

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY ACTION™

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DEDICATED TO THE DEFENSE OF
MORAL VALUES AND THE FAMILY

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Dear Friends,

Greetings from all of us at Focus on the Family® and Focus on the Family Action, and from the Dobson household. May I take this occasion to re-introduce you to our first grandchild, Lincoln Cash Dobson? (You have been expecting this, haven't you?) Isn't he a beauty? What joy and satisfaction this little lad is bringing into Ryan and Laura's home, and into the hearts of his grandparents. You may recall that my professional field is child development; and even after many years since my academic training at USC, I am still fascinated by the magnificent unfolding of personality and intelligence that springs forth when life is new. The Scripture tells us we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). That handiwork by the Creator is never more evident than when the characteristics of "humanness" begin to unfold like flowers on a spring morning. I love it! I thank God for it!



Lincoln Cash Dobson hanging out with Grandmother "Mae-Mae"!

In December of 2005, I shared a letter with you that was written by Paul Batura, my associate at Focus.¹ He described the difficulties that he and his wife, Julie, had experienced in trying to conceive, and how discouraging and disappointing their journey had been. Treatment for infertility is a long and costly

process. It is wonderful when it succeeds, but heart wrenching when it fails. For Paul and Julie, one disappointment followed another until despair stalked their home. Finally, they began trying to adopt a child, and Paul described in his letter the miraculous answers to prayer that eventually resulted in a beautiful baby boy named Riley being placed in their arms. Our entire staff was exhilarated. Well, Riley is now a toddler, and he is a charmer. Here is a recent photograph of him with the Baturas' Great Dane, Shep, each looking longingly at the outside world. Don't you suppose they were thinking, "How can I get outta here?!"



Riley Batura with his new best friend, "Shep."

Is there anything more fulfilling and rewarding than investing oneself fully in a precious child, teaching and training and ultimately introducing him or her to the God of the Universe? I think not. Admittedly, children are costly in every way. The emotional and spiritual investment required is immense, not to mention the financial commitment. The Web site parenthood.com recently estimated that the average parent will spend around \$170,000 to raise *one* child over a lifetime. A Department of Agriculture study is even more striking, estimating that "it will cost \$237,000 for a family with an average annual income of \$57,400 to feed, clothe, house and educate one child from birth to age 17."² And that figure does not even take college expenses into account!

How foolish and self-serving it is, given the financial burden that rides on the shoulders of today's young parents, that the Democratic Congress is seriously considering a series of sweeping tax increases that will make parenting even more difficult. Their proposal calls for an elimination of every tax cut in the past seven years, totaling \$400 billion.³ It would be the largest tax increase in U.S. history. It would slash the child tax credit in half, reducing it from \$1,000 to \$500. Death taxes would rise to the highest level ever, and tax brackets would increase substantially in every bracket, even for low-income families. These "working poor" would be assessed a staggering 15 percent!⁴ Whatever happened to the promise that only the "rich" would be hit? Instead, there will be tax increases for absolutely everybody.

The most onerous of the proposals is the re-imposition of the "Marriage Penalty Tax," which for 32 years (1969 to 2001) forced moms and dads to pay federal income tax at a higher rate than unmarried people living together out of wedlock. Does this make any sense whatsoever? The public should be up in arms by the mere suggestion of this assault on the financial viability of the home!

According to Americans for Tax Relief, the average taxpayer faces an increase of \$3,035 under the Democrats' tax plan. And if you have a family of four with an income of \$60,000 per year, your taxes will rise from \$3,030 to \$4,893. That's an increase of 61 percent! Is it any wonder that Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid never mentioned this during the 2006 campaign?

Married mothers and fathers are already sacrificing mightily to rear the next generation of Americans. Upon the outcome of their effort lies the future of the nation. Nevertheless, politicians who don't care a whit about the stability of the family are contemplating legislation to penalize the very people who are investing their lives daily in guiding, training, feeding, clothing, medicating and comforting their children. It is an outrage that these "national heroes," known as parents, are given so little support and respect. Fathers and mothers such as Paul and Julie Batura and Ryan and Laura Dobson should be paying *lower*, not higher, taxes.

By the way, we should ask what Democrats will do with the revenue they generate from increases in taxation on families. Here is the answer. We were given an eye-popping look at their priorities in March when the House and Senate tacked \$20 billion and \$18

billion respectively in spending onto the bill to fund our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵ It was an old-fashioned “pork fest.” Specified expenditures included:

- \$25 million for payments to spinach growers
- \$120 million to the shrimp industry
- \$74 million for peanut storage
- \$5 million for shellfish, oyster and clam producers
- \$425 million for education grants for rural areas
- \$24 million to sugar beet producers
- \$22.8 million for geothermal research and development
- \$25 million for asbestos abatement at the Capitol Power Plant
- \$20 million for reimbursements to Nevada for insect damage
- \$75 million for salaries and expenses for the Farm Service Agency
- \$3.5 million for guided tours of the Capitol
- \$283 million for the Milk Income Loss Contract program
- \$6.4 million for House of Representatives salaries and expense accounts⁶

My good friend, Rep. Mike Pence [R-Ind.] offered a tongue-in-cheek analysis when he said, “Spinach, shrimp, peanuts and shellfish? That’s not a war funding bill, that’s the salad bar at Denny’s.”⁷

In House and Senate versions of the Iraqi War Funding Bill which passed in each chamber, mothers and fathers will have to dig even deeper to pay for these and countless other wasteful projects, which are intended to secure re-election by politicians who want to impress their constituencies. This is not what Americans sent them to Washington to do! Seventeen new Democrats in the House, most of whom ran on a moderate platform, took the “bribes” and voted to abandon our troops by calling for a set withdrawal date for the war.⁸

If you agree this was a disgraceful political maneuver, would you take a moment to express your sentiment to the people who lead the Democratic Party and the Congress, notably Harry Reid, Majority Leader in the Senate (202-224-3542) and Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives (202-225-4965)? You might also express your views to your local newspaper and various media outlets. They often advocate in favor of higher taxes of every variety. And while you are at it, tell those in both parties who would like to become president that you are watching how they deal with the institution of the family. If you will join me in this campaign, we will put heat on tax-and-spend liberals who are planning to soak families again.

Returning to my theme, bearing and raising children requires every spiritual, emotional, financial and psychological resource that parents can muster. It is a journey fraught with potential pain and disappointment, but also unspeakable joy and satisfaction. The investment in children is the antithesis of our society's self-centered, "me first" environment that so often aborts its babies or neglects its young. An important study by social researchers, Drs. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, brings this anti-child mentality into the sobering realm of reality. Their report, titled "Life Without Children," confirms that "demographically, socially and culturally, the nation is shifting from a society of child-rearing families to a society of child-free adults."⁹

The most striking evidence of this shift can be seen in our nation's declining birthrate. An article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* revealed that in 2002, the birthrate in the United States fell to only 66.9 births per 1,000 women aged 15-44.¹⁰ This figure, an all-time low, represents a shocking 43 percent decline in the fertility rate since 1960. In their study, Popenoe and Whitehead state that "since 2000 the birthrate has been continuing its downward trend. In 2004 . . . the American 'total fertility rate' stood at 2.049 . . . This rate is below the 'replacement level' of 2.1, the level at which the population would be replaced through births alone . . ."¹¹

Some researchers believe that birthrates in the United States will eventually fall as low as those in some European countries, where the population is in a state of dangerous decline. In Japan, schools close on a regular basis due to the shortage of children. Meanwhile, in places such as Singapore and Australia, where parents in the 1960s and 1970s were offered government incentives to limit the number of children they produced, officials are now offering couples incentives to have *more* babies in an effort to stabilize the population.

Whitehead and Popenoe assert that in today's economy, childless young adults are considered extremely desirable as both consumers and economic contributors because they are not "burdened" by the time constraints and other limitations associated with marriage and, especially, parenthood. Similarly, adults over 50 "make up a growing share of Americans with money to spend on second homes, travel, recreation, learning and entertainment."¹²

This conclusion might help explain why studies show an apparent link between our society's wealth and materialism (what some have termed "affluenza") and its increasing aversion to children. Apparently, when people are caught up in the ongoing race for bigger houses, better jobs and faster cars, they have little time for or interest in bearing children. An article in *Opinion Journal* recently noted that San Francisco, which has a median house price of \$700,000, also has the lowest percentage of people under 18 than any other city in the nation—14.5 percent (the nationwide average is 25.7 percent).¹³ And last year, a *USA Today* article noted that "In Seattle, there are nearly 45% more dogs than children. In Salt Lake City, there are nearly 19% more kids than dogs . . . It's not that people in a progressive city such as Seattle are so much fonder of dogs than are people in a conservative city such as Salt Lake City. It's that progressives

[liberals] are much less likely to have children."¹⁴

This demographic shift has produced an adult-oriented, self-centered mindset reflected in a proliferation of “no kids allowed” housing developments, health clubs, stores, and so on. Social and travel groups are organized for “DINK” (dual income, no kids) couples, and anti-child Web sites abound, many of which derisively refer to children as “spawn” and their parents as “breeders.”

The eventual result of this hostility to children and parents, as it spreads, will be a form of social suicide, leading to a world without springtime, regeneration or the idealism of youth. Remaining will be an increasingly aging community stumbling inevitably toward death and decay.

At this point, it is critical that I make a few important distinctions. My intent here is not to heap undue guilt on married readers who, for any number of reasons, do not have children. I am fully aware, as well, that there are many couples out there who desperately desire to have kids but have not been able to do so as a result of infertility, miscarriage and other physical complications. Neither is it my goal to criticize those who have not yet found a spouse or those who, through the specific leading of the Lord, have chosen to remain single.

My comments are directed primarily to married couples who view having children as simply another “lifestyle choice”—and an undesirable one, at that. I believe that attitude contradicts what we know from Scripture about the blessing of children and the high calling of parenthood.

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who is a good friend and a respected member of Focus on the Family’s board of directors, has written extensively on the subject of “intentional childlessness.” He, too, is careful to differentiate between couples who are childless as a result of fertility problems or other extenuating circumstances, and those who avoid parenthood for purely selfish reasons. In his own words, “My concern is with those couples who, now freed by contraceptives from the ‘threat’ of children, have simply decided that they will choose to be married but will choose not to have children. The rise of ‘lifestyle’ childlessness is a new thing among human beings—much less among Christians—and it is a willful rejection of God’s procreative purpose for marriage.”¹⁵

In his blog at albertmohler.com, Dr. Mohler sums up the argument this way:

Marriage, children and sex are part of one package. To deny any part of this wholeness is to reject God’s intention in creation—and His mandate revealed in the Bible . . . Those who reject children want to have the joys of sex and marital companionship without the responsibilities of parenthood. They rely on others to produce and sustain the generations to come . . . The church must help this society regain its sanity on the gift of children. Willful barrenness and chosen childlessness must be named as moral rebellion.¹⁶

Dr. Mohler's perspective might seem harsh, but it is difficult to take an honest reading of Scripture and come to any other conclusion. Consider this familiar passage from the book of Psalms: "Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5, NIV). It is a serious error to intentionally avoid or reject something that the Lord calls a "gift" and a "blessing," especially in the interest of pursuing selfish financial gain or fleeting pleasure.

Leon R. Kass, a respected professor and researcher at the University of Chicago, has described the experience of parenthood in particularly eloquent terms:

Marriage and procreation are, therefore, at the heart of a serious and flourishing human life, if not for everyone at least for the vast majority. Most of us know from our own experience that life becomes truly serious when we become responsible for the lives of others for whose being in the world we have said "We do." It is fatherhood and motherhood that teach most of us what it took to bring us into our own adulthood. And it is the desire to give not only life but a good way of life to our children that opens us toward a serious concern for the true, the good, even the holy.¹⁷

This is precisely why the high calling of childrearing deserves our society's support and encouragement, not its scorn and indifference. Parents who are earnestly endeavoring to raise productive citizens and, hopefully, committed followers of Christ, need the very best resources that our government, social organizations and churches can provide. What they *don't* need are looks of disdain from the cultural elite, backbreaking taxes and family-unfriendly policies from the government, or jeers and jabs from everyone else.

If you're a parent, you already know that raising children is the most difficult job you'll ever do. In the words of Popenoe and Whitehead, "the bone-wearying and time-consuming work of the child-rearing years [does not] comport with a culture of fun and freedom . . . Indeed, child-rearing values—sacrifice, stability, dependability, maturity—seem stale and musty by comparison."¹⁸

But it's also a faith-challenging, faith-stretching and faith-affirming endeavor that nurtures selflessness and maturity in the face of our culture's admonitions to pursue pleasure and to "look out for number one." If approached in a spirit of humility and prayer, parenthood produces the fruit of righteousness in those who embrace it. How can one *not* be transformed by a trip to the ER in the middle of the night when your little one has a dangerously high fever? How can a mother *not* mature in her faith after years of nursing skinned knees, bandaging broken arms, or offering comforting embraces after bad dreams? What father hasn't learned a valuable life lesson after experiencing, though his children, the joys and failures of school sports? What parent could remain unmoved and unchanged after hearing a little voice ask, "Why is the sky blue?" or "Where will I go

after I die?" or "Who is God?" This is the stuff of real life. The pursuit of fame, fortune, comfort and convenience are utterly meaningless in comparison.

No matter what stage of life you're experiencing today, I hope you'll make every effort to be "counter-cultural" by promoting and proclaiming the significance of bearing and raising children. If you're a member of the senior generation, as I am, maybe you'll think twice before advising a newly married couple "not to rush into the parenting years." Rather, encourage them to embrace them for the blessing and challenge that they are, rather than waiting for all of their financial dreams and aspirations to be realized. Or maybe you're married and in your 30s, and have bought society's lie that children are nothing more than a burden and an inconvenience. I urge you to seek the counsel of a pastor or some parents within your social circle in order to gain a broader perspective. Or call our counselors here at our sister organization, Focus on the Family. They will be glad to talk and pray with you.

Whether you're a parent or not, you might also encourage the leaders in your church to make a more concerted effort to ensure that families with young children are welcomed, affirmed and supported by the congregation. And by all means, be sure to keep up with the latest cultural developments and to support political leaders and policies that are friendly toward parents and their kids. And I beg you not to believe the propaganda, now being shouted by the media, that Americans don't care about the issue of abortion any more, and have "moved on" to global warming and other issues. It is a distortion of major proportions.

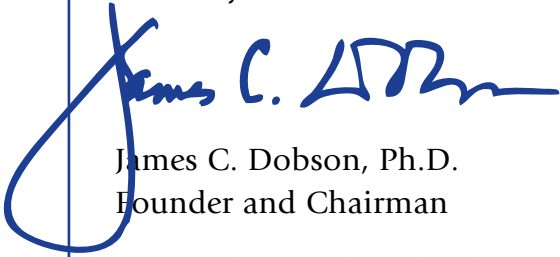
Rest assured that all of us here at Focus on the Family and Focus on the Family Action remain committed to promoting a culture that embraces the blessing of children and supports the high calling of parenthood. We have invested a great deal of time, energy and money into producing resources that will encourage and equip parents in the sacred responsibility of childrearing. For example, Focus on the Family's *Your Child*[®] DVD seminar contains a wealth of information designed to help moms and dads tackle the tricky issue of discipline. Another DVD-based seminar is based on my book *Bringing Up Boys*. (I'm currently writing the follow-up book, *Bringing Up Girls*). My earlier books for parents include *The New Dare to Discipline*, *The New Hide or Seek*, *The New Strong Willed Child*, *Life on the Edge*, and *Bringing Up Boys*. Each of these books is available from bookstores and from Focus on the Family.

But this ministry is not simply a one-man band featuring James Dobson! It offers a wide range of books from a host of respected authors, along with DVDs, magazines, downloads and Web sites covering virtually every aspect of the parenting experience. Our selection of kid-friendly resources, spanning birth through the teenage years, is growing as well. Check out the Focus on the Family Web site for more information.

If you have any suggestions about how we might pursue the goal of fostering a "child-friendly" culture even more effectively, we'd certainly love to hear from you. And by all

means, please pray for us as we endeavor to strengthen the institution of the family in our society and equip Christian parents to say, along with the Psalmist, "Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11).

Sincerely,



James C. Dobson, Ph.D.
Founder and Chairman

P.S. As discussed in this letter, the anti-family forces in Washington are well-organized and well-funded. Focus on the Family Action is working hard to defend the values that you and I hold dear, but our budget is limited and our needs are particularly acute just now. If you feel led to make a contribution to Focus Action at this time, we'd certainly love to hear from you.

ENDNOTES:

¹ See: focusonthefamily.com/docstudy/newsletters/A000000258.cfm

² "Adult Population Without Children Increasing," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, 30 July 2006.

³ "Citizens Against Government Waste Condemns Senate Democrats' Budget," *U.S. Fed News*, 15 March 2007.

⁴ See: atr.org

⁵ James Rosen, "S.C. Senators Blast Pork in Bill for War on Terrorism; Rep. Clyburn Says Domestic Situations Need Funds, Too," *The Myrtle Beach Sun-News*, 29 March 2007, p. A6.

⁶ See: michellemalkin.com/archives/007156.htm

⁷ "Rep. Pence Condemns Iraq Emergency Funding Bill As 'Fiscally Irresponsible and Constitutionally Flawed,' 23 March 2007.

⁸ See: latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/wire/la-na-talley24mar24,1,4382057.htmlstory

⁹ Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe and David Popenoe, 2006, "The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America, 2006, Life Without Children," The National Marriage Project, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

¹⁰ Helena Oliviero, "Married Without Children: Couples Say Not Having Offspring Doesn't Deprive Them of Well-Rounded Lives," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 24 August 2003, p. 1.

¹¹ Whitehead and Popenoe, 2006.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See: opinionjournal.com/best/?id=110006473

¹⁴ Phillip Longman, "The liberal baby bust; Progressives are less likely to have children than are conservative folks. In fact, fertility rates in Bush states were 11% higher than rates in Kerry states in 2004. What might this mean for America?" *USA Today*, 14 March 2006, p. A15.

¹⁵ Albert Mohler, Ph.D., "Deliberate Childlessness: Moral Rebellion With a New Face," albertmohler.com.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See: boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001161.cfm

¹⁸ Whitehead and Popenoe, 2006.