

Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo
Growing Families International
Chatsworth, CA 91311

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Dear Ezzos,

We are writing to share some concerns that we have with your book *Preparation for Parenting*.

So that you know something about us, we are both born-again Christians attending Calvary Chapel in Albuquerque, NM. We were first exposed to *Preparation for Parenting* two years ago when close friends began attending the classes. As we saw the principles of *Preparation for Parenting* in action, we began having concerns about its teachings.

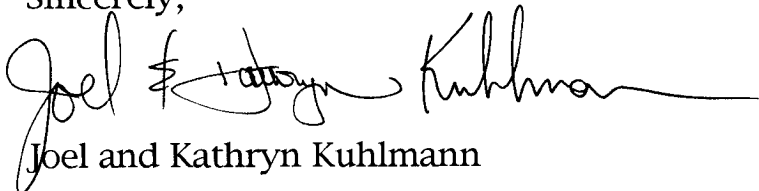
Anticipating becoming parents ourselves soon, we have read many books on parenting to help us decide which styles will be consistent with our Christian beliefs and our own family goals. Our number one priority is to raise our children to know the Lord and according to His precepts.

One of the parenting resources we studied was *Preparation for Parenting*; we watched the first video and have read the entire book thoroughly. What we have learned about the parenting style you advocate has deeply disturbed us; thus the reason for our writing to you.

During a lengthy conversation with pastor Richard Encinias about *Preparation for Parenting*, he encouraged us to share our concerns with you directly as outlined in Matt. 18:15.

We appreciate you taking the time to review our concerns, detailed below, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel & Kathryn Kuhlmann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "K".

Joel and Kathryn Kuhlmann

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I. Misinterpretation

The very first paragraph of Section One in *Preparation for Parenting*¹ states:

“Scripture has very few specific mandates for practical applications in the realm of parenting, especially infant parenting. It provides the spiritual goals of parenting but not exact or specific how-tos. Therefore, parents guided by the Holy Spirit have the ultimate responsibility and duty to research the parenting philosophies available today.”²

We agree wholeheartedly with these statements but were dismayed and astonished to find as we read further that this philosophy was not supported through the rest of the book. Not only are the usually-referenced and accepted Biblical passages on child-rearing missing (including Eph. 6:4, Deut. 6:6-7, Prov. 22:6, Prov. 29:17, to name a few), but the ones referenced in this book are taken completely out of context and do not at all appear to be God's opinion of a particular parenting style.

The two most obvious examples of Biblical misinterpretation occur in conjunction with your position on the practice of allowing children to sleep with their parents, the family bed.

I Kings 3:19 — “During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him.” (NIV)

Your interpretation of this verse is as follows:

“In the Old Testament, the family bed received one review, a negative one (I Kings 3:19). We believe the practice is potentially dangerous and developmentally unhealthy.”³

We cannot object to you having the opinion that the family bed is “potentially dangerous and developmentally unhealthy.” But to use this Biblical story illustrating Solomon's wisdom to support your claim demonstrates a practice of irresponsible Biblical interpretation.

¹Fifth edition, copyright 1995.

²*Preparation for Parenting*, p. 19.

³*PfP*, p. 188.

There is even an attempt in your book to use Jesus' birth as a statement against the family bed.

Luke 2:12 — “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (NIV)

Your interpretation:

“In the Gospel account of Saint Luke, the angels told the shepherds they would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). The manger was the crib where livestock fed, not where they lived. It was literally a feeding crib. Baby Jesus was in a crib, not the family bed.”⁴

To use the Christmas story as a statement against the family bed certainly seems to be stretching the limits of Biblical interpretation.

Although the family bed may be a controversial subject in parenting circles, these passages do not state that the family bed is unbiblical, but rather illustrate much greater Biblical truths (Solomon's wisdom and the lowly estate of Jesus' birth). Taking passages out of context as you do is contrary to even the most basic instruction on Biblical interpretation.

If we were to look elsewhere in the Bible for specific parenting “mandates” in this same out-of-context fashion, we could interpret Mark 7:27 (“‘First let the children eat all they want,’ he told her...” (NIV)) as a statement by Jesus that we should let our children eat anything and everything they want. In reality, this passage has nothing to do with parenting how-tos. When taken in context, this verse is part of a significant truth Jesus is trying to illustrate to his disciples that has nothing to do with gluttony.

CONCERN: In the beginning of the book you say that the Bible does not contain much specific guidance for parenting. However, the rest of your book does not support your initial statement and, in fact, finds specific Biblical guidance where there is none. We would like further clarification on how you arrived at your interpretation of these passages.

⁴*PfP*, p. 173.

II. Misleading

The introduction to *Preparation for Parenting* includes the statement “Our purpose in writing this book is not to provide you with a list of dos and don’ts.”⁵ When reading through the book, however, one cannot help but come away feeling like he has just been given a parenting dos and don’ts manual. Here are just a few of the dos and don’ts that riddle the entire book:

“If you need to awaken your baby during the day to prevent him from sleeping longer than the 3-hour cycle, do so!”⁶

“Feed your baby, rock him and love him, but put him down before he falls asleep.”⁷

“The stabilization phase will be completed around the eighth week. By then, your baby should be sleeping through the night on a regular basis. When we speak of sleeping through the night, we are referring to 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep.”⁸

“If your baby is not sleeping through the night by eight weeks, don’t worry about it. The eighth week is not a mark of spirituality. Although it is rare, 2 to 3% of PDF babies begin sleeping through the night at ten and eleven weeks. But when they do, they usually sleep 10 hours, catching up to all the other PDF babies.”⁹

“The determining factor is whether or not you are following a basic feeding routine with a minimum of 2.5 hours from the end of the last feeding to the beginning of the next. When infants are fed on the PDF plan, their hunger patterns stabilize.”¹⁰

CONCERN: Again, in the beginning of the book you state one thing -- that *Preparation for Parenting* is not a dos and don’ts manual -- but the rest of the book does not support the initial statement. We would like to know how statements like the above cannot be interpreted as dos and don’ts, especially when no alternatives are given. These statements, craftily interspersed with strategic (though misapplied) Biblical quotes and the repeated theme of your commitment to God’s guidance, lead an undiscerning parent to conclude that these dos and don’ts are, in fact, God’s way.

⁵PfP, p. 12.

⁶PfP, p. 115.

⁷PfP, p. 73.

⁸PfP, p. 116.

⁹PfP, p. 49. (PDF stands for Parent Directed Feeding. See footnote 12)

¹⁰PfP, p. 68.

We have been told that your intention is not for this to be a legalistic approach to parenting and that those people who use it as such do so out of ignorance. However, what we have stated above clearly demonstrates a legalistic approach and many of our acquaintances who have gone through your program consult your book specifically as a manual of parenting dos and don'ts and apply these literally to their parenting. It is our opinion that these parents are not ignorant, but are merely lacking self confidence to parent the way that works the best for them. They give no credence to their own intuitions about child rearing but proceed far beyond their level of comfort in order to carry out what they perceive are the Ezzos' instructions for them. If this is not your intent, then what you truly mean is definitely not being conveyed accurately to these parents.

Preparation for Parenting is clearly missing any admonition to parents to use intuition in raising their children. Rather, you present a formula whereby, if your methods are followed (A+B), a certain type of child will result (=C). God created each of us, parent and child, unique, not designed to fit into a mold. The rigid structure you advocate seems designed for the benefit and convenience of parents, without honest thought given to the best interests of children.

III. Misrepresentation

An up-front statement made in *Preparation for Parenting* is that “...parents guided by the Holy Spirit have the ultimate responsibility and duty to research the parenting philosophies available today...and decide for themselves which philosophy is most consistent with biblical thought and what they want their family to be like.”¹¹ Again, a seemingly open-minded statement, until the rest of the book is read. Nowhere in *Preparation for Parenting*, when other parenting styles are presented, is the generous encouragement given for parents to “decide for themselves.”

Your portrayal of parenting styles focuses only on two types: your method or the let-your-child-step-all-over-you method, which you misname as attachment parenting. The reading we have done on attachment parenting work by respected leaders and advocates of this parenting option (i.e., Dr. William Sears) does not reveal anything close to what is portrayed in your book. You are again doing a disservice to your audience by giving them false information and not encouraging them to explore other parenting options for themselves. If parents-to-be took you at your word and your definition of attachment parenting, they would in no way be interested in researching it for themselves. In reality, attachment parenting is not in the least as you describe and is, in fact, a viable parenting option for Christians. (The attached Appendix includes a brief summary of attachment parenting.)

Following are some of the unsubstantiated, sarcastic, and inflammatory statements you make regarding attachment parenting:

“Some mothers emotionally thrive on an attachment style of parenting. For them, womanhood means motherhood. That is not the case for all women, and for this latter group there is an alternative: parent-directed feeding (PDF). Our premises are basic. We believe it was never God’s intent that when a woman becomes a mother, she would stop being a wife, sister, daughter, friend, or neighbor.”¹²

First of all, attachment parenting never teaches that when a woman becomes a mother “she would stop being a wife, sister, daughter, friend, or neighbor.” This would be a ludicrous claim for anyone to make about motherhood, yet you are boldly attributing it to attachment parenting! This excerpt also provides a perfect example

¹¹PfP, p. 19.

¹²PfP, p. 49.

of how any style of parenting other than PDF is made out to be contrary to God's intent.

“Because of the lack of order associated with the attachment-parenting methodology, the one statement attachment mothers do not hear is: “My, what a good natured baby you have!”¹³

Again, this is an unfounded statement. Personally, our friends who have raised their children using attachment parenting ideas have wonderfully good-natured children. Your book is riddled with this type of inflammatory criticism of a parenting style different from what you teach.

“A second erroneous assertion about babies crying relates to God's character. Certainly, God is full of love, compassion, and mercy, and is desirous of a constant and intimate relationship with us, but those attributes are qualified by His holiness, justice, and desire for our obedience. When someone isolates or elevates any of God's attributes above the others, they distort the real meaning of that attribute. Statements such as, ‘God would never let a baby cry because He is compassionate’ or ‘God hears all of our cries’ elicit emotions of guilt, and directly downplay the need for soberminded assessment. Although God hears all our cries, He answers them according to His timetable, not ours. And He certainly does not respond to our prayers just to get us to stop praying.

How does God respond to the cries of His children? A simple concordance search of the words ‘cry,’ ‘crying,’ and ‘cries’ reveals that God's response is never without thought, or for the purpose of simply getting us to stop crying.

Praise God that the Father did not intervene when His Son cried out on the cross (Matthew 27:46). If He had stopped the process, there would be no redemption for us today. Our heavenly Father's nonintervention to His Son's cry at that moment was the right response. This example is not meant to minimize the significance of Christ's crucifixion, but to demonstrate God's loving response for the greater good. The Father loves us so much that the agonized cry of His Son did not stop Him from fulfilling His divine purpose. It is that type of love from which we can choose to train our children. We should forsake the satanic counterfeit that has God sitting on the edge of His throne waiting to jump up at our every cry, trying to prove He loves us.”¹⁴

This brash discourse makes a direct and inappropriate comparison between our Heavenly Father and human parents. Jesus' cries on the

¹³PfP, p. 49.

¹⁴PfP, p. 141-142.

cross are portrayed as being analogous to a baby's cries in his crib, and God's ability to intervene equivalent to a parent's! How are we supposed to have the knowledge, as God does, of the source of our baby's cry? Parents obviously do not have God's omniscience. Furthermore, this excerpt states that what you define as attachment parenting is a "satanic counterfeit." This is taking an extreme liberty in judging another parenting style, after first slandering it.

CONCERN: We would like to know which attachment parenting advocates you studied to get your information and how you arrived at your notion about what attachment parenting is. Again, in the books we have read on attachment parenting, we have yet to find anything represented as you claim. We would like to know where you got the information to support your claims. Specifically, we are interested in studies that you either conducted or referenced for this book.

This biased representation of the Ezzo method as being the one true, Godly way of parenting results in the conclusion that no other way is Biblical. Insecure parents-to-be reading through this manual and watching the video tapes certainly wouldn't dare question the one and only parenting method with God's stamp of approval. Thus, parents are truly not encouraged to explore "all the alternative theories" as you suggest at the beginning of your book; any method besides yours is clearly identified as unbiblical and even "satanic."

IV. Misinformation

The following excerpts are taken from throughout your book. They are just a sampling of the misinformed, unsubstantiated and irresponsible statements that litter *Preparation for Parenting*.

“Babies not only become conditioned to being picked up at a whimper, but also become abnormally dependent on it. How sad to think that Stevie’s parents are unknowingly training him to use crying as his primary mode of expression. It is commonly observed that babies under the PDF plan tend to cry less in the long run than babies who are demand-fed. The reason? Infants put on a routine become confident and secure in that routine. Their lives have order, and they learn the lesson of flexibility early in life.

Babies who settle into regular and predictable rhythms of activity develop greater tolerance to frustration and learn to use modes of communication other than crying. Ryan expresses himself with happy sounds, such as cooing, and by excited body motions, such as bouncing. These are additional modes of baby talk.”¹⁵

CONCERNS:

1) Throughout this book, your primary focus is on babies under eight weeks old. Is crying not, in fact, the primary mode of communication for infants? How are babies to communicate distress in their lives if not by crying? Are we really to believe that other parenting styles result in babies who have not learned to make “happy sounds” or “excited body motions”? A baby whose parents do not respond when he cries (while being trained to sleep through the night by eight weeks old, for example) will soon learn that crying will get him nowhere. He will learn that any discomfort he has needs to be dealt with by him alone. Is this God’s way?

We would like to know the nature of your research that has led you to conclude that crying should not be a primary mode of expression for a baby.

2) How does “order” in these babies’ lives also mean “flexibility”? This seems to be a contradiction and makes no sense in this context.

“A newborn needs outward structure until his central nervous system is fully developed. PDF is that outward structure.”¹⁶

CONCERN: Is this first statement supposed to be such a well-known fact of child development that it needs no further explanation? We

¹⁵PfP, p. 144.

¹⁶PfP, p. 68.

would like to know the research done in support of that statement and your conclusion that PDF is the answer.

“Imagine what would happen to an adult who was not allowed to sleep more than 3 hours on average for one week. The negative effects to his mature central nervous system are well established. But what about an infant whose central nervous system is still developing? Our question then is: To what extent does sleep deprivation negatively impact an infant’s developing central nervous system? Imagine parenting in such a way that your baby is not allowed to sleep continuously for 8 hours, even one night out of three-hundred and sixty-five. Could many of the learning disabilities associated with a non-structured approach to parenting be rooted in something as basic as the absence of continuous nights of sleep in the first year of life when the higher brain is still developing?”¹⁷

CONCERNS:

This paragraph is full of absolutely irresponsible statements:

- 1) It is blatantly ignorant to equate a child’s sleep patterns and requirements with those of an adult. There are so many factors that come into play in a child’s sleep that don’t (usually) apply to adults: hunger, dirty diapers, fear, cold, etc. This is so obvious as to warrant no further discussion.
- 2) You use a devious technique of throwing out leading questions that are left for the reader to answer. An unsuspecting reader would draw the conclusion to which you are directing them based on the context in which you place these questions. Even the title of this section, *Is Infant Sleep Deprivation Dangerous?*, leads an undiscerning reader to think that any other questions posed here are also rhetorical.
- 3) We would like to know the answers to the three questions you ask, since the answers are not overtly provided in your text. To make a statement directly implying that a non-structured approach to parenting leads to learning disabilities without supplying any evidence for this is irresponsible and demonstrates a profound lack of discretion.
- 4) The implication is very strong that any parent using a method other than yours is depriving their child of sleep. Again, another statement with no substantiation.

¹⁷PfP, p. 69.

“The most serious sleep problems we’ve encountered are associated with parents who sleep with their babies. Sharing sleep with children puts them at risk both physically and emotionally. Rolling on top of the child and smothering him to death is a real threat. Emotionally, this method is passively abusive. It may create a state of abnormal dependency on the sleep prop to the point that the child actually fears falling asleep when transitioned to his own bed.”¹⁸

CONCERNS:

- 1) What are the sleep problems you reference? We are interested in data from your studies as well as your methodologies.
- 2) How is sharing sleep “passively abusive”? Another unsubstantiated statement.
- 3) You say this “*may* create a state of abnormal dependency.” Anyone can say anything if it is qualified with *may*. How often does this “state of abnormal dependency” occur according to your research or the research you have studied?

¹⁸PfP, p. 72.

It is unfortunate to see material as unsupported, unsubstantiated, and inflammatory as *Preparation for Parenting* being blindly accepted by so many Christians merely because it is touted as being Biblically based. This is reminiscent of the current Word of Faith movement that is gradually infiltrating the church because Christians are not following the guidance of I Thes. 5:21 to “examine everything carefully.”

After examining the principles of *Preparation for Parenting* thoroughly, carefully, and at length, we can only conclude that they are not as they are represented, as being God’s way. Rather, the book is replete with half-truths and misinformation, open-ended questions, statements with no attributable research to back them up, slander, and, most disturbingly, with distorted and erroneous Biblical interpretations. That these are the qualities of the leading Christian guidance on parenting in the United States is shameful.

Joel and Kathryn Kuhlmann
August 18, 1996

Appendix — Attachment Parenting

The following is a list of excerpts from *The Baby Book*, by Dr. William Sears, and from an article he authored entitled *Attachment Parenting: A Style that Works*. These excerpts serve to briefly illustrate the attachment parenting philosophy.

“Attachment parenting has been around as long as there have been mothers and babies. It is, in fact, only recently that this style of parenting has needed a name at all, for it is basically the commonsense parenting we all would do if left to our own healthy resources.”

“One of the greatest gifts you can give your new baby is a home built on the foundation of a stable and fulfilled marriage.”

“Attachment parenting is an ideal. Because of medical situations, lifestyle differences, or just plain rough times, you may not be able to practice all of these attachment tips all the time. Parenting is too individual and baby is too complex for there to be only one way.”

“The rate at which babies develop physically and emotionally varies tremendously. Having rigid and unrealistic expectations will only lead to frustration which can put a damper on your spontaneous interaction with your child and ultimately lessen your enjoyment.”

“The early weeks and months are a sensitive period when mother and baby need to be together. Early closeness allows the natural attachment-promoting behaviors of a baby and the intuitive, biological caregiving of a mother to unfold. Early closeness gets the pair off to the right start at a time when the baby is most needy and the mother is most eager to nurture.”

“Every baby comes wired with an ability to signal his needs. Adults call this unique language the cry. Every mother develops the ‘wiring’ necessary to receive her baby’s signal. This is a special communication network designed for the survival of the baby and the development of the mother. Promptly responding to your baby’s cries increases your sensitivity to your baby. Sensitivity helps develop your parental intuition.”

“Pick up your baby when he cries. As simple as this sounds, there are many parents who have been told to let their babies cry it out, for the reason that they must not reward ‘bad’ behavior. But newborns

don't misbehave; they just communicate the only way nature allows them to. Imagine how you would feel if you were completely uncoordinated — unable to do anything for yourself — and your cries for help went unheeded. A baby whose cries are not answered does not become a 'good' baby (though he may become quiet); he does become a discouraged baby. He learns the one thing you don't want him to: that he can't communicate or trust his needs will be met."

"Babies often give their parents cues as to where they want to sleep. Some babies sleep best in their own room; others sleep best in a bed in their parents' room; many babies sleep best in their parents' bed. Parents have varying preferences as well. The sleeping arrangement whereby all three of you (mother, father and baby) sleep best is the right one for your individual family."

"Attachment parenting works because it respects the individual temperament of the child. The child comes equipped with a certain level of needs and the ability to give cues about what these needs are. The parents, by first being open to the child's cues, learn how to read the child and respond."

"Difficult problems in child rearing do not have easy answers. Children are too valuable and their needs too important to be made victims of cheap, shallow advice."