children to use when they need to interrupt their parents. And then the show itself was interrupted by a commercial break. After the break, the discussion dealt with questions of breastfeeding and issues beyond the scope of this critique.

There was one additional point raised that I would like to mention. The interviewer asked about lactation amenorrhea and the suppression of ovulation. Anne Marie explained, “Well, just to define that part, while you’re lactating and particularly if you’re under the demand feeding philosophy as you are lactating, that holds off any cycles from returning. So basically, in kind of a nutshell, that would be briefly what it is. We are going to discuss a little more what that ensues but during the break we were talking a little more about just the sleep cycles and how they are stabilized — excuse me, the feeding cycles are stabilized, the lower brain stem function and that the sleep cycles also become stabilized.” Gary and Anne Marie drifted off into a discussion of infant sleep and wake cycles.

“The concern that is being raised then by your question,” Gary said, “will that then affect the use of lactation as a method of birth control? And the response is that medical authorities know and I’m sure the gals who were here also would agree with the fact that lactation is not a sure way of holding off the possibility of pregnancy. There are too many other factors that are involved. They use a prolactin index but that particular index is rather subjective in that there are too many, that means basically there are too many studies that contradict each other to allow for the idea that if you’re not going to lactate during the night you’re not going to have the opportunity to hold off the cycle. And to a degree that is somewhat, there is some truth to that. The question is, do you want to give up everything else? And the other question is, no where does Scripture say that this is God’s way for birth control.”

“You can’t have it both ways,” the interview commented.

“No, that’s right,” said Anne Marie.

“You can’t have it both ways,” agreed Gary. “You can’t use the laws of nature and elevate it above revelation in our theology.”

Some may wonder why I bring this up. During my more active involvement with pro-life ministry, I was surprised to discover that a growing number of Protestant, evangelical Christians are becoming convinced that the Bible does not condone the

⁶⁶ I would respond that the only areas where the Ezzos deal with the character of the parent seems to be in conjunction with the implementation of the Ezzo Method. Examples: the need for scheduling their proscribed routine (God is a God of order; He created an orderly universe; we are to do things “decently and in order”), the correct response to crying (God did not respond to the cries of His Son on the cross; we are to be sober-minded instead of ruled by our emotions), etc. It is interesting that little is said of love, grace, patience, self-sacrifice, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, tenderness, comfort — as these aspects are apparently deemed unnecessary within the Ezzo philosophy of infant management. In fact, some of the Ezzos’ followers have said to their friends, “I’m afraid I love my baby too much. I need to harden my heart” and “It’s wrong for me to try to comfort my baby by nursing her so I need to let her cry.” (Even though the Bible speaks beautifully of God comforting Israel as a baby is comforted at his mother’s breast!) Also, Scriptures **are** used by the Ezzos in attempt to justify their techniques and methodology, as I hope was readily apparent to the reader of the first few sections of this critique.

use of artificial means of birth control. In fact, a number of books and articles have been written on this very issue. While some parents and authors have pointed out the rather godless and immoral origins of much of the modern contraceptive movement, others have expressed concern over the side effects many women suffer as a result of various forms of birth control, as well as the potential abortifacient properties of some methods. My admittedly limited reading of the medical literature on the topic would seem to indicate that if a mother nurses “ad lib” (no feeding schedule other than that set by the infant) around the clock, uses no supplements or pacifiers, and does not introduce solids until the baby is five or six months old, she can expect her cycle to return on the average between nine to twenty months after the birth of her child. During this time of lactation amenorrhea, the risk of pregnancy is about 5%, although some studies indicate an even lower risk. Most of the studies I read, and the mothers with whom I spoke about this topic, suggested that what is often termed “natural” or “unrestricted” breastfeeding for at least the first six months will result in babies being spaced on the average every two to three years.

Yes, Gary is right in saying, “No where does Scripture say that this is God’s way for birth control”. Nor does Scripture say that chemicals, hormones, surgery, and sundry mechanical devices are God’s way for birth control. (Some have argued that careful obedience to Scripture would preclude some, if not all, of these methods.) I would also remind readers, no where does Scripture say that the Ezzo Method is God’s way for raising children. In fact, the Ezzo Method would pose a real quandary for those couples who feel strongly convicted that they are to avoid artificial contraceptives and that the relationship between unrestricted breastfeeding, child spacing, and natural family planning is all part of God’s wonderful and miraculous plan for the family.

Listening to this interview left me puzzled. Why is there such discrepancy between what the Ezzos say and what they write? Is the controversy surrounding the Ezzo Method merely a case of misunderstanding and miscommunication? Had I failed to notice, during my study of the Ezzos’ materials, during my conversations with the Ezzos’ followers, during my correspondence with Gary, and during my listening to their own radio program, that Gary and Anne Marie really believe and teach that the Bible is silent on the issue of infant feeding and management, that we have freedom in this area, and that their method is merely one option out of many? Had their strange use of Scripture merely been another case of miscommunication?

While I was writing this critique, *Christianity Today* came out with a story on the Ezzos. Rather than approach the issue from a Biblical or theological perspective, the writer of the article chose to address the health issue. “Does a new curriculum for families build up the parent-child relationship, or put infants at risk?” the article asked.⁶⁷ The author of the article also saw a contradiction between how Gary Ezzo responds to questions and what is stated in the curriculum:

Ezzo says he did not want to create the impression that his is the only biblical approach to parenting. “There’s no biblical issue governing feeding babies. It’s an area of freedom.”

However, Preparation for Parenting paints a different picture, saying, “Working from a biblical mindset and practicing demand-feeding can never be harmonized since the two are incompatible

⁶⁷ Thomas S. Giles, “The Brave New Baby” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, pg. 34-36

philosophies.”...

...Joan Wagner, former director of early childhood ministries at Lake Avenue Congregational Church, says that in person, the Ezzos encourage flexibility in their approach. “[But] their written materials do lend themselves toward a formula approach.

“I wouldn’t want [Preparation for Parenting] just out there in the community because of the chance for excess and no chance to monitor those that might be given to that excess.”

The article’s author quotes a former follower of the Ezzo Method: “They use compelling Scriptures in the newsletter to inspire families to raise children according to the Ezzos’ program.” Scott Bauer, Church on the Way’s executive director of ministries was quoted as saying, “The printed materials were very dogmatic about a schedule-fed baby. Parent-directed feeding is *the* way, the Bible way, children are fed.” (emphasis in the original)

The article also mentions that the Ezzos are revising *Preparation for Parenting*:

Ezzo has asked Nancy Williams⁶⁸ to write part of the new edition. He says she is “one of the top lactation consultants” in La Leche League. Ironically, in his third edition, Ezzo frequently refers to the La Leche League in negative terms, saying, “La Leche League International has led the charge” toward demand feeding, which he asserts is based on unbiblical principles.

While writing the current edition, Ezzo did not actively consult any lactation experts or other health-care professionals, except his wife Anne Marie, a registered nurse with a background in pediatric nursing.⁶⁹

What changes the Ezzos will choose to make in their curriculum remains to be seen.

⁶⁸ Nancy Williams, by the way, is one of the “three gals” to whom Gary made reference. He met with her for the first time after the broadcast. Although she originally considered accepting his invitation to help revise his curriculum, reading his latest book, Babywise, has caused her to decline.

⁶⁹ I was informed by a member of the staff with Growing Families International that Anne Marie received her degree before her now adult children were ever born, that she worked only briefly (and part-time at that) in the field of pediatric nursing, and that she has not worked professionally since the birth of her children.

Conclusion

The ministry of being a mother or father...nothing else seems so demanding, yet so rewarding. What joy there can be! And yet, what sorrow can pierce us as well! We tend, as parents, to be vulnerable — and perhaps that is why we become so defensive over the whole issue of how to go about this ministry. We so desperately want to be right, that sometimes we are willing to attack others as wrong. This has not been my intent.

In researching the Ezzos' teaching, I have been told of churches, families and friends that have suffered from divisiveness as a result of the *Prep* course. Parents have been criticized for following their own consciences and determining that the Ezzo Method is not for their family. Parents have felt under attack for raising some of the issues I have raised in this critique, or for questioning the medical basis for the Ezzos' teaching, or for merely adopting a parenting practice not mandated by Gary and Anne Marie. Christian mothers and fathers who attempt to live their lives in accordance with Scripture have been, by the Ezzos and their followers, called "secular humanists", labeled as "primitivistic marsupial mothers", accused of "lies and fabrications", warned that they are allowing their babies to rule their homes, and been told that they obviously base their personal philosophies on some extra-Biblical source or they would be implementing the Ezzo Method. This is tragic. Those that advocate the Ezzo Method claim of the wonderful benefits to their families⁷⁰, yet apparently a fair number of these advocates seem appalled and almost angry at those unwilling to "sign up"; they seem troubled that not everyone recognizes these supposed benefits or that other parents may wish to adopt different parenting methods to achieve their own goals for their families.⁷¹

One concerned father wrote: "...the spirit in which the Ezzos deliver their methodology is elitist and divisive. They insist that their way is the only way to raise children...NO WHERE (sic) do I see anything in the Bible which allows this sort of claim to exclusivity in child-raising..." He went on to comment ominously, "One of the first steps toward a cult is a unilateral claim on exclusivity."⁷²

Another couple wrote, "It is our opinion that the Ezzos are teaching their own personal parenting techniques, and labeling them as biblical truths...The real danger is that they are indoctrinating an entire age group of young Christian parents by calling their teaching biblical. Time and time again we came away from the Ezzos' classes trying to figure out how they could 'stretch' biblical meanings of scripture verses to justify and accommodate their own techniques and opinions...we feel they are promoting a type of cult. Gary and Anne Marie personally taught the first seminar we attended. They emphatically stated...that we should not discuss

⁷⁰ Some of the glowing testimonials I have heard: "I have more time for myself", "Life is so much more predictable with this schedule", "I'm not so tired", "It's really easy for me to leave this baby and I'm enjoying my freedom!" and "My husband likes feeling like he has me all to himself instead of always having to share me with the baby." I have yet to hear a testimony concerning the well-being of the baby.

⁷¹ This has been reported to me by others; it is not merely my own experience. Certainly I am not holding the Ezzos personally responsible for everything their followers might say or do. However, it is interesting to note the effect the Ezzos' teaching seems to have on a number of people. Or perhaps this reflects no so much on the Ezzos' teaching *per se*, but on the type of parents who find it attractive?

⁷² letter on file

anything we learned in class with outsiders...Gary and Anne Marie worked to make us feel as though we would be 'Godly Parents' by cutting a new path and that this path would be opposed by many people....The Ezzos teach that their parenting method is the only one that is truly God's way".⁷³

Yet a third letter says, "Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo state that their parenting techniques are truly and unequivocally 'God's Way' for rearing children. Not only this, but they make it quite clear that other parenting styles, especially opposing ones, are not biblical and are not 'God's Way'...Once young couples are initially committed to the Ezzo program(s)...they are specifically told not to discuss what they will be learning with outsiders, nor to be concerned with their opposition or conflicting viewpoints. Gary Ezzo claims these viewpoints are societal and cultural in nature and that they have no biblical basis. These kind of cultic overtones are very alarming to me."⁷⁴ These three letters were from parents who had been through the "Prep" course and included honors graduates of colleges as well as graduate schools, a university professor, and church leaders. They obviously present a picture quite different than that presented by Gary and Anne Marie in their radio interview.

In addition, the article in *Christianity Today* stated, "The Ezzos also forbid debate in their classes and tell parents not to initiate conversations about the curriculum outside class. Some professionals fear these rigid rules may keep parents from talking about the Ezzo program with their own doctors."⁷⁵

Perhaps, in the new, upcoming edition of *Preparation for Parenting*, the Ezzos will make a number of corrections. Perhaps they will commit themselves to sound exegesis and will revise all of their sections where they misuse the Word of God. Perhaps they will no longer attempt to claim a Biblical basis for statements that are merely their own opinions. Perhaps they will clarify this whole issue of the teaching of God's Word versus the teaching of the Ezzos by re-titling their curriculum and by including qualifiers such as "In our opinion...", "We suggest...", "It is our personal philosophy that...", and "A number of our parents have found..." Perhaps they will emphasize that godly parents have a variety of options available to them in terms of infant management techniques and that the Ezzo Method is just one option, and neither the only nor the most biblical one. Perhaps the Ezzos will clean up what I am told are a number of errors in their medical information. Perhaps they will no longer seem to malign the character or intelligence of those who would choose another parenting practice rather than to adopt an Ezzo-mandated schedule, and perhaps they will admit that there are parents who do not fit into their narrow categorizations. Perhaps they will take pains to prevent the impression that they are making claims to exclusivity, and instead will urge their followers to be critical only of those parenting practices directly forbidden by Scripture. Perhaps they will encourage open dialogue among parents with differing viewpoints. Perhaps they will offer a more complete and balanced view of what the Bible does teach concerning the roles of mothers and fathers. Perhaps they will undertake the major task of gutting and revising their entire work, and will implement this seemingly radical change in philosophy. It remains to be seen.

However, even if they do, damage has been done. How can the Ezzos possibly reach every parent who has fallen victim to the errors contained in their teaching?

⁷³ letter on file

⁷⁴ letter on file

⁷⁵ Thomas S. Giles, "The Brave New Baby" *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1993, pg. 34-36

Corrections and modifications will only be helpful for new parents; they will not benefit those who already own the books and have already taken the courses.

We can only speculate on the long term consequences of following the Ezzo Method as taught in the third editions of both *Preparation for Parenting* and *Growing Kids God's Way*. An interesting point has been raised in this regard: what will happen in the next generation, when the "Prep babies" (as they are often termed by Ezzo followers) reach adulthood? What sort of relationships will they have with their parents, especially as their parents age and perhaps become more dependent on their children? Some have speculated that these adult children, if they continue to follow the Ezzo philosophy, will place their own marriages and convenience far above the needs of their parents. They will not have had the opportunity to see and experience a model of servanthood and unselfish giving even in the face of inconvenience. Perhaps it will be all too easy for them to "build a giant playpen for the old folks" (as someone joked) and send their parents off to languish in an institution.⁷⁶ One wonders.

⁷⁶ In true proof-texting tradition, they can even attempt to justify their dishonoring of their parents by quoting Genesis 2:24: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Lest anyone be convinced by this sort of excuse, let me hasten to quote I Timothy 5:8, which speaks of what we term the "extended family" when it warns, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." Let us also remember that the command to honor our parents is not age-dependant.

Bibliography and Sources

In addition to the Bible, my husband and I have used a number of sources in gaining a deeper understanding of God's Word and formulating our personal philosophy of parenting. Listed below are those that have been most helpful in providing information, balance and guidance in my study of the Ezzos' teaching.

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In addition to the above sources, this critique was also influenced by informal interviews and conversations with parents of well over fifty families, written testimonies from numerous families, perhaps a dozen classes or seminars on Christian parenting offered through churches or educational organizations, discussions with several pastors, and the examples of many godly parents who have inspired my husband and me over the years.