

I have known Israel and Brook Wayne and their children for many years. During that time I have had the joy of watching their family grow to now nine children. When it comes to parenting, they practice what they preach. Speaking from the perspective of a pastor, their children are some of the most well-behaved children I've ever had the blessing of being with. They behave better, and pay attention in church, more than some adults I know. Biblically parenting their children isn't something they just do, it's who they are. I only wish I had their insights to parenting when I raised my own. It would have made things easier.

Richard Grom, Calvary Chapel Sunset Coast

The Wayne's have done a wonderful job of telling a story of the danger of anger in the family. Their transparency shows they have lived in our shoes and this lends credibility to their anger solutions. If we fall to temptation and sin in the area of anger, there is hope in repentance and confession as seen in their story. I was greatly encouraged by regularly pointing us to biblical truth. One of the keys of adopting what the Waynes are teaching is that it will help to build the foundation for long-term healthy relationships with our children as they move into adulthood. I would highly recommend this book and the study questions at the end of each chapter to help overcome all forms of anger in the home.

Todd Kangas, Director of Midwest Parent Educators

Israel and Brook Wayne have hit one out of the ballpark with this book! *Pitchin' a Fit* is the most practical, thoughtful, and insightful book on parenting that I have read. There is so much wisdom and humility between these pages that it is hard to come up with an appropriate description. Instead of focusing solely on children's behavior, Israel and Brook direct parents to look deeply at their own reactions to their children. They teach us how to get past our emotional reactions and learn how to respond biblically and model the behavior we want to see in our children. Using their own experiences, including the lapses we all experience, they illustrate how we can tap God's Word to reform ourselves as we learn to gently guide our children to maturity without anger. This book gets my highest recommendation!

Carolyn Forte, Excellence In Education

A great blend of straight Bible and straight practical. Israel and Brook live "the real life" with a houseful of kids every day, so their wisdom is tried and tested! As a granddad who yearns to see today's couples turn first to the Word, and second to the experience and wisdom of other godly parents — not the other way around — *Pitchin' A Fit* is a breath of fresh air! Kudos to my good friend Israel and his amazing helpmate, Brook.

Dale Mason, author, magazine publisher, homeschool dad

Israel and Brook Wayne offer an excellent treatment for the problem of anger — a problem that afflicts practically every home in the world. This book is surprisingly approachable, highly practical, and biblically fortified throughout.

Kevin Swanson, pastor, author, host of Generations Radio

Solid biblical truth and real-life practical help for parents who struggle with whining, screaming, and bad attitudes — and I don't mean the kids!

**Sonya Shafer, founder of Simply Charlotte Mason,
author, conference speaker**

Scripture commands fathers to avoid exasperating their children and provoking them to anger. Yet our kid's disobedience seems to naturally bring out the anger buried inside. So how are parents to reach the heart of our young children and shepherd them with grace and gentleness? I'm a firm believer in one of Brook's and Israel's suggestions to "slow down and sit down" when you are suddenly faced with a need to discipline a young one. After all, what's the rush? Slowing down will help you as much as it will bless your children. Give it a try. I bet you will feel better about the whole process.

Davis Carman, President, Apologia Educational Ministries

In their new book, *Pitchin' a Fit*, Israel and Brook Wayne provide us with a deeply comprehensive look at anger, both in our personal lives and in the family context: What are the origins of anger? Is anger ever justified? What does Scripture mean by not provoking our children to anger? How can parents deal with anger among siblings? With anger at their own children? Much more. Israel is a gifted, and much sought-after speaker on the subject of family and parenting issues. I recommend this book for every parent, even those who don't think they have anger issues. You will be helped by the insights Israel and Brook share on these pages!

Chris Davis, Author, conference speaker, publisher

What a welcome breath of fresh air in a very me-focused culture to find a book willing to tackle what I believe is a real problem for Christian parents. Israel and Brook Wayne share their struggles while going one step further than most books, giving practical advice that will actually work. Not only do they give you advice on getting to the root of the problem, but enclosed is a roadmap to freedom, as well. If you need a book that will help you conquer anger and deal with stress with a big dose of encouragement, I highly recommend this book.

**Felice Gerwitz, author and podcaster,
founder of Media Angels, Inc.**

OVERCOMING ANGRY *and*
STRESSED-OUT PARENTING

PITCHIN' A FIT!

Israel & Brook Wayne

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All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and
great shall be the peace of your children (Isa. 54:13).

Dedicated to our precious children, each of whom has enriched our lives in countless ways. Our prayer for each of you is that you will look to the Lord all the days of your life and allow Him to lead you. May great peace follow you all the days of your life. We love you more than life itself.

And to the parents walking this journey with us, looking to put off the weight of our own weaknesses and faults for the sake of seeing God work in each of our children.

Special Thanks to Sony Elise for her editing skills, time, and love. You are a great sister, and we're thankful to co-labor with you.

Special Thanks to Tim Dudley for believing in us! Thank you to the whole team at New Leaf Publishing Group for your dedication and hard work to produce “ink on paper to touch eternity.”

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Introduction

Israel: It was a simple request. “Make sure you feed the chickens before we leave.” That’s not exactly rocket science. However, when you give an instruction to a child, you never know how things may turn out.

We were all loaded up in our 15-passenger van, ready for our 31-day road trip across America. As a public speaker I travel frequently, speaking at churches, conferences, retreats, seminars, camps, and other events on a variety of Christian-living topics. The nice thing about not being tied to a “day job” is that I sometimes get to take my whole family with me. My wife, my sister, and our flock of children were waiting on me as I locked our house and proceeded to the vehicle.

As I was getting into the van, I noticed a sight that sent a shock of emotions pulsing through my system all at once. In front of our closed garage door were about 25 chickens, all ravenously trying to push the others aside so they could single-handedly consume the 50-pound bag of feed that had been dumped there.

“What in the world!” I exclaimed as I walked over for closer inspection. My mind was having a hard time taking this in. I could feel the frustration rising. I walked over to our van, opened the door, and instructed the child in question to accompany me to the crime scene.

“What did I tell you to do?” I asked sternly.

“Feed the chickens.”

“Right. So why did you do this?”

“I fed them.”

“This is NOT the way you feed the chickens!” (My blood pressure was rising.)

(Silence.)

“You know that I wanted you to take the feed to the chicken coop, which is 150 yards from here in the *BACK YARD!* In what universe do you think *THIS* is okay?”

“You didn’t say *where* to feed them. You just said to feed them.”

“Seriously? Are we really having this conversation? Why didn’t you leave them in the chicken coop? Did it not occur to you that we would be leaving for 31 *DAYS*? Did you not consider that since your aunt is coming to feed them for us, she will *NOT* want the responsibility of chasing 25 chickens around the yard and catching them? And *WHAT* could have possibly convinced you that right in front of our garage door was a location where I would want chickens pooping all over the place? What on earth were you thinking?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Yep. I was angry. “Get in the van!”

The child quickly retreated to the van (which was still running), while I began to think of what to do. I knew that chickens have the ability to eat almost constantly, so there was very little threat of the feed still being there by the end of the day. I knew this would require my (other) sister to buy more feed while we were gone (which I hated to have her do). I knew that we would get a late start if we took time to capture the chickens, but if we didn’t, my sister would have that unpleasant task.

Most of all, I knew I had just done what I have always told my children not to do. I lost my temper. Now when I say I “lost it,” I don’t mean that I lost it in any kind of seriously out-of-control way. No one in the situation was in fear for his or her safety. But I had raised my voice and I had spoken in anger. I hated that.

I noticed that my wife and sister were watching me pace back in forth in the driveway, muttering to myself. I needed to cool down. The problem was that every time I glanced toward the garage, the emotions all flooded back.

Finally, I walked toward the van, climbed in, and sat down. I was about to put the vehicle in drive when I remembered our family’s tradition. Before we leave on a long trip, we pray for safety and blessing. I thought about the purpose of this trip. We were going to meet with thousands of families across America who were hurting and needed help and encouragement. I always ask my children after our time of prayer, “Why are we going on this trip?” They all respond, “To bless people!”

There was *no way* I was fit to be a blessing to anyone at that moment. In fact, I felt rather hypocritical about even praying. I was pretty sure that God wouldn’t be interested in hearing anything I had to say. Or worse yet, He probably already had heard everything I had just said (and how I said it). I looked in the rearview mirror, made eye contact with the offending child, and said, “Get out of the van.”

We both stepped outside, and I took five deep breaths. I looked up toward the sky, said a silent prayer for help and grace, and then repented to my child.

“I was wrong. That was not an acceptable way for me to respond to you. Now let me be very clear . . . what

you did was not acceptable either . . . but that does not excuse me. I spoke to you in anger, and that is not what I want to do.”

“That’s okay,” came the quick reply. (Children are so eager to forgive, even when their parents have been out of line.)

“I appreciate that you forgive me, but no, it’s not okay, and I don’t want you to ever think that it is. By God’s grace I want to respond more appropriately in the future. I will be praying about this and asking God to change my heart. Will you pray for me as well?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, I love you.”

“Thanks. I love you too.”

“Are you ready to go?”

“I think so.”

“Okay, let’s see if we can have a better trip now. Oh, but first, we need to catch some chickens and clean up a mess.”

I wish I could say that this was the only such scenario in my many years of parenting. It was not. However, I am thankful that, for all of my failures as a father, God has continued to teach me His ways and help me to mature. Those moments for me are relatively infrequent and are not life defining.

Taming the Meanie Monster

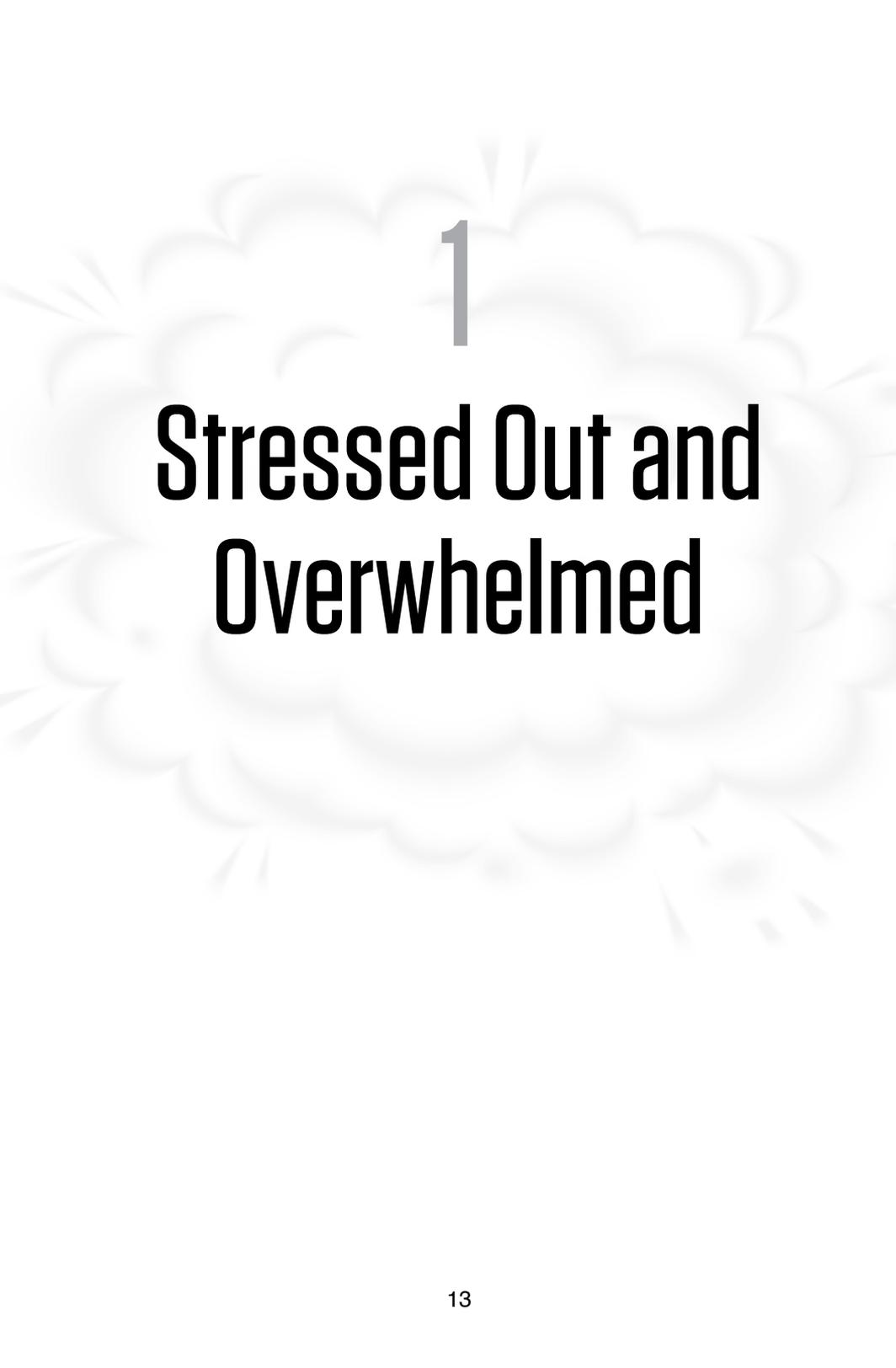
If you are a parent, you have been there. Children do things that test the limits of those of us who admire rationality and common sense. Our innate default in such moments is to respond badly. We all struggle with anger to some extent. It is only through learning what God has to say on the subject of anger, and through appropriating the power of the Holy Spirit, that we can escape the tyranny of our own tendencies and addictions.

If you struggle with habitual anger, there are several things you need to know.

1. You are not alone. Everyone struggles with this issue to some extent.
2. It is not okay. Left unchecked it will damage important relationships.
3. There is hope. There is freedom found in God's Word to help you overcome this habitual sin.

We hope that you will join us on a mission to escape the trap of angry and stressed-out parenting. In this book, we will share with you a biblical view of anger, strategies for breaking life-long habits, and ways that you can build up and encourage your child rather than tear him or her down.

We believe that there is life-transforming power in the truth of Scripture, and we know that better days are in store for you and your family through God's grace.



1

Stressed Out and Overwhelmed

Brook: It was Sunday morning. We were running late . . . again. I detest being late. I get it from my dad, who is punctual on the side of early. Nothing had gone right that morning. The oatmeal had burned right under my nose as I put the finishing touches on our crockpot dish to share for lunch. We had been out the night before, so there were too many people waiting in line for a shower and, way too early, the hot water was exhausted. The girls couldn't find their tights, one of the boys' shirts had a stain on it. We finally dashed out the door. During the drive, my mind was still in a muddled mess about all the little imperfections we had left behind, as well as the ones that went with us. Ugh! One of the girls' tights had a hole in it! Why hadn't I noticed that! I was sure everyone else would notice it! And the perfectly combed hair of several children was all askew as they had tussled with each other to get out the door. Then there were the breakfast dishes left on the table. Why couldn't we get it together to at least get them to the sink? Just as I was feeling out of sorts, wouldn't you know it, we took a turn, and, well, the crockpot. . . .

As we finally resolved the crockpot situation, I actually took the time to count up each of the irritations I had faced that morning. Every last little irksome, imperfect dent on my day. No one item was large or significant in and of itself. Nevertheless, I felt like a tremendous failure. Just why do little stressors have to all gang up on me together, and in the morning to boot?

As I faced out the window, ignoring the children's chatter, I had to admit to myself that there really wasn't all that much to get worked up about. With some better pre-planning, many of those little problems could be avoided. But what stared back at me from the vehicle's window was the fact that I had come to love so much

having all my “ducks in a row,” everything organized and “just so,” that I was willing to get all bent out of shape when “perfect” didn’t happen. I had to ask myself, “Did Jesus suffer, die on the cross, and rise again, so I could have a flawless, organized, picture-perfect life with no bumps?”

By taking on stress in a million small ways, I had allowed stress to narrow my vision to a very small world — one where I got to be in command. Jesus came to bring salvation to a vast world of sinners caught in the chains of addiction to self. And here I was, all in an emotional despair, because one of my children didn’t wear his good shoes and didn’t comb his hair?

Sure, there can be quite a bit of benefit to examining how to streamline family life and its various functions, but feeling out of sorts doesn’t help accomplish that. My heart’s focus had gotten off the riches and fullness of Christ and had settled onto the temporary. And, for many of us, that’s where we open the door for stress to come in and roost.

The Illusion of the Life of Ease

None of us likes trials, big or small. We like to safeguard our lives and avoid stress at all costs. We like to have everything pristine and under control. Some of us work very hard at not taking on more than we can handle. But life isn’t always like that. It throws us curveballs and bumps and losses when we least expect it. We can’t hide in an ivory tower. If we try, we end up shutting *people* out of our lives. Parenting, in particular, brings its own set of stresses related to the care and upbringing of children. The bills, the broken legs, the cobwebs, the repairs, the dishes — they can all look so big and scary, and seek to knock us off course!

If, instead, we keep our eyes on the Lord, trusting He has a plan through all of this, a load will be lifted from our shoulders.

The Lord tells us that His burden is light. He will give grace in the day we need it.

Stress Can Lead to Anger

Not surprisingly, stress can be hugely detrimental to health. Every year, experts reveal the negative effects stress brings about on our physical bodies, emotions, and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, stress can get into our homes and affect the family.

We want to point out that stress and anger are not always cut out of the same cloth. Many stressed-out parents are not necessarily angry parents. However, stress is often a trigger point for anger. Stressed-out (but not angry) parents can bring a different tension to the home than angry parents, but it is still not a healthy atmosphere.

Anger Exists on a Spectrum

Suppose we charted anger on a kind of timeline, from left to right. On the far left, we'd find very mild expressions of anger, moving toward more advanced stages on the right: impatience, irritation, annoyance, edginess, frustration, agitation, exasperation, anger, fury, wrath, frenzy, hatred, and rage.

Most of us, as Christians, are pretty aware that the expressions on the far right are unacceptable for God's people. However, too often we give ourselves a free pass on the lighter expressions of anger, feeling like they aren't all that bad. The problem is that in most cases, anger, like cancer, isn't good for us. It's really not something we want to have affixed to our person, because it usually grows and metastasizes.

Stress Tends to Lead to Fear

Let's face it — most of us lead some pretty busy lives. It's a lot to keep up with family life, work, household maintenance, etc. In the face of deadlines, repairs, obligations, and responsibilities, the panic of whether we can pull it all off stems from fear. We're afraid we won't get everything on our to-do list done on time.

We're afraid that we'll mess up some major job by not getting the details correct. Maybe we're even so overbooked that we feel stress that we're not working on one task because another task has tied us up!

Stress in parenting can also stem from fear. We're afraid we'll ruin our poor kids. Or maybe we're a little fearful we won't be all we ought to be as moms and dads. We're afraid that they'll grow up to resent us for not getting them that puppy, or new bike, or the latest technology. That's nothing to say of the near accidents we save our children from throughout their childhood. The fear and stress a climbing toddler can give his parents is akin to teaching a teenager how to drive.

Yet, while we live with all of these challenges (and I'm sure you could think of many more), fear is not something that God intends for us. While we're on this earth, we're going to have trouble. Thanks to our great-great-plus-granddaddy Adam, we're fighting those thistles with the sweat of our brow, working hard to bring children into the world. Even through all the struggles we face in our modern lives, God's intent is that we don't live by a spirit of fear.

Brook: These precious words Paul wrote to Timothy have stuck out to me: "I am reminded of your sincere *faith*, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to *fan into flame* the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit *not of fear* but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:5-7, emphasis added).

Allow me to slip in a substitute word for a minute: "For God gave us a spirit not of [being overwhelmed]." I know it says "fear," but think with me, what is being overwhelmed? It is fear that we can't keep up or live up

to our calling — fear that we can't raise our children properly.

Stir up God's Gifts

A spirit of fear is not a gift of God. This is not the gift 2 Timothy is indicating we're supposed to fan into flames. When we give into stress by living and feeding off of it, we're stirring it up. We stir it up by dwelling on our stress, feeling pity for ourselves, and rehearsing in the privacy of our minds how we're really being imposed upon.

There is no shame in feeling stressed. It is likely going to happen to each and every one of us along the days of our parenting, and probably many times. However, living in a continual state of being overwhelmed is a choice. Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines overwhelm: "To overspread or crush beneath something violent and weighty, that covers or encompasses the whole, as to overwhelm with waves. To immerse and bear down; in a figurative sense; as, to be overwhelmed with cares, afflictions, or business."¹

There is such a spirit of passivity in the very word "overwhelmed." A feeling is only a feeling. A feeling only becomes part of you when you allow it to take up residence. Next time you begin to feel stressed, you won't "feel" like remembering the gifts God has placed in you, much less exerting the effort to stir up that gift, so you need to prepare yourself beforehand. Ask yourself questions such as: "What am I going to do when I feel stressed out? How can I prevent my feelings from controlling how I interact with my children?"

Take a look at what God gives you:

A Spirit of Power

God provides His power to enable you to raise your children. He won't call you to anything for which He will not equip you. When God calls us to a responsibility or an area of service, He will provide His strength and resources. Avail yourself of what He offers!

1. <http://av1611.com/kjbp/kjv-dictionary/overwhelm.html>.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20–21).

When stress is overtaking you, whether directly with your youngsters or through the stresses of life, call on the power of God to provide you with direction.

Brook: Not long ago, I became aware of a large home repair we needed to make. The whole thing stressed me out right from the beginning. It was something outside of my skill set. I didn’t know how to go about fixing it. I knew it would be costly, and all that stress came out in my relationships with my family. After snapping at everyone for about the third time, I realized that I had better get some prayer time in . . . and quickly! I took the stressful repair to the Lord, acknowledged my wrong in allowing it to interfere in my family, and simply asked for help.

Throughout the next day, every time I thought of that repair, my heart raced a little faster. But I reminded myself that I had a choice to make: was I going to allow my stress to affect my family? I had prayed about the issue and was calmly looking into how to go about that repair. My adding panic to the situation wasn’t going to make things better! This is the power of God in us, to say no to ungodly behavior and turn from it, however many times a day it is necessary.

A Spirit of Love

When we feel overwhelmed, we feel depleted, and about the last thing we want to do is invest in our families, yet cultivating a spirit of love produces in us a deep-rooted realization that people

are more important than things. Relationships are never worth losing over stress. Stir up this gift by allowing God's love to flow through you to your family.

When we feel stressed, we're often in a hurry because of the clock. It is easy to be a slave to our calendar. Fear wants to hold us down and shut off the flow of love within us. But fear isn't the spirit God wants to see expressed in our homes. Even through tough times, the rare beauty of love is what will carry us through.

Brook: I'm reminded of a dear, kind mom, Kelli, who struggled with a vicious form of cancer while her children were yet young. As soon as she learned of the cancer, fear (naturally) gripped her heart and expressed itself every chance it got. She found, as her condition worsened, that the fear had altered her home. No longer did she talk kindly to her children. Life had become one long session of pain and tension. Yet, as death stared her in the face, she knew this wasn't the legacy she wanted to leave behind should this be the end of her earthly story. Slowly, purposefully, she sought to replace the fear that terrorized her day and night, with love. Wherever she could sprinkle love, she did it. When she talked about her hope to live, she put in a dose of why she loved her family so much. When she shared about her pain, she thanked her family for their love for her, and reminded them of her love for them. Kelli's time was not long, and as I have heard about it, her farewell was filled with an intense expression of love. Her choice in the midst of the ultimate stress was profound.

A Spirit of Self-Control

Other translations refer to this alternately as "self-discipline" or "sound mind," which I think is very fitting. Quite possibly, you will go through some time in your parenting when you feel like you are losing your mind. Those feelings are not meant to become

the fabric with which you parent. The phrase “self-discipline” also provides such rich treasure for parenting. If we, moms and dads, walk in self-discipline, even just in the practical aspects of our lives, we are taking a huge swipe at minimizing stress.

Stress can sometimes bring with it a sense of entitlement. We may feel like we are working long hours, whether in a job or in the home, and not getting enough recognition. When we feel put out about the weight of stress we carry around, we open the door for that stress to come out on others (our families mainly) for not helping out in the way we think they should. So we bark at them and feel justified. Or we holler and snap angrily back. Or we make unreasonable demands and put each other down. In our attempts to gain some kind of control over the chaos life sometimes throws at us, we threaten and connive and give up *self*-control. When we do so, we are letting stress have control, and it is not a good or kind master. Panic becomes its sidekick, and you are led around in its grip.

God is in the business of turning us worn-out, tired, stressed, and even *angry* parents into ones filled with self-control.

Work and Stress

Brook: Many times stress is directly related to the pressures to accomplish a certain job by a given time. After speaking about stressed and angry parenting, I had some time to sit down with a mom who works from home about four hours each afternoon. Her three children range in age from 7 to 11, and she was pulling her hair out trying to keep an eye on her children and fulfill the pressing duties in front of her.

“Basically,” she began, “I feel like I am under so much stress just running from my desk to break up squabbles and fix problems, and trying to act as judge, and then heading back to my desk and trying to remember where I was. We need the money from my job, but

I can't handle the stress! And I know I'm sharp with the kids because of it. Can you give me some advice?"

I encouraged her (if possible) to take one afternoon off of work and focus solely on coming up with a game plan for her children. Over the years, I have found that children who are given clear instructions on what they are "supposed" to be doing are much easier to manage than children left to their own creative and mischievous devices. I mentioned that she might even want to include her children in giving her a few of their suggestions.

Here's what I suggested for coming up with a definitive plan:

1. Break up your work afternoon into slots about 30–45 minutes long, switching from something fun and hands-on, to something more quiet and studious in rotation every change of time slot.
2. Talk to your children about the new setup, and try it out for an afternoon or more to fix any glitches. Then paste it where the children can see. Now, for the next two weeks, you can't expect that it will go well. Your job during this time is to realize you may still have just as many interruptions, but, each time, you will have something solid and concrete to turn your children back toward.
3. At the end of those two weeks, with consistency, you should begin to start seeing progress.

Stress is often brought about by the tension we feel when we have too many priorities at one time. It can also come through procrastination or the tension between working and relaxing. Working toward utilizing our time in a self-disciplined way can go a long way toward reducing stress.

Stress often leads to disappointment. We want things to go a certain way, and tension builds when it doesn't. Pain and irritation can also lead to anger and stress.

The Three-Ring Circus

There have been a few times (maybe more!) where I think I have reached the point that parenting has fully equipped me to capably handle running a three-ring circus. I remember when our second child was born and I felt like my mind was going to split in two taking care of an active toddler *and* a tiny infant. God has since gifted us with a houseful of children (nine at the time of this writing), and there are days I shake my head, while the baby needs attention, the soup boils over, Cubbie wants to learn to tie his shoes, Teddy Bear wants help learning his fractions, my oldest explores various career choices, and my butterfly girl dances and dreams and flits from one project to the next. Like all of you, the daily stresses of family life, a business to run, bills to pay, and unfinished projects mount, and we have a choice: how are we going to handle the various needs and tensions pulling on us? We can let stress overtake us. Or we can look for ways to employ the power of God, love, and self-control in the *midst* of all that stress.

Saying No to Outside Extras

One of the mantras we often hear from time-management experts is the need to say no to some things in order to say yes to the very best. If stress has come to live in your home, take serious inventory as a couple and as a family of ways you can reduce your activities.

And When You Can't Say No

But we also recognize there are all sorts of times that saying no to responsibilities is simply not an option. In these times, look for

ways to double utilize the time by building with your family. Do you have work-related responsibilities that allow for the whole family to be together? Or are you able, as a family, to reach out to a family in need? Deuteronomy 6 provides rich instruction for finding time to bond with our families around the Lord, even during the busyness of life.

Searching for Some Margin

As parents, we may need to redefine what margin and refreshment look like. Parents don't really have the luxury of taking a lot of personal time, a common go-to for many folks for relaxation. Nevertheless, moms and dads need times to be rejuvenated, and creatively finding rest in the midst of family life is a must. Maybe it looks less like a round of golf, a visit to the local shopping center, or a quiet weekend getaway, and more like huge bowls of popcorn, reading aloud together, or sitting quietly on a park bench while little ones run off some energy. Rest and refueling in the family setting are different, but some of it comes down to snatching quiet and refreshing moments, as they come, with thankfulness. There will come a day when we'll have all kinds of time to ourselves for non-family-related pursuits. I hear from empty nesters that they miss these busy days we find ourselves in.

Margin for moms and dads is possible, just different. It might come in snatching an opportunity to spend one-on-one time as a couple or with one of the children, or in sitting for a few moments on the porch with a cup of hot coffee. We all need space, even our active and social teenagers, and energetic toddlers. Taking "down time" as a regular routine can have huge benefits for keeping sanity for the whole family. Guard your calendar carefully so that you don't entirely squeeze out margin in your life.

When even your carefully planned and trimmed life seems relentless, remember this season of parenting is a stretching season for everyone. If you feel like stretched-out elastic, take heart, because it means you are being stretched to hold more of God.

Feeding on the Real Deal

Just as doughnuts and candy give a false sense of fullness without delivering nutrition, it is important to make sure we are spiritually and emotionally refueling on that which will really give us refreshment. There is no problem with pampering sorts of relaxation if that fits in with your lifestyle, but don't miss out on getting the real food of the Word of God deep into your existence in order to be fed. Ultimately, God's Word is going to be the real source of strength as we walk through parenting.

Questions to Consider

What are the three biggest areas of stress for you right now? Are there any ways in which you see stress affecting your family?

What are two ways you could make a few minutes of margin this week? What are two ways that you could find some rest and relaxation with your family?

What do you see the benefits could be of responding to stress with prayer (calling on the power of God), love, and self-discipline?