

October 11, 2005

Dear [Name],

I was asked to respond to the letter you wrote to [one of our pastors] dated July 25 regarding the sermon on July 24, entitled, "Questions I Have About Family." I coordinate the Parenting Ministry at [name] Church and am well acquainted with the programs you mention as well as the author. First, I want to thank you for the spirit in which you write. You are articulate, humble, and appear to be open to a well-thought out response. Each of your comments, though only a few sentences long, levied sobering concerns, statements, and accusations concerning [our church] or a program we offer. These concerns call for a response equally as sobering.

I have put a response together that follows the order of your letter, a copy of which is enclosed for your convenience. The format of my response is somewhat sterile, but I am using that type of outline so you are able to follow my response specific to each point in your letter. Here we go.

- 1. Growing Kids God's Way being the 'sole parenting curriculum' used in the church.** We have offered and will continue to offer several other programs at [name] Church in addition to those provided by *Growing Families International*. Some of these programs include: *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, by Ted Tripp; *Parenting with Love and Logic*, by Foster Cline and Jim Fay; *Bringing Up Boys*, by James Dobson; *Effective Parenting*, by Chip Ingram; *Practical Parenting* (Building-U); *Parenting with Proverbs* (Building-U); *The Foundations of Biblical Parenting* (Building-U); *Bringing Up Girls* (Building-U); *Parenting through Psalm 23* (Building-U); and *At the Heart of Your Teen* (Building-U). All of these programs receive more advertising when they are offered than do the *GFI* classes, which really don't require much advertising, only notification that the classes are available. [Our church] isn't closed-minded to any parenting program, and I will review most anything with the hope and anticipation that we can offer that curriculum to our congregation. There are several parenting curricula I've looked at which haven't met the criteria of our church, either due to their theology (or lack of it) or the quality of their presentation. I am currently reviewing a new series by Andy Stanley and have high hopes that we can offer this program next year. In addition to the challenge of finding a curriculum that fits with our church doctrine and philosophy, we need to find a qualified leader, impassioned about the material, who is willing to teach it.
- 2. It has been well-documented that the Ezzo's insistence on scheduled feeding is a health hazard to young babies.** The *accusations* are well-documented. The *criticism* is well-documented. But there is no official documentation to substantiate these claims. Mr. Ezzo has attempted to obtain evidence that these claims are true, as have I, but no one has yet to provide any documentation validating these accusations and criticisms.
- 3. One of the most affluent congregations in the city is producing a percentage of failure-to-thrive and underweight babies that rival that of poor, inner-city neighborhoods.** This statement concerns me greatly. I would like to see your documentation to support this at your earliest convenience. We've had thousands of families go through this program at [name] Church over the past fifteen years and not one person has come to me with that claim. I don't know this for sure, but I imagine if you took the same number of people who had *not* taken this program you might find a greater number of failure-to-thrive and underweight infants among them. The *Infant Way* program provides a significant amount of information including reasons for and safe-guards against failure-to-thrive, including seeking the advice of a professional, certified lactation consultant,

and your baby's pediatrician.¹ May I encourage you to take a close look at the section entitled *Signs of Adequate Nutrition* as well as the *Healthy Baby Growth Chart*² at the end of *Along the Infant Way*?

4. **The Ezzo's material is rigid in nature and puts more value in a schedule than in the health of the babies.** I have not seen that in the material. In fact, I see just the opposite. These excerpts taken directly from their material support my point.
 - a. This first example is taken from the section entitled, *Week One: Healthy Growth indicators*.² "During the first week, frequent nursing is necessary for two reasons: first, your baby needs the colostrums and second, frequent nursing is required to establish lactation. The fact that your baby nurses every 2½ to 3 hours and nurses a minimum of eight times a day are two more positive indicators to consider."³
 - b. "There is only one PDF [Parent Directed Feeding] feeding rule for the first week to ten days. Mothers and fathers should take their clocks, turn and face them against the wall. We do not want you to look at the clock but rather focus on one thing. Work on getting a FULL feeding from your baby at each feeding. That's it! No snacking, full feedings. And while this approach might quickly fall into a basic 2½ to 3 hour routine, the clock, even as a guide during the first week is to be submissive to the single goal of your baby getting a complete meal at every meal."⁴
 - c. This statement is regarding a baby who is 8 – 10 weeks old. "Your baby has been doing great on her 3½ hour routine, feeding and sleeping like the book says. And then, all of a sudden around week seven, she wakes 45 minutes into her nap. You know that she just had a full feeding so you begin to wonder if the problem is sleep related. That might be the cause, but equally it might be that she is hungry and in need of another full feeding. If that is the case, feed her again. And then readjust her routine over the next two feedings. You will know if the problem is hunger if she takes a full meal. Equally, you will know if it is not hunger if she is not interested in eating or only nurses for a minute."⁵
5. **The criticisms of Mr. Ezzo are many and legitimate.** I have known Mr. Ezzo for sixteen years and his material has been taught at this church for about fifteen years. [Name] (senior pastor) knows Mr. Ezzo personally and has spent time with him, as have I, fleshing out the criticism to ascertain whether or not it is legitimate. We are satisfied with Mr. Ezzo's explanation of the criticism and rather than being left questioning his integrity or the legitimacy of the claims, we are left feeling supportive of a man who has followed a call to bring biblical parenting to a level most parents can understand and appropriate. We are sad and disappointed that Christian brothers and sisters, most of whom simply have philosophical differences, or don't like the methods taught, would spend so much time and energy taking down a program that is clearly effective. I'll state here what Bob has said in the past and recently, "The proof is in the pudding."
6. **Many parents are reluctant to say anything because they have such a deep love for the church and don't want to do anything to foster a spirit of division.** A divisive spirit is more easily fostered by the talk that takes place among individuals in inappropriate venues. We'd invite any member of our church to approach [name] or me with legitimate concerns regarding the Ezzo's programs being taught at [our church]. They don't need to feel as though they are being divisive in doing that. In fact, the Bible is clear that if you have a disagreement, you should deal with it directly.

¹ *Along the Infant Way*, pages 91-97

² *Ibid*, pages 194-206

³ *Ibid*, page 86

⁴ *Ibid*, page 78

⁵ *Ibid*, pages 108-109

7. **The threats to newborns are serious enough and the potential for damage to the church as a whole is significant.** The leadership of our church – from theologians and researchers, to medical and law professionals – have reviewed the material from *Growing Families International* and find there to be nothing in the material antithetical to what [our church] teaches or represents, nor do we feel the material could put [our church] in a precarious legal position. The Family Court division of [our city's] judicial system has ordered numerous parents to take the *GFI* classes offered at [our church] in order to retain or regain custody of their children. I'm sure they would not send parents to this program if what you are claiming were substantiated.
8. **The leadership of the church needs to take a frank and objective look at the Ezzo's program.** Yes, we should take a frank and objective look at any of the programs we offer and we have. See point number seven above.
9. **The church should provide positive Christian alternatives of which there are many.** Yes, and as much as we can, we do. I feel I've adequately addressed this in point number one.
10. **One of the classes was titled *How to Really Love Your Baby*. This gives a clear implication that methods outside the one taught in this class are not 'really loving' your baby.** Well stated and I agree. I have had that line eliminated from the description of that particular class.⁶ Thank you for your valid concern.
11. **[name] (pastor) lists one of the main threats to church harmony as a 'Legalistic Spirit.' This is a major tenant of *Growing Kids God's Way*.** If you are suggesting that legalism is a main thread or theme throughout the *Growing Kids God's Way* material, nothing can be further from the truth. The material can be handled in an overzealous manner and that is unfortunate, but the principles taught in the *GFI* curriculum are anything but legalistic. In fact, the Ezzos work hard at encouraging a parent to guard against legalism. Here are some comments directly from the *GFI* text to support my point.
 - a. "Flexibility is basic to your success"⁷
 - b. "Every baby is different. Remain mindful of growth spurts that may require additional feedings for a few days. You're the parent. Assess and decide what is best for your baby. Staying mindful of all healthy baby indicators⁸ will help you determine how many feedings are right for your baby."⁹
 - c. "As stated, your baby's normal feeding periods fall between 2½ and 3 hour intervals. But there are times when you may feed sooner than those time increments. For example, the late afternoon for many nursing mothers is usually when their milk supply is at its lowest point quantitatively and qualitatively. This is usually due to mother's busy day. As a result, there may be an early evening feeding as soon as 2 hours after the last feeding."¹⁰
 - d. "Remember you are the parent – endowed with experience, wisdom, and common sense. Trust in these attributes first, not in extreme of emotion or the rigidity of the clock. When special situations arise, allow context to be your guide."¹¹
 - e. Question: "My three-week old baby starts to cry 1 hour after his last feeding and appears hungry. I've tried to stretch his time but can't get him to go longer. What is the problem?"

⁶ See the new *Infant Way* brochure shell enclosed.

⁷ Along the *Infant Way*, page 104

⁸ Ibid, pages 194-206

⁹ Ibid, page 107

¹⁰ Ibid, page 108

¹¹ Ibid, page 110

Answer: If your baby is hungry, feed him."¹² Mr. Ezzo then goes on to give advice as to what the problem might be if it is not hunger.

- f. "In developing common ground, one thing to guard against is crossing into legalism. A legalist approach to parenting is very dangerous, especially in the teen years. It leaves in its wake a frustrated child, for the form of truth is elevated above the substance of truth. Legalism creates prohibitions by elevating the rule over the principle. The legalist sees all decisions in life as either black or white, immoral or moral. He or she acknowledges no heart or motive areas. No room is made for individual strengths and weaknesses. The legalist tends to demand that the conscience of every believer be identical."^{13]}

12. **Your quote of Dr. Dobson: The very title of program has an unnecessarily exclusivistic sound about it, as if there were only one 'correct' and godly way to raise children and that all other methods were unbiblical.** [pastor's name] has a tape series entitled *Raising Kids God's Way*. The subtitle of Jim Burgen's book, *What's the Big Deal About Sex*, is *Dating, God's Way*. There's *Grieving God's Way*, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way*, *Doing Business God's Way*, *Greater Health God's Way*, *Day by Day God's Way* and on and on. In fact there are now over 200,000 books that use "God's Way" in their text or title. The Ezzos say: "The use of the title is not to say this is the only way to parent; it is to say that the principles in this material are biblically based." So, why do all the other authors get away with the use of this title without the criticism? I can only guess that it has to do with the subject: Parenting. You can discuss and even counsel a person on their spiritual walk, their marriage, their money management, and their health habits, but it is a very touchy thing to counsel someone on the matter of their parenting. And I might gently suggest, [name], that there appears to be a sense in which you feel threatened (I believe the word you used was "attacked") by this philosophy on parenting which perhaps challenges your own. Here's what the Ezzos write on the first few pages of *Along the Virtuous Way (Growing Kids God's Way)*, "This curriculum is not intended to give all the answers or provide the reader with all he or she will ever need to know about the process of raising a child. Therefore, parents guided by their own convictions have the ultimate responsibility and duty to research parenting philosophies available today and then make an informed decision as to what is best for their family. *Growing Kids God's Way* is just one resource of many available to guide parents along the way."¹⁴ When someone calls me with questions about our parenting classes wondering if it's right for them, I encourage them to go to a book store, open *On Becoming Babywise* (the non-sectarian version of *Along the Infant Way*) as well as other resources with perhaps a different philosophy, compare both resources, and prayerfully decide which mindset represents the family philosophy they believe is right for them. We don't push any curriculum on our members. In fact, Mr. Ezzo is the first to ask his audience to not do that. I am including the Introduction videotape to *Along the Virtuous Way* for you to observe for yourself how Mr. Ezzo asks his audience to not proselytize his material without being invited by the seemingly needy person. Dr. Dobson's comment was made before he came out with his recent book, *The Focus on the Family Complete Book of Baby and Childcare* whose advertising trailer was, *Everything You Need to Know in Parenting*. One of the five core values we hold to as staff at [name] includes *trusting positive intentions*. I trust that Dr. Dobson did not intend for his title nor his trailer to sound as exclusivistic as it could be interpreted. I choose to believe that Dr. Dobson intended for the reader to know that his book is comprehensive; that it covers most of the bases in parenting. He has earned the benefit of that doubt. I believe Mr. Ezzo has earned the same.

13. **A session topic in another brochure was on 'marriage bed defilers,' which I can only assume refers to children who may sleep in the same bed with their parents.** Actually, it does not. The Ezzos give 5 examples of marriage bed defilers, none of which have anything to do with children in the bed.

¹² Ibid, page 176

¹³ *Along the Virtuous Way*, page 40

¹⁴ Ibid, page 10

14. **His [Jesus'] use of the illustration could be argued as an endorsement of it [children who may sleep in the same bed with their parents].** Just as you had suggested Mr. Ezzo misuses Scripture, I would offer you the same caution in how you are using Luke 11. I think it's a theological stretch to suggest this verse is endorsing shared sleep. [name] joined his brother who is on the [town] Police force for a "ride along" last year. One of the calls they made in the middle of the night was to a home where the mother who practiced shared sleep had rolled over and suffocated her infant. The concept of shared sleep is not one that is endorsed by the Family Ministry at [name] Church. It is specifically cautioned against by most medical professionals, including the American Academy of Pediatrics.¹⁵ Consider the potential damage to our church if we advocated this method of parenting.
15. **At the very least, Ezzo makes some questionable divisions of Scripture.** I am leaving *Along the Infant Way* and *Along the Virtuous Way* for you at the Welcome Center. Please use these materials to show me where this might be true. I will be happy show [name] (pastor) the specific Scriptures you site. Should he agree, I will then take the matter to Mr. Ezzo. He has always been approachable and willing to make adjustments according to our valid suggestions. For example, the Scripture you site in your letter, Matthew 27:46, was misunderstood by many who thought Mr. Ezzo was using that Scripture as a biblical basis for letting a baby cry. That was not at all his intent, but because others misunderstood his use of the Scripture he removed this reference about five years ago.
16. **Ezzos teaching is at the very least questionable.** I feel I've adequately addressed this in point number seven. Please use the materials I am giving you to provide me with an example of where this might be true.
17. **[Mr. Ezzo] who at last glance was telling off a news camera crew from Detroit and refusing to discuss his teachings in a way that I can't imagine any ministry of this church doing.** I was in Detroit at the *GFI National Conference* when this occurred in July of 2004. An intern by the name of Ross Jones of Channel 7 news in Detroit contacted Mr. Ezzo requesting an interview on behalf of a reporter named Steve Wilson when he was in the city for the conference. Mr. Ezzo granted the interview based on the represented intent of the interview. After learning through a reliable source at the news studio that Mr. Wilson had grossly misrepresented his intent for the interview, Mr. Ezzo cancelled the interview through a letter. However, Mr. Wilson, sneaked into the conference under false pretense. This was a private conference attended by paid, pre-registered leadership of *Growing Families International*, not open to the media or even the general public. He and his cameraman showed up posing as someone they were not. The security at the conference stopped the reporter and the cameraman, questioned them, and caught them in several lies. (From what I understand about Mr. Wilson, this is apparently characteristic of how he goes about obtaining his interviews.) Upon being asked by security to leave, they left the building, but not the premises. Mr. Ezzo was informed of the incident, excused himself from the conference and met the reporter outside. While the camera was rolling, Mr. Ezzo repeatedly stated that he wouldn't do an interview with him on camera, but would be willing to speak with him off camera. Mr. Wilson did finally accept Mr. Ezzo's invitation to turn off the camera and come inside where I personally observed Mr. Ezzo spend 3 hours with Mr. Wilson explaining his teaching. Yet, what was aired was a 3-second clip that was not representative of Mr. Ezzo or his material. They weren't interested in the truth, only something that would make a sensational story. Mr. Ezzo excused himself from a conference with hundreds of attendees to meet with one individual who sneaked into a place where he had no business being, used a lie to get in, lied about being there, and left with a tome of notes, free materials, and 3 hours of Mr. Ezzos time, which, in my mind, is the real story.

¹⁵ See the two articles are enclosed which caution against shared sleep.

18. **If the Word of God has not spoken to a specific method of raising godly children, why any single method . . . should be given such an endorsement by the church to the exclusion of other methods.** You are right. Scripture does not speak to a specific method of parenting, but it does give us principles. We believe the Ezzo's material effectively delivers those principles in a manner that is congruent with the philosophy of the Family Ministry at [name] Church. The Ezzos carefully separate the principles in the Bible from the vehicles that deliver these principles, cautioning their audience to never elevate the vehicle over the principle it attempts to deliver. The Bible does not speak to specific methods of having a Godly marriage, yet we offer classes that provide methods on how to have a biblical marriage. The same can be said about the finance classes we offer, the classes on exercise and health and more. In no case do we ever say or support that this is the only way to biblically conduct yourself in marriage, handle your money, manage your health, or raise your children. As I mentioned in point number one, we offer other parenting programs whose principles line up with the doctrinal position of [our church]. Although we probably offer more options in parenting than any of the other subjects just mentioned, it is the *GFI* parenting program that seems to have the greatest draw and the greatest positive impact on the family. Perhaps that is why it seems to you that it is the only one we offer.

You indicate that your letter has been four years in the making. It would appear that you have much invested already. I would like to ask several things of you that are listed below, but will understand if you don't care to invest any further. If that be the case I ask only one thing of you: That you realize you have made statements that are not accurate, not current, or are not substantiated, yet you make serious claims against [our church] and against Mr. Ezzo that could compromise the reputation of both. However, if you are willing to invest further, I'd like to ask you to do the following:

1. Pick up the two books (*Along the Infant Way* and *Along the Virtuous Way*) I have left in your name at the Welcome Center.
2. Provide me with documentation on the failure-to-thrive and underweight cases from our church equal to a percent that rivals that of poor, inner-city neighborhoods to substantiate your claim in point number three.
3. Encourage others who are talking among themselves to come directly to me or [pastor's name] with their concerns. In their effort to not be divisive they are not following the biblical process for matters like this. Perhaps you would be interested in asking them to join you in researching the materials I am providing.
4. Substantiate the threats to newborns and potential for damage to the church as a whole that you mention in point number seven.
5. Show me in Mr. Ezzo's material where you feel Scripture is misapplied and where you feel his teaching is questionable according to points number fifteen and sixteen.
6. Provide me with the names of some other biblically based programs that I can review.
7. Provide me with some documentation directly from American Academy of Pediatrics that supports a feeding schedule that differs from what Mr. Ezzo suggests according to your statement on the first page of your letter, paragraph nine. I have enclosed a chart we call *Establishing a Baby's Routine* to make it easier for you to glean the Ezzos schedule rather than having to read the whole section. This chart is derived directly from *Along the Infant Way*.
8. Observe the Introduction videotape to *Along the Virtuous Way* taking special note of Mr. Ezzo's explanation that this program is not the only way, but *a* way to parent as mentioned in point number twelve. Note also how he exhorts his audience to not push this material on others.

Perhaps you are blessed to have a family with a father in the home. Perhaps this is and will be the only marriage you will ever have. I hope that is the case for you. Perhaps you have not adopted or are not fostering any of your three children. Perhaps you don't know of a young father struggling to care for his infant daughter after his girlfriend abandoned her child 3 hours after giving birth, signing away all rights. I don't know. But here in Family Ministry we work hard with all types of family situations: Single parents, some who have never been married before and have never had a healthy family modeled for them; blended families who are falling apart because they can't get on the same page with their parenting;

adoptive families who are experiencing Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and want to give the child back they'd recently brought into their home because they didn't know it would be so hard; parents who are struggling with children with ADD, ADHD, ODD, autism, downs, and other forms of behavior problems and disabilities. Sometimes our work is with (what would appear to be) normal families with healthy children, yet the common event of adding a child to their family has so rocked their world that they lose all ability to function normally without help. Situations like these are just "a day in the life" of Family Ministry at [our church]. And helping them is our heart beat; it's what we do. Many of these families have been transformed and marriages saved as a direct result of their application of the principles taught by Mr. Ezzo. You are welcome to see the numerous surveys and testimonies that continually support that.

Finally, [name], even though we may need to agree to disagree on infant feeding and child rearing philosophy, it doesn't mean that you won't have children that are obedient, respectful, and come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It does mean, however, that you might get there in a different way than others. I feel it was a repeated theme in your letter that we as a church allow for more than one way to return a child to the mark, Jesus Christ, and I am hoping that you will allow others to do the same.

I'm looking forward to hearing back from you should you choose to further invest in the issue. Please feel free to contact my office at [number] at any point you wish to discuss this matter further. May God bless you and [name], [name], [name], and [name].

Sincerely,

[name]

Cc: [name]
[name]

Encl: Your letter dated July 25, 2005
News release from the SIDS services of Illinois Copyright 2005
FOX News article on sharing a bed with infants, July 8, 2005
Establishing A Baby's Routine chart
A copy of the new *Infant Way* brochure shell

Under your name at the Welcome Center:

Introduction Video to *Along the Virtuous Way* (I'd like to have this back at your convenience)
Along the Infant Way (You are welcome to keep this)
Along the Virtuous Way (You are welcome to keep this)