

From Tom:

We have been married for over twenty years and have five children. Our story for the first ten years of marriage is not much different than many other Christian couples. I am a physician and my wife graduated with a degree (Summa Cum Laude) in Elementary Education. We had our first child after five years of marriage. Two more came along within the next five years. Our lives were pretty hectic with three young children in the house. Without belaboring all the details, I would come home from work most days not wanting to face the stark reality of a house in disarray and a wife who was at her wits end after dealing with the children all day. The sad thing was that everyone else around us was the same way, so I thought this was pretty normal for parenting. We loved each other, went to church, had our children in good schools, and we were financially secure. All the necessary elements of a successful life, right? Wrong! We didn't realize it then, but we were setting ourselves and our children up for failure because we really didn't have a clue how to raise our children. I mean, we read all the popular parenting books and manuals, but we neglected the most tried and true method of all - parenting principles found in the Bible. Man's ways change with the wind but God's way never changes and always works when applied according to His Word. I knew the stories in the Bible, and my wife even had a fairly extensive biblical foundation since her dad was a preacher. But both of us missed the boat when it came to understanding what the Bible says about raising children. We mistakenly let the wisdom of man supersede the Wisdom of God and we paid the price.

It was by God's orchestration that we were introduced to biblical parenting through *Growing Kids God's Way*. After the first couple of weeks of the eighteen week course, we began to see changes in our family, and we knew we were on the right track. By the end of the semester, the changes were so profound that we sensed a calling to share what we have learned with others. We have been teaching GFI classes now for over ten years and also conduct workshops around the country on biblical parenting principles. However, we are still humbled with each new class that we teach. Taking *Growing Kid's God's Way* is like drinking from a fire hydrant. There is only so much that you can absorb and you will tend to concentrate only on what is important to the age of the children. Each time we teach it, our children are a little older and the struggles that they face are different than the year before. We pick up something new, or we are reminded of something that we have let slide, each time we teach the course.

Please understand this: you really CAN have that happy, peaceful family that you have always wanted. Yes, there are always struggles and, like a garden, it takes hard work with constant attention to bear fruit. We must be willing to do what is necessary to nurture these precious children as they grow, providing them with the proper nutrition for their mind, body and spirit. We must get our hands down in the soil and take out all the weeds that tend to choke them and stunt their growth. We must put them in the light of the Son to help their roots grow so deep that the winds of our wayward culture will not uproot them, killing the spiritual life within. But most importantly, we need the gardener's manual, the Bible. This will tell us all that we need to know to be a successful parent. The Ezzos' teaching on the practical application of these principles is where the rubber meets the road in Christian parenting. But remember, the Ezzos' teaching is only a tool. You may decide that different techniques work better for your family. How you apply biblical parenting principles is ultimately your decision.

From Evangeline:

Chaos reigned in our home the first five years of our parenting. Much of it was my fault. I had been introduced to some unbiblical ideas about parenting before our first child was born, and I attempted to use these theories, rather than the Word of God to build my personal parenting philosophy. In my college education classes we were taught that if parents/teachers just provide the proper environment and meet all the child's needs they will somehow turn out to be perfect little moral people. Then at breastfeeding support group meetings that I attended while expecting our first child, permissive "attachment parenting" (non-conflict parenting) was encouraged, and I was determined to be the perfect nurturing, non-conflict parent—much to my husband's frustration.

By the time we had three children ages 5 and under, the fruit of the parenting theories that I had been following were already evident, and our family was so out of control that I was depressed and discouraged and even our marriage was suffering. One day one of my sisters called and mentioned a parenting class that she and her husband had taken that had been "life-changing" for them. I listened attentively as she went on to describe their experience with a *Growing Kids God's Way* class and how it had totally changed their perspective on parenting and had given them hope for their family. As soon as she was off the phone I called for information on those classes. Providentially, a few weeks later, our church offered this class for the first time, and we eagerly signed up with high expectations.

As my husband said, this was the beginning of a complete turnaround in our family. It has taken hard work, dedication, focus and commitment, but we have watched the Lord grow our family in amazing ways since the early years of our parenting. We now have 5 children ranging from 22 months to 15 years at the time of this writing (Jan. 2006), and our home is now peaceful and our family is an amazing testimony to the power of God's Word at work.

Not that we're perfect, mind you. We still have lots of growing to do and as parents we still fail daily in big and small ways. We have learned to be good at asking forgiveness of our children and of one another. But by the grace of God our family is close-knit, our children (including our teens and pre-teens) are a joy to us, and our children are best friends with one another. We thank God every time we are reminded of that first *Growing Kids God's Way* class that we took so many years ago. Had Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo not been faithful in sharing what God taught them about parenting, we do not see how we would be enjoying the family blessings we enjoy today. We're grateful that God placed them where He did at this point in history, and that he brought them into our lives. There simply is not another course like *Growing Kids God's Way* that spans the theory and practice of biblical parenting in such a comprehensive way, making it interesting and fun as well as convicting and challenging. There is a special quality about it that God seems to use to change hearts and minds and effect real and lasting changes in families. He certainly did in ours.