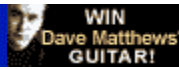


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An Evaluation of the Ezzo Parenting Programs: Growing Kids God's Way & Preparation for Parenting



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Saturday, April 07, 2001

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I. Process of Analysis

*“But examine everything {carefully}; hold fast to that which is good;
I Thessalonians 5:21*



Dates of Evaluation

Initial evaluation (Committee)	1997
Revised evaluation (Dr. McClain)	2000

Background of Evaluating Author

Dr. Kent McClain

Academic Preparation

Bachelor of Arts	Point Loma University	(History and Speech)
Master of Arts	University of Wyoming	(Speech Communication)
Master of Science	National University	(Educational Administration)
Master of Arts	Northwest Baptist Seminary	(Biblical Studies)
Doctorate Ministry	Christian Learn. Inst. of Denver	(Practical Ministry)

Experience

Elementary and Secondary School Teacher
 Youth Pastor and College Pastor
 Senior Pastor and Christian Education Director
 Children/Family Life Ministries Pastor
 K-12 Christian School Principal/Pastor

The Committee

The committee that assisted in this initial evaluation was made up of a number of church elders and leaders, a school teacher, a Christian Psychologist, and many well educated and concerned parents. In response to the evaluation, a report and recommendation was submitted in 1997 to the attending church in Arizona. The present evaluation is based on some of those original observations and assessments. The additional time (1998-2000) afforded me the opportunity to write my own evaluation of the Ezzo program.



Abbreviations

GFI	Growing Families International
GKGW	Growing Kids God's Way
PFP	Preparation For Parenting

1997 Committee Observation Process

The overall analysis by the committee took about eight months to complete (March '97-October '97).

1. All materials (GKGW & PFP) were read by Dr. McClain and an accompanying committee.
2. All of the GKGW videos were reviewed by Dr McClain.
3. A church committee chaired by Dr. McClain met over an eight-month period of time. The committee invited concerned church members and met once with the Regional Director for GKGW, Chris Christiansen. (Dr. McClain met with Chris four times.)
4. Other parenting materials were brought to the committee for comparison, such as Tim Kimmel's, *"Raising Kids Who Turn Out Right."*
5. Dr. McClain talked with Gary Ezzo, over the phone. He later traveled to L.A. to meet personally with Gary Ezzo, who later canceled the prearranged meeting.
6. Dr. McClain spoke with churches who have used the GFI programs. Some of the churches spoke highly of the program, but many others voiced serious concerns.
7. Dr. McClain spoke by phone and personally met with Stewart Scott the Family Ministries Pastor at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles church. John MacArthur's church was the birthing place of Gary Ezzo's parenting program.
8. The committee dialogued with many Christian parents who were proponents of the program, as well as those who were dissatisfied with it.
9. Dr. McClain sought opinions from some of the leading Family Life Conference speakers and authors in Christian child development (Dr. Kevin Lehman, Dr. Tim Kimmel, and Dr James Dobson).
10. The committee collected related materials and evaluations from key web sites and major churches (John McArthur's Church in Los Angeles, Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, and Fullerton Evangelical Free in California).
11. The committee reviewed a number of Christian books relating to raising children (Bringing Up Kids Without Tearing Them Down -Kevin Lehman).
12. The committee spent considerable time in prayer over this evaluation.

II.

The Overall Observation



2000 Dr. Kent McClain's Observation

The following are my general observations of parenting challenges, The GFI program, and individual

parent responsibility with any parenting program.

1. The GFI program seems to be gaining popularity with many church families around the country. This is not surprising since many Christian parents are looking for practical suggestions for raising their children. These are nervous times for parents who see many of today's undisciplined youth disregard adult authority, disrespect classroom teachers, disdain the laws of the land, and gravitate toward drugs, alcohol, and sexual experimentation.
2. Christian parents want answers, and in response many Christian family life leaders have tried to respond in part through Christian parenting books, conferences, and radio broadcasts. But as one parent stated months ago, "It's too difficult to run from one author to the other trying to find answers, and the expense of each book, or conference is prohibitive."
3. In response, the Ezzo's put together a program (GFI) that is well organized, relatively inexpensive, and easy to follow. The Ezzo's are to be commended for the effort. They have resurrected from our past educational philosophies some excellent principles which, even though they may be behavioristic at points, can be helpful with certain children at different ages. Some of these principles can even be supported by Scripture (Eph. 6:4.)
4. As an example, (Session #5, GKGW, "The Father's Mandate"), Gary Ezzo teaches in a video session some great principles about the role of a father. He points out how important it is for a father to allow freedom to fail as long as an effort is made. His relationship with his daughters seems commendable in this session of discovery.
5. **What is the reason for concern?** Since there are some positives in the program in a culture that desperately needs rules and guidance in parenting and the program is growing in popularity, why criticize the Ezzo's parenting program? In fact, many have said to me, "Let each Christian parent choose out of the program what is good or not for his own children." Each time I heard this comment, I prayerfully took a step back, delaying my evaluation. But I equally heard from many parents who have had great difficulties with the program and poor results. In response to those comments I continued to step forward with this analysis.
6. The hope in this current (July, 2000) analysis is that you establish a discerning basis when applying any program that will effect the raising of your children. Not surprisingly, faithful Christians are not always right on every issue. 2000 years of church history have proven that. How many denominations do we have today, because one biblical issue or approach could not be agreed upon by fellow Christians?
7. **You are responsible!** No matter how you respond to my analysis, ultimately, you are the one responsible for raising the children God has given you. Follow the Scripture, it is your greatest written ally from God. As parents of two faithful servants of God (a 24 year old boy & an 21 year old girl,) all the parenting programs in the world pale in comparison to the plan we followed, which was a daily commitment to pray, obey, and seek the advice from other Christian parents who traveled the trail before.

III.

Four Areas of Concern



“Then you will understand what is right and just and fair-every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.” - Proverbs 2:9-11

This section is a brief overview of the four areas of concern that should be considered before using any of the Growing Families International programs on parenting. More detail will be added to these concerns in Section IV. The areas of concern and their descriptions are as follows:

1) Missing Biblical Cornerstones

The program, which purports to be God’s plan for raising children, fails to cover essential biblical teachings such as: the knowledge of redemption/salvation, how to walk by faith, the exercise of prayer, family devotions, etc.

2) Mishandling of Scripture - Fact vs. Opinion

It is difficult to distinguish between the Ezzos’ opinions, actual fact, and biblical principle. They periodically create the impression that their own ideas of parenting are Scriptural, when they may not be.

3) Presence of Legalism

The program has a tendency of making parenting applications more significant than the biblical context allows. The material routinely moralizes parenting suggestions forcing decisions to be either biblically right and wrong.

4) Questionable Views of Child Development

The materials display a questionable understanding of child development. Many of the discipline suggestions are not age appropriate.

IV. Data Supporting Four Areas of Concern





Concern # 1
Missing Biblical Cornerstones

The parenting program is named **Growing Kids God’s Way**, which may give the program participant the idea that this is a complete, biblical program in raising children. **It is not!** The program focuses primarily on discipline. Some teachings on discipline have biblical roots and some do not. Discipline is important; the Bible speaks on it. However, there are other issues which are missed that are equally more important.

That is not to say a program guiding parents in child discipline is not needed in our society. But it is very possible that this program has missed the greatest goal in Christian parenting. The greatest goal is to lead a child to a saving knowledge of Christ (redemption). Without the redemption of a child, what would it matter whether children responded to discipline in the home or not? Without such instruction and response they would spend their lives on earth and in eternity without the presence of God.

God’s plan to redeem man is one of the overriding themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. This program gives little or no attention to it. If this were a program teaching parents how to raise children according to a biblical plan, then at least one major section would be devoted to the redemption of a child. Teaching redemption is so important in the Bible that Jesus spent one third of his teaching ministry training the disciples in redemption. How can the GKGW program be God’s plan in raising children if the redemption of a child is not a major issue? What about the subjects of prayer, faith, and the Word; where are these teaching sections in this parenting program?

In courtesy to the Ezzos, I believe they would like all children in their program to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, but their goals in parenting mistakenly miss this important element. It would better serve this program to include these areas or rename the program: *“Growing Kids in Discipline According to Gary and Ann Marie Ezzo.”*

The following page is the Ezzo’s “Subject Index” (GKGW) for raising children according to God’s plan. Discover for yourself what is missing, and ask is this truly God’s way of raising children? Enclosed in the box are the biblical priorities that I feel are essential to a Christian parenting program. It would be impossible to title a parenting program Growing Kids God’s Way without these priorities.

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4. How to receive and understand salvation.
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9. The role of the Holy Spirit
10. The forgiveness of God
11. The call to serve others
12. The identification of spiritual gifts
13. The essentials to a personal and family prayer time
14. The explanation of the Trinity

We the committee at Grace Community Church, Tempe, Arizona, feel that the above are vital cornerstones in raising Christian, God fearing children.

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Concern #2 Mishandling of Scripture

Although there are over 1700 references referring to children in the Bible, only a few directly apply to parenting advice and application. In response to this limitation of Scripture dealing directly with parenting as a subject in the Bible, three questions need to be posed to the Ezzos concerning their use of Scripture.

Question #1

Is the Ezzos Scriptural approach for establishing their parenting theories biblically applicable or accurate?

Since the Ezzos claim their program is a biblical view of parenting, then great discernment must be applied in respect to the Scripture they use to establish their parenting principles. In my opinion some key Scriptures used in the program have been mishandled and stretched out of context in order to validate the Ezzo's opinion of parenting. It seems as though the Ezzos predetermined their parenting principles and then carelessly aligned them with what they thought were related Scriptures. Some of the Scriptures are not as related as they seem, as the Creation and Cross accounts in this part of the analysis will prove. (*See Fact or Opinion-page 14; Focus on the Family evaluation-page 28; Christianity Today's evaluation-page 32*).

The following passages of Scripture that in my opinion are either taken out of context or misapplied. In all, there are over 70 references of Scripture that need to be looked at carefully, before a biblical mandate is applied.

- **Out of context** verses occurs when the Scripture reference is taken out of its setting to prove a parenting application. Thus, the validity of the parenting application cannot alone stand on this particular Scripture.
- **Misapplication** occurs when the parenting application used could be valid, but not in context with the passage of Scripture being used. The resolve is to use other Scriptures that directly deal with the context of the parenting principle being advocated. This disciplined method of analysis maintains the integrity of each passage of Scripture, and effects a more accurate application.

Scriptures in Question

Growing Kids God's Way Manual
(Analyzed by John Pruitt: church elder)

1.	Page 9	Ephesians 3:20	Possible Misapplication
2.	Page 10	I Samuel 16:7	Possible Misapplication
3.	Page 16	II Cor. 5:18-20	Possible Misapplication
4.	Page 16	I Peter 1:16	Possible Misapplication
5.	Page 16	Proverbs 17:28	Possible Misapplication
6.	Page 18	I Cor. 13:11, Matt. 18:3	Possible Misapplication
7.	Page 21-22	I Cor. 14:33	Possible Misapplication
8.	Page 25	Proverbs 4:23	Possible Misapplication
9.	Page 29	Phil. 3:13	Possible Misapplication
10.	Page 36	Matt. 28:19-20	Possible Misapplication
11.	Page 36	I Peter 3:2,16	Possible Misapplication
12.	Page 37	Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; James 2:1-10	Possible Misapplication
13.	Page 39	Proverbs 3:3-4	Possible Misapplication
14.	Page 50	I. Cor. 3:16	Out of Context
15.	Page 98	Jn. 17:17, Matt. 7:24-27	Out of Context
16.	Page 103	Acts 23:1	Possible Misapplication
17.	Page 104	Rom. 1:18-21, 2:14-15; Ps. 119:11	Possible Misapplication
18.	Page 107	Ex. 20:14, Matt. 5:28	Possible Misapplication
19.	Page 108	Psalms 119:11	Possible Misapplication
20.	Page 109	2 Sam. 24:10	Possible Misapplication
21.	Page 111	Col. 3:16	Possible Misapplication (Sin is not issue in this verse)
22.	Page 122	Phil. 2:3	Possible Misapplication
23.	Page 124	Eph. 6:1-4	Possible Misapplication
24.	Page 127	Rom. 1:29-30, 2:2	Possible Misapplication

25.	Page 128	Gal. 3:24	Possible Misapplication
26.	Page 131	Prov. 4:1-7, Jn 15:15	Possible Misapplication
27.	Pg. 141-142* *PFP Manual	Matt. 27:26	Possible Misapplication
28.	Page 161	Rom. 8:19-22	Possible Misapplication
29.	Page 172	Heb. 12:11	Possible Misapplication
30.	Page 185	Pro. 29:15b; 1:8-9; 22:15a	Possible Misapplication
31.	Page 186	1 Peter 1:16	Out of Context
32.	Page 188	Prov. 15:23; 25:11	Possible Misapplication
33.	Page 201	Deut. 8:5, II Sam. 7:14; Pro. 19:18; Heb. 12:67; Heb. 12:6-7; Rev. 3:19	Out of Context
34.	Page 209	Prov. 22:6	Possible Misapplication
35.	Page 267	Prov. 22:15	Possible Misapplication
36.	Page 272	John 13:34-35	Out of Context
37.	Page 274	Heb. 11:6	Out of Context
38.	Page 277	Titus 3:8	Out of Context
39.	Page 301	Pro. 20:11	Possible Misapplication
40.	Page 311	Pro. 19:18	Possible Misinterpretation

Question #2

Is there evidence of Scriptural misapplication specifically explained in this evaluation?

In one of the parenting theories, the program determined that the husband and wife relationship hold the highest priority in the family. Regardless of age, children should not be allowed to disturb or alter the husband-wife relationship. If there is a center of attention in the family, it should not be with the children, but the husband and wife.

Quotes from the GKGW manual (pg. 63-64)

“. . . marriage is the priority relationship, all other relationships must be subject to it.”

“Often parents leave their first love, each other, and focus extensively on their children. Although this may be done in the name of good parenting, it is the first step to the break up of family relationship.”

“Parents who center their entire world around the nurture of children are child-centered.”

“Child-centered parenting attacks the husband-wife relationship by reducing its biblical significance.”

The Ezzos Creation Parenting Principle Misapplication

Whether you agree with the view of the husband and wife priority or not, the disturbing fact remains that the Creation account was their biblical basis for making such an assertion on parenting. The Ezzos attempt a lengthy explanation trying to make this work, first claiming that there was a concept of dependency inherent in all creation (pg. 63, GKGW.) According to them, what God created on the second day was dependent on the first day. Therefore, what was created on the first day had priority over the second day. Since the husband and wife were created first in the Garden, their relationship superseded that of the children. What they are trying to work toward in this biblical analysis is to abandon the practice of making the children the center of family nurturing. As you read pages 63-65 in GKGW, ask yourself, how did I get from the Creation account to the concept of not being child

centered in my parenting?

The creation account doesn't hide any secret messages, it simply records God's creation of the world in Genesis 1-3. The messages is very clear: 1) God created Adam and Eve in His likeness, 2) God gave Adam and Eve a paradise to live in, 3) God allowed them to be tempted by Satan, 4) God rescued Adam and Eve when they sinned, and 5) God set in motion a plan of redemption for Adam and Eve and the world that followed. There is no teaching within the context about the priority of the husband-wife relationship that deters parents from being too child centered in their parenting. In fact there is no other passage of Scripture, including those that deal directly with parental advice, that even infers such a concept. That doesn't mean the advice is not good or workable, but it is not biblical.

Dr. McClain's Adam and Eve Parenting Principle Misapplication

In order to briefly illustrate my point further, I will take the same Creation account (Gen. 1-3) to establish my own parenting principle, which I will call the Adam and Eve Parenting Principle. I believe this principle ("tongue in cheek") *is biblically inspired, logical, and guide worthy. From the outset, I will tell you that I cannot use this as a biblical mandate, because it is a parenting principle I devised while reading the Word, not one that came directly from the Word. It is a biblical inspiration not a biblical principle.*

Since the Trinity (God the Father, Son, & Spirit) are the perfect parents of us all, then Christian parents should treat their children in the same way that Adam and Eve (Mankind's infant beginnings) were treated in the Garden. Adam and Eve were the center of the Trinity's thoughts and efforts. An entire world was created around them, they were in God's image, and there was nothing God didn't do for them. He gave them a protective Garden to live in, and then granted them the freedom of choice. When they failed in that choice, God rescued them, and established a plan of redemption for them and all of mankind. As centuries passed, mankind was given progressively more knowledge and opportunities to trust God. The greatest parenting act of all time was when God sent His own son to save His beloved, but rebellious children. In the midst of all this Godly parenting, never once does the Trinity debate the importance of man. Man was the center of their attention, and so should children be at the center of each parent's attention. That is what I refer to as the Adam and Eve Principle of Parenting, which I was biblically inspired by to use in my own parenting. ***Is not a biblical principle in Scripture; the context does not allow this.***

Whether you agree with the GFI's inspired teaching on the Creation account or mine, realize neither one interprets the context, therefore the application may or may not be biblically valid.

Question #3

Is there Fact vs. Opinion confusion in the GFI parenting program?

Another complication in the GFI parenting program is the intermixing of fact and opinion. In many cases the Ezzos have some good opinions on parenting and give reasonable advice. In the PFP Program, they list some specific suggestions on determining the reason behind a baby's cry. Some of those suggestions are:

- 1) Listen for the type of cry (dirty diaper, trapped gas, illness)
- 2) Think about your baby's routine. Is nap time over, has he/she been in the swing too long? (pg. 153, PFP.)

The confusion comes when the Ezzos make the mistaken effort to add biblical support to their

parenting opinions. Biblical support that is often taken out of context. In response, many Christians will faithfully adopt these parenting opinions as biblical fact because they are purported to come from the inspired and inerrant Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Once again let me emphasize, the Ezzo's parenting opinions may be helpful, but many cannot be used as applications from the Scriptures chosen.

An example the Ezzos incorrectly used Christ's travail at the cross as a biblical basis for delaying a response to a baby's cry. As the manual records, "Our heavenly Father's non-intervention to His Son's cry at that moment was the right response. . . it is used to demonstrate that God does not always respond to cry-cues immediately and without thought." (Page 142, Prepared Parenting Manual.) The travail at the cross had nothing to do with delayed response to a child's cry.

Ezzos' moral approach

In the final lectures of the series GKGW, I was relieved to hear Gary Ezzo finally claim that some of his parenting principles did not always have a biblical basis. Perhaps this was said to answer recent criticism, I do not know. But then he corrected himself by stating they did have a moral basis. As an example in lesson 8 on character development, The Child Interrupt Rule was not a biblical principle, but a moral mandate. **You cannot have a moral mandate without a biblical foundation. The Bible amongst many things is the moral center and foundation, a document behind all moral decision making.**

Concern # 3

Presence of Legalism

Even though the Ezzos openly reject legalism in parenting, they are often guilty of using this approach in many of their parenting applications. The following list defining legalism comes from the Ezzos' own definition on page 52-53 in the GKGW manual.

- 1 Legalism creates prohibitions by elevating a method over biblical principle.
- 2 Whenever someone wants to lower the standard, he is the first to call those who keep the standard, legalists.
- 3 The legalists see all decisions in life as either black (immoral) or white (moral.) He or she acknowledges no gray areas.
- 4 The most notable aspect of a legalist is this: he rejects context. Considering context guards against legalism.
- 5 When there is no direct or indirect prohibition in Scripture, you have a "gray area." To bind the believer based on the gray areas of life contradicts the Apostle Paul's teaching to accept that "one man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." (Rom. 14:15)

Throughout the Ezzos' applications of parenting principles there are often great leaps between what a Scripture teaches in context and the application drawn. The Ezzos take a potentially good idea, and try to insure it with a biblical mandate which becomes a moral decision. The Ezzos take the commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Steal" (given to Moses at Mt. Sinai) as the Scriptural text and basis for returning a grocery store shopping cart to its original position after use. The Ezzos move from the command, "Thou Shalt Not Steal," to an application that infers the violator (the one who doesn't return the cart) is immoral, and unholy in the eyes of God.

In the manual GKGW, it says:

“You create these feelings in others each time you abandon your shopping cart. The context makes the act immoral.” (pg. 157, GKGW)

“When you are finished taking your groceries to the car, do you return your shopping cart to the appropriate place? Men and women who live by biblical ethics should not leave their shopping cart squeezed between two cars.” (pg. 156, GKGW)

The inference of not being holy for violating this shopping cart principle does not appear in the manual, but in the Ezzo’s video presentation. And even that can be confusing, because the Ezzos state that if there is a conflict between what is said in a conference and what appears in the manual, the manual is the final authority. But the power of influence of what the Ezzos teach lies in the tapes. For this reason, I will transcribe the portion of his teaching, word for word, in order to give you the full context of what was taught using the shopping cart illustration. As you read this transcript, you review the five things Ezzo defined as legalism, and ask does he violate his own teaching? Is the application elevated above the context? The legalist sees all things in black and white (moral and immoral.) Do the Ezzos make a moral issue out of a shopping cart? The legalist disregards context in making an application; do the Ezzos disregard this context, “Thou Shalt Not Steal,” in order to establish a parenting principle engulfing a shopping cart? The Ezzos support the idea that where there is no direct or indirect prohibition of Scripture then you have a gray area, which is okay. Is the parenting principle of returning a shopping cart a gray area or is it black and white (moral or immoral?) In order for it to qualify as a moral issue, it cannot have any exceptions.

Gary Ezzo speaking:

“We have a natural propensity to substitute our value system for the value system of other people. (Serious tone to the voice) We are going to put our value, (repeat) our value, on their property, and then we make a judgment with our own children. I usually demonstrate this by using the shopping cart analogy. . .ladies and gentlemen, the question you have to answer is how much value does a shopping cart have to you? Right!~I mean you know, the shopping cart that you go shopping with, that you put your groceries in, that you go out to your car with. Here’s a better question, how much value does that shopping cart have to its owner? That’s the legitimate question. How much value does that shopping cart have to its owner? Now ladies and gentlemen, when you go shopping you fill up your cart,. . . you take it out of the store, you take it up to the car, . . . you unload your groceries. Listen very carefully,. . .what do you do with your cart? Yes, I hear, I hear, I hear the guilt (laughter from audience). What do you do with your cart? Do you, ladies and gentlemen leave your cart (serious tone in voice) right there?

No! because Christians don’t do that (sarcasm intended).

What do Christians do? (serious tone now) Christians who do not live in mediocrity,. . . Christians who live by a higher standard, (high pitched tone in voice). . .Christians who are other oriented, Christians who recognize the preciousness of others,. . . Christians who recognize the property values. These Christians take their shopping cart back to the front of the store. And then your kids say, “mommy, what are you doing, nobody else does that?” Because we are Christians and this is right, this is right (crescendo building). Yea!. . . this is right!. . . You guys know the experience, your dominion sensor goes off. You are driving around ladies, and you are looking,. . . or gentlemen,. . . you are looking for a parking spot; finally you find one; you see it,. . . it’s over there,. . . you see a space between a couple of cars, and you begin to pull in and there’s 2 or 3 shopping carts there,. . . and then you get upset. Now that’s all right, one of those are mine from last week (audience laughs). Yea, you get upset, your dominion sensor goes off. You begin to think, who would do something like this?. . . And then on a windy day, when the carts are pushed against your car. You think, doesn’t anyone have

any consideration?

A question to you. . .? Is that you? (serious tone) Listen, ladies and gentlemen, I've worked this out in conjunction with the

Holy Spirit (hard to figure if Ezzo meant this, but laughter came from audience) The next time you go shopping, . . . the next time you go shopping (repeat), and you take your cart out to the side of the car, and you unload your groceries and when you begin to let go of that cart, thinking I'm going to leave it here, let someone else serve me. Ladies and gentlemen, see this face! My face is going to appear, if you leave that cart. (laughter) I will be your guilt, you can drive away, but my face is going to be right there. You are going to have to stop your car, go back and get that cart and put it back in front of that store. Ladies and gentlemen, I guarantee you, I will promise you... if you've never done this before, . . . this is going to be a new experience, a new standard for you, and legitimately so. Because your heart is going to be confirmed, your heart is going to be confirmed (repeat) to the fact that your heart has lived to the standard you have received according to a value system that sees the preciousness of others. You have not operated on your value system, you've operated on the value system that owns that cart. It's thrilling to be able to do something morally beautiful. For no other reason other than, it's right! Go ahead and try it, ladies and gentlemen. Do you know what taking your shopping cart back is? It's 'boot camp' Christianity; taking your shopping cart back, . . . in fact, . . . in that moment. . . Get this!. . . I Peter 1:16 'Be ye holy for I am holy.' You say, taking back a shopping car? How can that be holy? Because in that moment you have agreed with God, not only in your heart, but because of your actions".

(Transcript of Tape - 1993

4th edition)

So how did you feel, at the end of this interpretation? Does taking your shopping cart reflect one of the key commandments of God given to Moses? Or would taking the shopping cart home, keeping it for your own personal use, or selling it for profit be reflective of the commandment? The parenting principle of being respectful of others is good, but it does not carry with it a moral mandate that leaves you unholy and riddled with this kind of approach, and if you are going to use some of their suggestions, then please consider the context of Scripture they advocate. If you are not sure, ask your local pastor, elder, or established Bible teacher for help.

Examples Of Possible Legalistic Parenting Practices In The Ezzo Program

The following are 10 examples of the Ezzos' parenting applications that can easily be practiced legalistically. Most of these were drawn out of the character development lessons 8, 9, and 10.

1. Opening Statement: "Everything that we teach is based on a moral model. All that we teach in GKGW gives certain Bible ethics in dealing with relationship." Tape 6, Lesson 9
2. Mr. and Mrs. title application: calling parents by first name is dishonoring authority, a break down of the commandment, "Honor thy mother and father." Page 41 GKGW
3. Buffet Line Illustration: First in line at buffet restaurant; not honoring to elderly, not good moral behavior, not biblically ethical, not honoring to God. Video Tape Session 8

4. The Interrupt Rule: “Don’t let them interrupt.”
This is not a biblical principle but is a moral issue. Video Tape Session 8
5. Family Witness: If you are not orderly with your children as with the interrupt rule, you hurt your family witness. So if the interrupt rule is not in place, the spread of the kingdom is damaged by your family witness. Session 8 Character Develop.
6. Shyness Example: Parents should not allow shyness as an excuse not to be courteous. Video Tape Session 8
7. Respect for pianos: Parents enter Church Sanctuary, banging on piano, running around. “Where is their morality, where is their biblical ethics?” Video Tape Session 8, Character Develop.
8. K-Mart Store: Someone interrupts line and asks question out of order! The dominion of others rule is violated. Video Tape Session 8 Character Develop.
9. Party next door: Leaving junk on lawn after party violates dominion of others, which is morally wrong Video Tape Session 8, 9, 10
10. “We believe the best evaluation of any parenting philosophy is found in the overall results.” Page 20 GKGW
*End doesn’t justify means

Other Areas of Apparent Legalistic Application

Page 10	The heart of a child
Page 127	Allegiance
Page 140	Interrupt Rule
Page 143	Titles
Page 170	First Time Obedience
Page 214	Grace Issue
Page 281	Childishness
Page 301	Outward Appearances
Page 22	Order

Concern # 4 Questionable Views of Child Development

There seems to be an inaccurate assumption of what children can absorb in their first few months of

life. The Ezzo's disciplinary expectations of young children are bothersome at times. In lesson 10 (GKGW) on obedience, the Ezzos felt that 8-9 months was not too soon for a **first time** (no second chance) obedience response. This **first time** response was called the 10% rule, which meant that not even 10% of non-compliance was acceptable. A child of 8-9 months could be expected to comply 100% with the demands of a parent. In establishing this point, the Ezzos used their 9 month old granddaughter, Ashley, as an example of establishing first time obedience. Evidently, in order for her to get out of the high chair she would arch her back to communicate her request to get down. Even though she could not verbally communicate at this point in her development, this was not an acceptable form of communication to the Ezzos. So, through a discipline system of isolating her, she was taught to use the more acceptable hand signals. This discipline was initiated because the Ezzos determined that the arching of the back was not a communication, but rebellion. So, at 9 months old she was disciplined into a new form of communication, demanding 100% obedience.

The following chart lists some acceptable age range expectations.

Dynamic Parenting Key Issues (Authored and published by David Ferguson)

Developmental Issues (Infancy 0-18 months)

- Limited motor activity but very active senses. . .especially hearing, touch, sight
- Judgments made as to the world being "safe" or "unsafe" especially relationships
- Judgments made are primarily related to whether basic needs for food, comfort, nurture are met

Practical Suggestions

- Provide visual stimulation and soothing talk and music
- Nurture-nurture-nurture with touch, talk, and holding
- Lovingly and consistently meet basic needs with gentleness rather than anger

Developmental Issues (Early childhood 18 months - 3 years)

- Rapid development of motor, verbal, and language skills
- Autonomy needed in feeding and controlling elimination
- Approval of parents/significant others very important

Practical Suggestions

- Stimulate motor development in walking, running, throwing, climbing, etc.
- Read-read to you child; Bible stories, nursery rhymes, songs
- Provide a safe environment in which to "explore"

Developmental Issues (Middle Childhood 3-5 years)

- Sense of competence comes out of freedom to undertake personally meaningful activities
- Inquisitive, fantasize and develop a functioning conscience
- Desire to differentiate from others . . . my, mine

Practical Suggestions

- Encourage and praise "favorite" activities and interests the child enjoys; experience Bible songs, videos, games
- Talk about feelings as you see sadness, frustration, fear, rejection - i.e., develop a feeling "vocabulary"
- Encourage social interactions with other children. . . at home, church, preschool

Developmental Issues (Late Childhood 6-12)

- "Industry" is to set and attain personal goals

- Social skills have heightened importance in rules, roles, sharing, and sexual differences
- Capacity to reason develops and desire to be “useful”

Practical Suggestions

- Find families with children the age of yours. . . initiate positive family friendships (i.e., positive peers)
- Explore and encourage hobbies, abilities, and talents
- Identify and praise personal responsibility and unique character qualities

Summary Comments Regarding Ezzo’s Child Development Practices

The Ezzos’ parenting program often makes parenting suggestions that are not age appropriate or biblical. My suggestion is for parents to follow three basic guidelines: 1) Refrain from using a lot of discipline with infants; that doesn’t mean you are a permissive parent; God gave all His people a lot of grace in the beginning years of their faith; do likewise, 2) Know your child and his/her strengths, weaknesses, and levels of understanding as they apply to each situation. Gradually introduce law and consequences, never forgetting grace and mercy; they go together, and 3) Ask successful Christian parents, pastors, and elders their advice on child raising issues.

The following is a small sample list of child development concerns I have been able to identify; Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa does a more thorough job, their address is listed at the end of this evaluation. (*Page 34*)

1. Location of Concern

Page 9, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Teenage rebellion

Developmental misunderstanding

Lack of recognition of normal hormonal changes

2. Location of Concern

Page 11, PFP

Ezzo Assertion

Parents need to be proactive

Developmental misunderstanding

Possible loss of needed affection, and encouragement

3. Location of Concern

Page 27, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Infant arches back

Developmental misunderstanding

Not a moral issue, this may be the child’s only means of communication at the time.

4. Location of Concern

Page 40, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Moral training shouldn’t vary regardless of needs

Developmental misunderstanding

There is little recognition or credence given personality differences.

5. Location of Concern

Page 47, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Hyperactivity is overcome by understanding role of the child.

Developmental misunderstanding

ADHD/ADD problems are not addressed or taken into account.

6. Location of Concern

Page 131, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Friendship position with children

Developmental misunderstanding

Fails to aid in issues of balance

7. Location of Concern

Page 142, PFP

Ezzo Assertion

Delayed response to crying

Developmental misunderstanding

The example of cross adds confusion to this child development issue. Regardless, this may also be a developmentally inappropriate parenting response.

8. Location of Concern

Page 193, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Childish mistakes and corresponding consequences

Developmental misunderstanding

Children with newly formed motor skills make mistakes, consequences are not appropriate.

9. Location of Concern

Page 210, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Children say, "I forgot." This really rebellion.

Developmental misunderstanding

There are exceptions; the affliction of ADHD is an example.

10. Location of Concern

Page 250, GKGW

Ezzo Assertion

Child response to divorce depends on age.

Developmental misunderstanding

Response to divorce doesn't depend on age.

V. Recommendation



Dr. Kent McClain's Final Thoughts

In respect to the observations I have made in this evaluation, I would not on the whole recommend Growing Kids God's Way as a Christian parenting program. I think specific parts of the program could be useful, if parents had a good grasp of the Scripture and a sufficient knowledge of child development.

In addition to my own analysis, other church organizations and parenting programs have influenced me to lean away from the Ezzo parenting program. As an example the statement (October, 1997) declared by the board of elders at Grace Community Church (John MacArthur's church) effected my decision not to recommend the program. It was in MacArthur's church that Growing Kids God's Way was birthed. Therefore a lot of credibility had to be given to their final opinion of Ezzo's parenting program.

Grace Community Church (MacArthur's Church) Evaluation

The following is a direct quote from the Grace Community Church (MacArthur's Church) regarding Ezzo's parenting program.

"We have received a flood of inquiries about our stance with regard to Gary Ezzo and Growing Families International (GFI). What follows is a brief summary of why Grace Community Church is no longer affiliated in any way with that ministry. We as elders cannot endorse GFI until these matters are resolved, and we wish to make our position clear. We have delayed making a public statement as long as we held out hope that these concerns might be resolved privately. Unfortunately, that no longer appears possible. We fully realize that many people worldwide have assumed GFI enjoys our full support. Literally dozens of people each week ask for clarification of our position relative to GFI. Therefore we believe this public statement of our concerns is warranted - - and even somewhat overdue.

It is still our earnest prayer, however, that these things may ultimately be resolved in a way that honors the Lord and is in harmony with His Word:

At an elders' meeting in the spring of 1993, the elders of Grace Church asked Gary Ezzo to be more accountable to them—particularly with regard to the content of his teaching and the amount of time he

was spending in GFI ministries beyond the purview of his responsibilities as a pastor.

Soon afterward, in June 1993, Gary announced he was resigning from the pastoral staff but planned to continue serving as a lay elder, keeping Grace Community Church as the base of GFI ministries. The reason he gave for resigning from the church staff was that GFI now demanded his full-time involvement.

The elders nonetheless urged Gary to follow through with his commitment to be more accountable, especially with regard to the content of his teaching. Gary promised to do so.

The pastoral staff began a review of Gary's published and taped material, and met as a group with Gary in mid-1995 to outline several concerns about the doctrinal and biblical content of GFI materials. (Some of those same concerns are given below.) Gary seemed to receive the criticism well and in a good spirit. He explained and clarified several points, and promised to make changes in his material to alleviate everyone's concerns.

However, in the weeks immediately following the meeting, Gary wrote letters to some of the pastors who had raised criticisms. He characterized their concerns as petty and personal, and indicated he believed the staff's criticism was driven by one or two people's personal agendas. He repeated those allegations in private conversations with church members.

The changes discussed in that meeting were never submitted to the pastoral staff. Instead, Gary resigned as an elder and withdrew from Grace Community completely. Ultimately several of his closest followers left the church as well.

Here is an outline summary of some of the more serious concerns Grace Church's pastors and elders have raised about GFI and its teachings:

1. Confusion between biblical standards and matters of personal preference. *The best-known example of this is the GFI emphasis on infant feeding schedules, combined with Gift's zealous opposition to demand feeding by nursing mothers. Portraying scheduled feeding as the true biblical practice, GFI strongly implies that demand feeding should be regarded as an unbiblical, humanistic—even sinful—approach to caring for infants. As elders, we see no biblical basis whatsoever for Gift's dogmatism on this issue. While not opposing scheduled feeding, we would caution young mothers not to adopt any system of parenting that is so rigid that it requires them to quell the God-given maternal impulse. (cf. Isa. 66:10-13)*

Other examples where matters of personal preference are presented as if they had biblical authority: GFI parents are taught that sling-type baby carriers are too child-centered and therefore incompatible with biblical parenting. GFI curriculum also teaches that mothers should not rock their babies to sleep; that they should not comfort or feed crying infants in the parents' bed—and especially that moms should never sleep next to their babies. Portions of the material seem to place an undue stress on stifling the mother's desire to comfort her children. For example, Matthew 27:46 is used to justify the teaching that mothers should refuse to attend to crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met. Gary Ezzo writes, "Praise God that the Father did not intervene when His son cried out on the cross" (Preparation for Parenting, p.122).

We find throughout the GFI material a blurring of the line between that which is truly biblical, and simple matters of preference.

2. A lack of clarity on certain fundamental doctrinal issues. *In particular, GFI materials tend to be*

unclear on the issues of original sin and human depravity. For example, in tape 12 of the “Growing Kids God’s Way” tape series, Gary Ezzo says: “It is not the **will** of the child that is corrupt but the **nature** that drives the will. It is the **flesh** that is corrupt.” “The will itself is morally neutral.” “The will itself is not corrupt, the flesh is corrupt. The will is morally neutral.”

However, Scripture clearly portrays our sinful nature as something that holds the unregenerate will in utter bondage (John 8:34, 44; Rom. 6:20). Nothing in Scripture suggests that the human will is morally neutral; rather Scripture teaches that the will of the sinner is bent inexorably toward sin, enslaved to various lusts (Rom. 8:7-8; Titus 3:3). Every faculty of the sinner’s heart is corrupted by sin (cf. Gen. 6:5)—and **particularly** the will. That is the whole point of the doctrine often labeled “total depravity,” which we affirm.

The notion that the human will is neutral is the very foundation of Pelagianism, a heresy that dates back to the Fifth Century. We do not believe Gary intends to teach Pelagianism. He has expressly stated his belief that children are born with a sin nature. (Even the statement above seems to hinge on Gary’s assertion the “the nature . . . drives the will”—i.e., if the nature is corrupt, the will tends to make sinful choices. But this still stops short of affirming what Scripture does: that the sinner’s will is in absolute bondage to sin.)

Again, we do not suggest the Gary **means** to deny the utter depravity of the sinner. But by over-classifying human faculties and declaring the will “morally neutral,” he has left room for serious misunderstanding on the issue. A similar example is found in the GFI book *Preparation for Parenting*, where parents are told that the child’s conscience at birth is a “clean slate”; and then a footnote differentiates between the “higher” and “lower” conscience. All of this seems needlessly to confuse the biblical stress on the **utter** corruption of the human heart and all its faculties (Jer. 17:9)—even from infancy: “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” (Ps. 58:3)

3. Insufficient attention to the child’s need for regeneration. Potential confusion on the human-depravity issue is compounded by the weight of emphasis given to moral indoctrination, compared to the relatively meager stress on the child’s need for a divinely renewed heart. Parents are repeatedly told that the goal of parenting is to raise a “morally responsible child”; and that they can “restrain the natural corruption by instilling into the child the self-disciplines of life” (*Preparation for Parenting*, p. 22). The impression is left with many parents that in training a well-mannered and morally innocent child, they have raised their child “God’s way.”

To be clear, our complaint is not the GFI material denies or omits the doctrine of regeneration. Statements are scattered throughout various GFI publications that **do** mention the child’s need of conversion. But the truths of the gospel and the necessity of divine grace are by no means the essential heart of Gift’s instruction to parents. Gary himself once reported in an elders’ meeting the GFI material has found a warm reception among Mormons and other non-evangelicals. This would hardly be possible if the truths of the gospel received sufficient emphasis in the curriculum.

4. A tendency to isolationism. GFI parents tend to isolate their children from other children—including Christian children—who are not part of the GFI “community” (i.e., those not indoctrinated in GFI principles). GFI parents have been known to sever all relationships with non-GFI families. To some degree, GFI teaching is directly responsible for encouraging this attitude.

While still a pastor at Grace Church, Gary Ezzo helped found a private “Community School,” where children could be enrolled only by personal invitation. Of course, only GFI parents were asked to

enroll their children. Some were even encouraged to withdraw their children from Grace Church's own Christian School, and move them instead to the "Community School."

Several GFI-trained parents have kept their children from participating in organized church youth activities in order to avoid exposing their children to others not "in the community." Some GFI parents have objected because non-Christian young people are welcome to attend youth-group activities, and because Christian young people in the youth group have been encouraged to befriend and evangelize non-Christians in their schools and neighborhoods.

GFI material does not caution against, but rather defends, that type of isolationism. In fact, Gary Ezzo teaches that to do otherwise could irreparably damage the "moral innocence" of children.

All of those are reasons why GFI materials are no longer available from Grace Community Church. One additional concern has to do with how Gary Ezzo has responded to criticism.

In several instances, Gary Ezzo has declined to listen to concerns from essentially friendly critics—including fellow elders, pastors, and even co-workers in the GFI ministries. His responses to the elders of Grace Church have reflected a repeated tendency to avoid accountability. For example, when the "Community School" was started, elders from Grace Church's School Council asked for a meeting with Gary to share some concerns about his involvement with the "Community School." Gary refused to meet with them. Later, when asked about the "Community School" in a full elders' meeting, Gary told the elders he had no direct involvement with the "Community School." But in fact, he was serving on the School's board of directors. In at least one case he assured a group of concerned elders that he would seek resolution of a long-standing conflict—then later refused to do so. His departure from Grace Church left a disturbing number of conflicts unresolved and concerns un-addressed.

At the same time, Gary has been known to respond with exaggerated and even false accusations against his critics. For example, just before he withdrew permanently from Grace Church, Gary sent an e-mail message to a "Grace to You" donor in the Midwest. In the message, Gary claimed that several staff members of the church had "gone amillennial in their eschatology"; that attendance at the church had dwindled so that church services were largely empty; and that Lance Quinn (Senior Associate Pastor) had "walked out" on John MacArthur—implying that Lance had left the church staff under less than positive circumstances. (Of course, not one of those accusations is remotely true.) Gary asked the donor to pray that the church would "close out its remaining years with dignity."

Our choice would have been to deal with all these things privately, and that has been the reason for our long silence until now. We consider it profoundly unfortunate that we must issue a public statement such as this. But our efforts to address these concerns privately have been rebuffed or disregarded. Sadly, that has made this formal statement necessary. Again, our prayer is that all these matters will be resolved to the glory of Christ."

***The Elders of Grace Community Church
Sun Valley, California***

Focus on the Family Evaluation (Dr. James Dobson)

Another statement that effected my opinion regarding Ezzo's Growing Kids God's Way parenting program came from a statement made by Focus on the Families (James Dobson) parenting ministry. This was in response to a letter I sent in October of 1997.

The following is quoted from the letter Focus on the Family statement issued to me personally on November 14, 1997.

“ We regard your request for our input as a genuine compliment, in response to your inquiry and others like it our staff has conducted an extensive evaluation of Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo’s materials on parenting, including the books-Preparation For Parenting and growing Kids God’s Way. Allow me to summarize their findings and recommendations as succinctly as possible.

We do have concerns and reservations about the Ezzos’ work, including the updated edition of Preparation For Parenting. In the first place, it seems to us that their philosophy of childrearing is far too rigid. The very title of their program, Growing Kids God’s Way, has an unnecessarily exclusivistic sound about it, as if there were only one “correct” and godly way to raise children and all other methods were “unbiblical.” In contrast to this, Dr. Dobson believes that there are many different approaches to raising children which are both healthy and consistent with the teaching of Scripture.

Speaking of Scripture, the Ezzos’ misuse of biblical texts is, in our view, a second cause for serious concern. They have, for example, repeatedly cited Matthew 27:46 –“...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—in support of their teaching that mothers should refuse to attend crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met. “Praise God,” writes Gary Ezzo on page 122 of Preparation for Parenting, “that the Father did not intervene when His son cried out on the cross.” We see no way to make such an application of this verse without completely disregarding its original context and purpose.

Third, we are aware that the author’s proposals regarding controlled feeding schedules for infants are highly controversial. Some critics have suggested that they might possibly result in child abuse if applied legalistically, inflexibly, and without regard for circumstance and the special needs of individual children; and, in fact, our ministry has received numerous letters from parents, pastors, midwives, physicians, and lactation professionals regarding cases of failure-to-thrive in infants subjected to the Ezzos’ program. We don’t believe this information should be ignored.

Finally, it needs to be said that the leadership of the Ezzo’s own church—the place where they initially developed and promoted their curriculum—has now issued a public statement disavowing any affiliation with the ministry of Growing Families International. The issues pinpointed in that statement parallel Focus on the Family’s concerns as outlined above. For further information, we suggest you contact Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California either via e-mail (letters@gtu.org) or by telephone (818/782-5920).

For these reasons we do not recommend the Ezzo’s material to Focus on the Family constituents. Further, we would suggest that, if and when it is used, its principles be implemented only in conjunction with generous measures of common sense, intuition, and natural parental affection.

*We hope these thoughts (**letter written to Dr. Kent McClain**) prove helpful. Thanks again for sending a e-mail to us. May God’s grace, peace, wisdom, and blessing be yours in the days ahead.*

I hope this clears up any confusion anyone may have about the position Focus takes on GFI’s materials.”

Sincerely,

Focus on the Family

Ezzo's Key Staff Members Leave Parenting Program

As I stated in the beginning of this evaluation, I personally watched the entire video (1993) series presented by the Ezzos. In the flow of the presentation, there was another teaching couple (Eric and Julie Abel) who assisted and supported the Ezzo teachings in each video session. In my frequent talks with Grace Community Church (John MacArthur's church) during 1997, I learned that the Abels had left the Ezzo parenting ministry over some significant problems they held with the Ezzos over the integrity, direction, and curriculum of the program. They later in 1998, explained these problems in the following e-mail.

The E-mail (2-25-98; 2 A.M.) reads as follow:

"It seems like everywhere we go, we speak with people who acknowledge our involvement with Growing Families International, and organization in which we served for over 10 years. Most people recognize us from the many video and audio programs we participated in while representing the company.

Even though we appreciate people's kind remarks, we never desired to be involved in such a visible capacity with this organization. Through the providence of God, we were chosen for this task and gladly accepted what God had in store for our personal ministry to young families.

As God would further have it, we parted company with this organization in 1994. At that time, we were mainly concerned about the integrity & direction of the company. Since then, we have been exposed to the additional concerns regarding the curriculum which we can no longer support. That is why we requested to be removed from the GFI materials, last year. Other than that request, we have virtually no contact with anyone from this company for several years. We apologize for any role that we have played in contributing to the delusion that we are still involved with GFI.

We encourage Church Leaders to prayerfully consider the pattern of controversy surrounding this organization. We hope that Pastors will get back to the Bible for parenting instruction.

Eric and Julie Abel
erricabel@aol.com

Christianity Today Notes Caution

Although there have been scores of cautioning articles written about the Ezzo parenting program, one of the better summaries comes from Christianity Today, a Christian magazine I highly regard. I quote the article's author, Randy Frame in the February 9th 1998 edition:

"The Chatsworth, California-based organization Growing Families International (GFI) claims

that more than 3,500 churches worldwide use GFI-published resources for guidance on child rearing. But despite such apparent popularity, the list of critics of GFI-and of its executive director, Gary Ezzo-continues to expand.

More than four years ago, CHRISTIANITY TODAY reported on questions being raised about the parenting advice offered in Preparation for Parenting, co-authored by Ezzo and his wife, Anne Marie, and On Becoming BABYWISE, a secularized version containing the same concepts but without religious references (CT, August 16,1993.page 34).

At that time, Ezzo served on the staff at Grace Community Church (John MacArthur's church) in Sun Valley, California. Recently, however, the church's board of elders issued a public statement disavowing any affiliation with GFI and outlining "serious concerns" about the organization and its teachings, as well as concerns about accountability.

UNCONVENTIONAL MEDICAL WISDOM: *Critics maintain generally that the Ezzos advocate a style of parenting that over emphasizes control and discipline at the expense of parental intuition and compassion. They say the medical advice offered or implied by GFI materials runs counter to current medical wisdom.*

In a Web site, the Ezzos have claimed GFI is supported by a network of health care professionals" that includes "hundreds of pediatricians." GFI has not documented this claim. Says Kathy Nesper, president of Artesia, California-based Apple Tree Family Ministries, "I don't know who their doctors are, but I'm not ware of a single International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) who has publicly supported their program.

Calls from pediatricians and emergency-room physicians prompted the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Orange County to conduct an extensive study of GFI materials. Physicians had been reporting a high incidence of dehydrated and failure-to-thrive children whose parents were adhering strictly to the Ezzo program. Collen Weeks co-chaired the committee, which conducted a detailed investigation of GFI materials spanning a year and a half before releasing results in 1996. Weeks says, "We established six criteria for healthy parenting education, and our committee concluded the GFI materials met none of those standards.

GOD'S ONLY PARENTING PLAN? *What complicates matters, according to critics, is that GFI represents its principles as being the only biblical prescribed approach to parenting. GFI materials acknowledge that the Bible is silent on such issues as infant feeding. But Nesper, whose ministry specializes in childbirth education and family life education for young Christian couples, says, "The underlying message is that their way is God's way.*

The Grace Community Church (John MacArthur's church) statement supports Nesper's assessment. "Portraying scheduled feeding as the true biblical practice, GFI strongly implies that demand feeding should be regarded as an unbiblical, humanistic-even sinful-approach to caring for infants. As elders, we see no biblical basis for such dogmatism on this issue. Phil R. Johnson, an elder at Grace Community Church" and the statement's main author, says the Ezzos "built their program on credibility they borrowed from Grace Community Church." Johns says that "the case could also be made to suggest that those of us with serious concerns about Gary's character should have pursued the discipline process more aggressively."

A CHORUS OF CRITICS: *Focus on the Family cites the Ezzos'"misuse of biblical texts"*

as a “cause for serious concern.” Focus points that the Ezzos repeatedly cite Matthew 27:46 (where Jesus cries out from the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) in support of their teaching that mothers should refuse to attend to crying infants who have already been fed, changed, and had their basic needs met. Focus says, “We see no way to make such an application of this verse without completely disregarding its original context and purpose.

INHIBITING EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT? While many have focused their critique of GFI on the potential health dangers to infants, others have raised concerns about possible negative psychological and spiritual effect on children’s development. In November, marriage and family counselor Barbara Francis focused on the GFI parenting program in a seminar at the annual meeting of the American Association of Christian Counselors. “The GFI model does not acknowledge God-designed levels of human development,” says Francis, adding that she is uncomfortable with the Ezzo’s advice to allow a baby to cry unattended. Francis stressed the importance of two-and three-year-old children being given the space to develop a “sense of self.” Noting that, according to the Ezzos, “ ‘no’ (a child’s response) is not permitted” Francis says, “If a child can never say ‘no,’ that child will not develop a sense of autonomy.” While “Ezzo children” may be more obedient, Francis says that obedience will likely be rooted in fear of abandonment or punishment rather than love.”

DEFENDING THE PROGRAM: Those in a position to receive inquiries about GFI agree that its materials are extremely popular and that its parenting philosophy has developed a following that reaches far beyond the influence of Grace Community Church. Critics acknowledge that amid the ideas they consider misleading or dangerous can be found much sound advice and many helpful ideas.

GFI’s Web site includes testimonies and newspaper articles featuring people whose family lives have improved as a result of GFI’s parenting curriculum Growing Kids God’s Way. Articles point out that the curriculum provides practical advice to help children learn to respect their parents and to put other’s needs before their own. For example, it suggests that children not be allowed to begin eating dinner until whoever prepared it sits down.

GFI’s lengthy response to the Grace Community Church statement can also be found at its Web site (www.gif.org). According to that response, the Ezzos are “deeply disappointed” by Grace’s decision to issue the statement. Among other things, GFI claims that for 30 months previous to the statement, no member of Grace Church “pursued the Ezzos on any church-related issue.” Johnson refutes this claim and several others made by GFI. Beyond referring to its Web site, GFI declined to respond to written questions.

Christianity Today

Other Articles Worth Consideration

(I have these articles if you want me to send copies to you)

1. “The Ezzo Method,” Wall Street Journal, February 17th, 1998, by Barbara Carton.
2. “Babies in Danger,” Ladies Home Journal, April , 1999, by Jenny Deam.
3. “More than a Parenting Ministry: The Cultic Characteristics of Growing Families, International”,” Christian Research Journal, April, 1998, by Kathleen Turner and Elliot Miller.

Addresses Of Other Organizations

1. “Focus on the Family”
(Jim Dobson)
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80995
(719) 531-5181
2. Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California
(John MacArthur’s Church)
13248 Roscoe Blvd. Sun Valley, CA 91352
(818) 782-5920
3. Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, California
(Chuck Smith’s Church)
3800 S. Fairview Rd. Santa Ana, CA 92704
4. Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton, California
(Chuck Swindoll’s previous church)
Pastor Doug Haag: Associate Pastor of Family Ministries
Fullerton Evangelical Free Church in California
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E-Mail doug@fefcful.org
5. Dr. Kent McClain
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1 208 938-1595
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 - RedRhino.mas.vcu.edu
 - <http://www.bhip.com/features/ezzo.htm>
 - <http://www.fix.net/~rprewett/grace-ezzo.html>

