

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your two letters with respect to your concerns about the Ezzo parenting materials (Growing Families International or GFI). I apologize for not having yet responded to the first one, as I had some pressing pastoral duties for which to care.

We investigated the GFI materials a few years ago, before endorsing them as one option to parenting ministries at Calvary (we use other materials as well). Several families in our church use the materials and I see nothing of the legalism, paraded by its critics, in the lives of any of those families. My wife and I (both widowed and recently married) went through the materials with a critical eye, aware of these charges. In the 18 week "basic" course and the 6 week "middle years" course, I did not find one theological problem with the materials. They continually speak of heart transformation by the gracious work of Christ and His powerful Word, not the extreme legalism with which they have been charged. I also saw no evidence of the Ezzos trying to build a "following" after themselves -- they constantly pointed people to the glory of Jesus Christ. The families I know at Calvary (and at other churches in town) who teach and use GFI materials show no evidence of being the rigid legalists, or cultists of whom the critics speak. They and their children seem to be godly, well-adapted, and very joyful.

Incidentally, I believe that any material can be abused by people to elicit cult-like behavior. Most cultists use the Bible as the supposed basis for their belief. In other words, I don't doubt that some people have misused GFI materials to weird dimensions, but such would certainly be contrary to the letter and spirit of the GFI materials I've studied.

With respect to Mr. Ezzo's character, I don't personally know him, nor do I personally know others who speak critically of him. I enjoy the ministries of Grace to You (John MacArthur) and Focus on the Family, yet I know that people often view other people or things very differently (some Christians also demonize John MacArthur and James Dobson). As much as I love John MacArthur's teaching, I can't personally vouch for his character any more than Gary Ezzo's. I can only say that the materials of both ministries I have studied are consistent with solid, biblical exposition and application; and are reflective of godly, Spirit-led personal lives.

[Name], if you can show me some specific examples from the GFI material itself that is in error, I would be interested in seeing it. Some of the charges like, "using the title, 'God's Way' is saying all others are not God's way," are truly inflammatory, unwarranted, and unreasonable. Crown Financial Ministries, founded by Larry Burkett, produces a course entitled, "Discovering God's Way of Handling Money." I don't take that title to imply that all other courses on Christian stewardship are "not God's way"; rather, it is simply the title of the course. In addition, I have heard from our GFI leaders that Mr. Ezzo has repeatedly offered to meet with his critics to biblically resolve these issues, but they have consistently refused. Instead, their web sites continue to propagate dated charges discrediting the Ezzos, causing division in the body of Christ, and hindering needy Christian parents from receiving the wise parenting counsel that GFI offers.

[Name], I would encourage you to get the "other side" of this story and meet with some of our leaders [name], [name], and [name]. I am not as familiar as they are when it comes to some of the details of this dispute. We, at Calvary, have tried not to stir controversy where the evidence of changed lives speaks volumes to the contrary (Matt 7: 15-20). Where God is at work, Satan will always stir up strife and contention, even using well-intentioned believers. As I said above, my wife, Dianne, and I took two GFI courses as we were blending our family because we felt we needed Bible-based, parenting training. We had seen consistently beautiful results in the lives of families who use the GFI principles and, after researching some of the assertions regarding the material and the Ezzos, we decided to take the courses. Our family was and is immeasurably blessed by the sound, common sense, Bible-based principles we have learned. We look forward to taking the course, I believe entitled, "Reaching the Heart of Your Teen," in the near future. In previous courses, we never sensed, based on the materials themselves, any notion that the Ezzos were promoting themselves or trying to divert any glory from Jesus Christ; nor pretending they are perfect or know it all about parenting. I thank God for how He has used the GFI materials in our life and respectfully encourage you to consider the "other side" of the issue.

Love and grace to you,

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