

How to Raise a **Healthy Family** in a "Modern Family" World

Craigjutia
President, Empowered Living
Author of From Hectic to Healthy

Stay connected with your family ...in a modern world

Today's families are long on commitment and short on time. Inundated with enticing technology, an abundance of activities and too many events to count, there isn't much family time left, is there? With our schedules overflowing and anxiety weighing us down, how do we find family balance? How do we connect as a family? How do we raise healthy families in the midst of our modern world?

In Faith and the Modern Family, Craig Jutila offers sound advice for today's modern family and today's modern parents! Craig will guide you through the steps of setting a healthy life pace for your family, which includes advice on setting priorities, modeling the behavior you want from your children, and planning for your family's future. Also included are downloadable resources—such as Four Steps on Your Faith Journey and Rules for Maintaining a Healthy Social Media Account—that you can use again and again.

With faith and some expert advice, you *can* stay connected to your modern family in a healthy way!

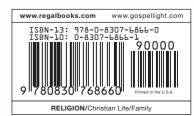


CRAIG JUTILA is President of Empowered Living where their mission is to empower leaders and their families for LIFE. He empowers others around the country on the topics of leadership, balanced living, parenting and family. He has authored several books, including the recent Hectic to Healthy: The Journey to a Balanced Life. Craig was voted

by *Group Magazine* as one of the top 10 influencers of the last 20 years. He and his wife, Mary, have three children and live in Southern California.

www.whowillyouempower.com





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Preface

The ideas in this book are already impacting families. Use the following link to hear some of their stories:

http://www.whowillyouempower.com/fmofy.



Introduction

Parenting Your Modern Family

Times are changing, especially for families. Today's modern family is facing challenges that rarely, if ever, crossed our minds a few years ago, and in some cases, a few months ago!

Most families today are long on commitment and short on time and are being pulled in so many directions that it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to connect face-to-face. Smartphones, mobile technology, work-life balance, relentless hurry and stress seem to be woven into the fabric of our lives. If these things are true, the question that begs to be answered is, How do parents raise a healthy family in a modern world?

In the hit ABC TV comedy series *Modern Family*, the dad, Phil Dunphy, is being interviewed as part of the episode. The question posed to him is, "What's the key to being a great dad?"

Phil: "Be their buddy."

Claire (*Phil's wife*, *popping out from behind the wall*): "Seriously, is that your answer?"

Phil (*Nervously starts to rattle off a few more options*): "Stay in school. Don't do drugs. Just give me the answer!" 1

I certainly remember my first mission trip with a group of kids from church. We made the drive from Southern California to Del Rio, Texas, and then into Acuna, Mexico. I can remember being rushed around to different churches and being warmly greeted, but not knowing a lick of Spanish—I mean, *nada*. We had arrived late to the first church we visited and it was already packed. The only pew left was the one in the front row. So, as the pastor, I was taken to the front row.

Church was radically different from what I was used to, so I picked someone out of the crowd to kind of watch and imitate. The man sitting next to me on the front pew seemed to know what he was doing, so I followed him. As everyone sang, the man clapped his hands, so I clapped my hands. When the man stood up to pray, I stood up to pray. When the man sat down, I sat down. When the man held the cup and bread for the Lord's Supper, I held the cup and bread. During the preaching, I did not understand a thing. I just sat there and tried to look just like that man in the front row.

After the service was over, I thought the preacher was making some announcements. The people clapped, so I looked over to see if that guy was clapping, and he was; so I clapped too. Then the preacher said some more words that I didn't understand, and then I saw the man next to me stand up. So I went ahead and stood up too. All of a sudden a hush fell over the entire congregation. A few people let out audible gasps. I looked around and saw that nobody else was standing. Then I looked at the guy I had been imitating, and he was staring at me with an angry expression. So I sat down.

After the service ended, the pastor stood at the door to shake the hands of those who were leaving. When I went to the back to greet the pastor, he said to me in English, "I guess you don't speak Spanish." I told him that I didn't and asked him if it was so obvious: The pastor said, "Yep, because at the end of the service I announced that the Acosta family had a newborn baby boy and would the proud father please stand up."

Have you ever felt that way about parenting? You look at someone who you think is a good dad or a good mom and you start modeling how that person parents. You stand when he or she stands; you clap when he or she claps; you read what he or she reads. Or maybe, like Phil Dunphy, you just want someone to give you the answer.

I can remember the night when I brought my wife home after giving birth to our twin boys. One of our sons, Alec, needed to stay in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), but we brought home Introduction 13

our other son, Cameron, that night. It was 1:00 in the morning. We were tired. But there was a quiet calmness in that moment as we sat staring at each other. Mary was holding Cameron and rocking him. Suddenly, I felt the quiet move from a whisper to a conversation to a full panic attack inside me. I blurted to Mary, "Hon, we have no idea what we are doing, do we?"

When she just smiled quietly at me and then looked back down into Cameron's face, the calmness returned. We have been on the parenting journey ever since.

The difficulty for me in writing a book on raising a healthy family is simply this: There are times when I am not a good parent. In fact, I should probably tell my kids, "Hey, did you guys just see what Dad did? Okay, don't do that."

I really want this book to be more about what kids need from us as parents rather than what a good parenting philosophy is. To me, parenting isn't a one-size-fits-all concept. Each of us is wired differently, and each of our children is wired differently. I really like what Psalm 78:72 says: "He cared for them with a true heart and led them with skillful hands." Although this is not a verse about parenting, I like what it says, and I think we can apply it to how we parent. What if we cared for our kids, our families, with a true heart and in a skillful manner?

Mary and I have always told our kids that we love them and want the absolute best for them. We have also told them that, as parents, we may be wrong on occasion. We all make mistakes, even parents. It seems a bit unfair in life that we get ample time to practice just about everything we do except parenting.

In becoming parents, a married couple enters into one of the most important, if not *the* most important, seasons of life; yet, there is no practice test, no long-term schooling or mentoring program, no manual, no application process or on-the-job training.

Think about it: We practice after school for our sports teams in order to develop chemistry and skill. We take practice tests on a Tuesday so that we can get a feel for what will be asked on the actual test on Friday. We take practice SAT tests so that when it comes time for the real thing we are better prepared. We practice for months to learn the rules of the road and how to navigate traffic on the streets before taking our driver's test. Yet, when it comes to parenting, training seems to be optional.

There is a definite skill set to parenting, especially in this "modern family" world. I used to have a slightly different mindset about this, but technology and the ever-increasing speed of life require parents who are not only aware but also skilled in the difficulties and opportunities presented to the family in today's modern world. If not, then they may end up asking their eight-year-old how he accessed that inappropriate content on the Web, and could he please block himself (or herself) from any further inappropriate activity or content.

There are, of course, many topics that could be discussed when it comes to today's modern family. However, there are four recurring questions—four themes:

- 1. How do we find time together as a family?
- 2. How can we help our kids with their behavior?
- 3. How do we understand the power of the Internet in our kids' lives?
- 4. How can we move our family into a healthy future?

If you are a parent of teenagers, you may be saying, "Yes, we are dealing with those topics on a daily basis!"

If you are a parent of a young child, you may be saying, "Do we really have to deal with those topics right now?"

If you are getting ready to become a parent, you may be saying, "Maybe we should wait, because we don't want to deal with those topics at all!"

Whether you are now a parent or soon will be, parenting isn't easy. When Mary and I left the hospital with our twin boys, we weren't given a manual, a mentor or a motivational speech. "Goodbye," was

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the parting word. We simply went home with these brand-new lives we were now responsible for. We weren't prepared; in fact, we were downright scared.

Mary and I have since added a girl to our family, and although our three children have been raised in the same environment with the same value system and the same rules all of their lives, they are different. To that I say, "Thank God!" Each of them has a unique outlook and perspective on life. One child may push a little harder, while another may be more compliant; one may be an introvert, while another doesn't care very much about what others think. Each child is unique in personality, skill, demeanor and experience. I say all that to make a point.

When Mary and I speak at a conference, we often get asked questions that start with, "What do you do when . . ." I want to tell you up front that I cannot answer that question. In fact, both Mary and I have asked that same question. Fortunately, we have been extremely blessed with friends who do life with us. We get together, share problems, hurts and concerns; and, in many cases, we ask each other, "What did you do when . . .?" And then we listen for feedback—what worked and what didn't work. We receive encouragement, support and a few nuggets we take back and try to implement in our family. (To be perfectly honest, I tend to avoid people and books that tell me their way is *the* way to do something. I prefer people and books that tell me there is *a* way to do something. I hope this book comes across as *a* way, not *the* way on the topic of parenting and family.)

You may say, "Craig, it sounds like you don't really know what you are doing." Yes! You got it. Well, sort of. Truth be told, I have 47 years of experience when it comes to parenting. That's the combined number of my children's ages and also includes hours and hours of study, research, teaching and training on the topic. As I said, we have three kids, but we didn't get practice kids. We mess up, blow it, seek advice, read books, go to conferences and pray daily for our children.

In this book, I want to share our experiences while on our parenting journey—what has worked, what would or could work, and what simply hasn't worked. There are some things we can all work on and apply as parents to help our children with their behavior so that they can grow into mature, healthy, independent adults. I want to do my best to answer the four questions that most families seem to be asking these days and, not so coincidentally, focus on what the Bible has to say and how it plays an integral part in today's modern family.

Our families will continue to evolve, morph and adapt as our calendars fill up, life overflows and technology gets "smarter." But the one component that stabilizes and balances all the change is faith. Faith, as Hebrews 11:1 explains it, "is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." God has a plan for you, as a parent, and for your children. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

There will be times as a parent when you just don't know what to do or what to say. It's in those difficult moments when you put faith into the mix of your modern family.



Set a Healthy Life Pace

Before I married, I had three theories about raising children and no children. Now, I have three children and no theories.

JOHN WILMOT, ENGLISH NOBLEMAN AND POET

Is raising a family today easier or harder than ever before? I have received lots of different responses to that question and, surprisingly, the answers are split about 50-50. Although we may find it difficult to agree on whether parenting is easier or harder these days, I think we would all agree that it's different.

Let me give you some context. Do you remember records? Yes, those round vinyl disk things that my children called big CDs when they first saw them several years ago. I can remember Alec telling me, "Dad, those will never fit in the computer."

How about eight-tracks? Not the number of lanes that are on that dirt thing at the local high school. No, I'm talking about those small and boxy little inventions that allowed us to listen to music in our cars from something other than the radio.

Fast forward (no pun intended) to the cassette days. This was the first time we could really put together a "best of" compilation of all our music from the 80s—I mean, from the past. If you had patience, and one of those big CDs (i.e., a vinyl record) and a cassette recorder, you were in business.

Don't forget the CD. It's already in the past as well. Who buys CDs anymore? My son Cameron returned home from a community garage sale with 10 CDs he bought for \$1.00. And they were good CDs! I won't elaborate on the bands he brought home, but he went on a long Journey to get them. When he arrived at the sale, he felt like a Foreigner from another neighborhood. After all, he

had to walk through some pretty tall Styx to get there. He caught an REO Speedwagon to make it back home on time. (Do you remember any of those groups?)

We have now moved beyond the CD into the age of digital media, and it's literally changing the way we think. I'm not talking about thinking differently. I'm talking about a subtle rewiring of our brains.

Most of us were taught to read books from left to right, largely in part because we held books in our hands, and our English language is written from left to right. This is not necessarily the way kids who have grown up using the Web read.

According to Nicholas Carr, American writer on technology and culture, children who have grown up using the Internet (Generation Net) take in and process information differently: "They don't necessarily read a page from left to right and from top to bottom. They might instead skip around, scanning for pertinent information of interest."

When I was a child, I had to look for things to do. Today's modern family doesn't have to look for anything to do; things come looking for them! Push notifications on your smartphone, tablet or computer not only collect information for you but also tell you when it finds it! When I was growing up, a push notification was called a doorbell. This alerted me to the fact that a friend was at the door and probably wanted to play outside. Today's modern family has lost three things: the doorbell, playing and outside. Today's doorbell is an alert message on a gaming console, and playing with others is online rather than outside.

I just finished watching a promotion for the new Xbox One, which should be out by the release of this book. The advertisement begins with a question: "How does it [the Xbox One] give me the content I want faster?" The rest of the advertisement goes on to tell me how. It appears that life doesn't seem to be slowing down any time soon; if anything, the modern family seems to be caught in a gravity pull toward the desire to do more at a faster pace. If this

is true, then a great question for each modern family to ask itself is, "What is a healthy life pace for us?"

We can no longer sit back with a foot dangling in the water and traverse the streams of daily activity as we leisurely go with the flow. Today, if we want to go with the flow, we will find ourselves capsized and gasping for air underneath the rapids of relentless hurry. Life has lost its healthy flow, like a river that has risen above its natural boundaries. We are flooded with information, and our lives have become overly saturated with busyness. The pace of life has quickened to such an extent that it has become important for every family to set a pace that is healthy.

A few years ago, I started thinking differently about this seemingly relentless push we all face. As a result, my family implemented five things that have helped us with our life pace; I believe these principles can help your family, too: (1) define your season; (2) work at work; (3) live end to end; (4) know your boundaries; and (5) simply simplify.

Define Your Season

Mary and I have talked extensively about the principle of seasonality in our book *Hectic to Healthy*, and it's worth mentioning here. The pace of your life should be determined by the season you are in, not the opportunities available to you in the moment. All of us have different seasons in our families. Some couples are married with no children and are thinking about starting a family. Some are married with one child, and others are married with two or more children. Some families are single-parent families or blended families.

Seasons come and seasons go. Each family is different from other families, and each season of their family life is different. Each season requires something different from them as parents and as a family.

Our season in the Jutila household is married with three kids—three teenagers, to be exact. Some would call that a cold winter

season, while others would describe it as beautiful spring. We value humor and laughter in our home, so I would like to exercise that value here with a quote about teenagers from one of my favorite comedians, Jeff Allen: "I think one day God looked down over His creation and said, 'Hey, let's see how they like it to create someone in their own image that denies their existence.' I have looked everywhere in the Bible, and nowhere does it say how old the devil was when he rejected God's authority, but my guess is 15."

Okay, back to seasons. In the Bible, this concept of seasonality is best seen when Jacob says to his brother, Esau, "Please, my lord, go ahead of your servant. We will follow slowly, at a pace that is comfortable for the livestock and the children. I will meet you at Seir" (Gen. 33:14).

The "we" in this verse refers to Jacob's family. When Esau asked Jacob to come back home with him, Jacob politely declined the offer. Why? Because Jacob had defined his season. Jacob's season was in a family-with-small-children season, and he paced his family life accordingly. Notice the reason Jacob declined Esau's offer: It was for his family. Jacob knew it would be unhealthy for his family to travel at a breakneck speed. Jacob's response is something we should all take to heart when considering the speed at which our families travel through life. The goal of considering seasonality is to make decisions for our family within the context of it.

Jacob's season of life was married with kids. His family's season defined his time commitments, priorities, decisions and speed. Jacob knew that traveling at a speed that might be healthy for him but not for his children would put his family at risk, and I'm pretty sure he didn't have a smart phone. Would the answer have been different if Jacob had been single? Maybe, but we'll never know. What we do know is that his decision matched his life's season, and it was a healthy choice.

Seasons come and go. Our children come and eventually go. They go off to college or into a career, but they do go. We have limited time with them in our home. It's hard for me to quantify or "feel"

time, so I need a little help. You could call it a reminder from time to time on how much time I have left with my kids in the home.

There is a scene that takes place in the kitchen of ABC's TV comedy *Modern Family* and that opens with chaos brewing. It's parents at their worst and the kids not much better. There is shouting, a fire erupting on the stove and a dish shattering as it hits the floor. Frenetic energy fills the scene as the dialogue picks up . . .

Haley: "You win the award for the worst mother ever."

Claire: "I will be sure to thank you in my speech."

Haley: "I hope the whole house burns down."

Mitchell (*Claire's brother, just arriving*): "Did we come at a bad time?"

Claire: "Come back in seven years and five months when they are all gone."²

It's Claire's line that makes this scene actually pretty funny. She knew exactly how much time was left in her "I have kids in my house" season. I'm not sure how she had that information at the tip of her tongue, but it's actually pretty useful information

I would like to suggest a more practical and compelling way to track how much time you have left with your children in the home. It's called the Legacy Countdown, and it's an app created by the great folks at The ReThink Group. (Search the Apple App store for Legacy Countdown.)³

With this app on your smart phone (and/or your iPad), you can enter your child's name, age and expected graduation date, and the app will show you how much time you have left with your child before he or she goes off to college or to work. When you visualize the time you have left with your kids, there is a better chance of your making that time really count.

The frustration we sometimes feel when our own home scene erupts into chaos is fleeting when we look at those difficult times within the context of a season that's about to end. When you reach

the time when your children have grown up and have moved out or away, you will wish for the walls to be dirty or to see crumbs on the floor or a messy room with laundry piled high. You will yearn for that broken glass and spilled milk or the fingerprints on the glass door or window. Time moves fast, and seasons transition quickly. Define your season, and live accordingly.

Work at Work

I remember coming home from work one evening several years ago and walking directly from the garage to the kitchen counter without saying hi to anyone. I put down my backpack, took out my laptop, opened my email and started to write. After a few minutes, my then five-year-old son Alec asked me what I was doing. I told him I didn't get all my work done at the office, so I needed to finish a few things at home. After a short pause, he said, "Well, maybe they can put you in a slower group at work." Well said!

How many of us secretly want to be put into a slower group at work? In the coming pages, I will talk about living life "end to end" vs. "and to and," but first I want to talk about leaving work at work. I know that is hard to do. One of the biggest mistakes I made in the last 15 years was working around the clock.

A work schedule that is specifically defined may be a bit easier than if your job feels like it doesn't have a start and end time. For example, if you work in retail, most likely you have a start time and end time, and once you leave your place of employment for the day, you are finished. It may be easier to leave work at work.

If your job is more loosely defined when it comes to starting and stopping time, it can be harder to leave work at work. For example, if you are a counselor, and you get a call after "quitting time," do you tell the person in crisis, "I'm sorry, I can't talk to you now; I have already finished work for today"? The line is not as black and white.

What if an idea pops into your mind that will help your position at work or advance a cause you are working to improve? Do you

pull out your smartphone or tablet and jot down that idea? Do you pull out a napkin and pen (old school, right!) and write down that million-dollar idea? Again, the line gets a little blurry, doesn't it?

Of course, there are exceptions to any rule, and the opportunities of our modern technology further blur the lines because we are rarely, if ever, totally unplugged. You don't really ever completely leave work because when you do, work comes looking for you: emails to your smartphone; a text from your boss or an employee; a direct message from Twitter; or a Facebook alert. Work is always on, if you want it to be.

Perhaps we all need to add a switch to our smartphones that would put us in a "fun" mode or "stop" mode—a button similar to "airplane mode" that would simply disconnect us from contact for a time. Or maybe we could reverse our thinking to get a larger view of our family and our world. Here is a great story that illustrates this point:

Each night when she came home from work, Gina spent an hour playing with her six-year-old daughter, Amanda. Everything else came second: dinner, chores and even Amanda's homework. Playtime was a ritual. But one night, Gina had to bring home extra work; playtime with Amanda would have to wait. Looking around for something to occupy her daughter, Gina found a magazine with a world map on its cover. She tore the map into pieces and spread them on a table. "Once you've put the puzzle together, we can play," she said, assuming the task would keep Amanda busy for hours.

A half-hour later, Amanda announced she was finished, and sure enough, she had pieced together the entire map. "How did you do that?" her mom asked. "It was easy, Mommy," Amanda replied. "There was a picture of a family on the back, and when I put the family together, the whole world just fell into place."

Amanda may be on to something. When we put the family together, the world just seems to come together.

Live End to End

Modern culture allows us to live in a way that keeps us not only physically busy but mentally and emotionally busy as well. I can remember growing up playing three different sports because each sport had its own season. There was a beginning to the season and an end. Today there is often a beginning, but rarely is there an end to any sport or activity.

When we were children, life offered us fewer choices. I had one video game: Pong. That was the extent of my video game choice. I couldn't play my video game with friends from another country or even from around the corner. To me, the world was big and slow. You and I were, in some ways, forced to live life end to end. Take a look at what could have been a typical parent schedule 30 years ago.

Drive Kids to School THEN A	rrive at Office THEN Make a Call THEN Answer Mail
7:30am	9:00am

Life happened end to end, because it was the only way it could be done. You couldn't start a work-related phone call at home and walk out to your car to continue the conversation—unless, of course, you went to Radio Shack and bought one of those 50-foot phone cords, but that would only get you to the car, not down the street! Once you got to the office, you could make a call or answer mail. No, not email, just mail. You remember mail, don't you? Those paper envelopes delivered to a little box outside your house or to your office?

Living life end to end had its advantages. There were natural boundaries built into life, which meant we didn't need to think about them too much. Today's modern family has a vast array of choices. We are compelled to set healthy boundaries or suffer the consequences of busyness, hurry and out-of-pace living.

When our culture made a drastic change in the way families spend their time, when we gained the capability of living life on multiple layers at the same time, we didn't live life *end to end* anymore. We can and, in many ways, *must* live life *and to and*.

There are benefits to both ways of living. However, there is more potential for an unhealthy pace of life with the latter.

Take a look at a typical parent schedule from $7:30\,\mathrm{A.M.}$ to $9:00\,\mathrm{A.M.}$ It could look something like this:

See how much we can do in such a short amount of time when we live life "and to and"? Our ability has outpaced our capacity, and that leads to a question for each of us to consider: Has our capacity for doing more increased?

As I process that question, I am inclined to say no, it hasn't. Our capacity hasn't changed, but our ability to reach it has. If you have a 16-ounce glass and want to pour 18 ounces into it, you most certainly can. However, as we all know, a 16-ounce glass holds 16 ounces, and no more. So, if you choose to pour 18 ounces into a 16-ounce glass, you will have a 2-ounce mess.

Let's change the glass example to a time example. We all have 24 hours in a day. What if we want to pour 26 hours worth of things to do into our 24-hour day? Here is the answer you have been waiting for. Are you ready? I don't know.

I honestly don't know. There are too many moving parts to consider. I wish I knew the answer. In fact, I think the answer is different for every family. Think back to what we just talked about: the concept of seasonality. Your capacity as a family should correspond to what season you are in. The answer to how much is too much seems to be a bit of a moving target.

With that in mind, I want to ask, and attempt to answer, three questions that will help us understand the value of living at capacity, not over it:

1. Are You Vulnerable?

"A person without self-control is like a city with broken down walls" (Prov. 25:28). A person or a family that can't control their ability to do or to filter out what would cause them to go over capacity is in a vulnerable position. Although it's not common for cities to build physical walls for protection these days, the Proverbs verse is a reminder to have at least some protection from intrusion. If you don't exercise some self-control with your ability to do more, you will put yourself and your family in a vulnerable position. Setting healthy boundaries, which I will talk about in the next point, is a healthy place to start.

2. Are You Capable?

"Practice self-control, and keep your minds clear so that you can pray" (1 Pet. 4:7, *GOD's WORD*). There has never been a time in our lives when we have been more capable of doing many things. Our ability has outpaced our capacity with information and options so readily available that compete for our time.

I wonder if Peter really knew the implications of what he was writing in the verse just referenced. I certainly believe God did, as He inspired Peter to write these compelling words; but do you think Peter understood the relevancy of them for us today? Did he

look 2,000 years ahead and say, "I really hope these words will help Martin and Debbie as they raise their children in a modern world with a steady barrage of text messaging and push notifications"? Honestly, I don't think it crossed his mind. But—and here is the really amazing thing—God did see it. He knew where you and I would be, and these words fit perfectly for our modern families. The Bible's words are timeless!

Let me paraphrase what Peter said: "Just because you hear that alert for an incoming text doesn't mean you have to answer it. If you do, it will cause your mind to think differently. It will cause your mind to think in short bursts and to be in a constant state of on-off, on-off thinking, and that's okay on occasion, but not as a way of life. Take some time to keep your mind free of clutter; keep it clear. I want you to do this so that you can focus on the One to whom you are praying, so that you can reduce the noise and clutter that can force you to live over capacity."

3. Are You Suceptible?

"Someone may say, I'm allowed to do anything, but not everything is helpful. I'm allowed to do anything, but I won't allow anything to gain control over my life" (1 Cor. 6:12, GOD'S WORD).

Just because we can do something (ability) doesn't mean we should (capacity). Just because we can live life and-to-and doesn't mean we should. When we were growing up, we weren't as susceptible to doing more, simply because we had fewer choices. Our modern families are more susceptible to going over capacity because our ability to do so has increased. Today's modern family must filter out what is right for them and leave the rest. We are not talking about making choices to do either bad or good. If it were that simple, we would all be doing fine.

Today, our susceptibility is about making a choice between good and better. How do you say no to something that is good, helpful, life giving and healthy? Well, first you need to know where your family is going and what your family is committed to be. I will talk about this in detail in the last section of this book. However, if you are prone to a short attention span, feel free to flip over to chapter 10 and read about taking some practical steps to write your family's purpose statement. When you know what your family is all about, it's easier to say no to good and yes to better.

I will admit that I love technology! I love what it can do for the family, for God's kingdom, for church services and for business meetings. New technology will continue to open amazing possibilities for all of us, but we must be careful how we use it. Voltaire said, "With great power comes great responsibility." And before Voltaire uttered his words, Jesus said, "When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required" (Luke 12:48). We are living in a modern world where much has been given and much is required, including our choice between what is good and what is best for our family.

No Your Boundaries

That subhead is not a typo. "No'ing" where your boundaries are as a family most often consists of setting limits. Setting limits in today's modern world of too many choices usually involves saying that little word "no." A family boundary is something you set that indicates a healthy limit for your family.

Here are a few questions that represent the myriad of activities common to most families. Discuss these questions with your family and work on coming up with some healthy family boundaries:

- How many sports can [name(s) of your child (children)] be involved in at one time?
- How many times should our family have dinner together each week?
- How much homework is appropriate each school day?

- How many outside activities can [insert name(s)] be involved in at one time?
- What time should I, as a parent, be home from work?
- How much TV time is allowed each day?
- How much computer or phone time is appropriate each day?

Feeding children a healthy life pace most definitely requires setting a few boundaries. A healthy diet is not only built on what you eat, but also on what you don't eat! Taking steps now to define a few boundaries is much easier than trying to make some up on the fly.

I know for a fact our kids love boundaries. Okay, I know what you may be thinking after that statement: Yeah, right! Kids don't like boundaries. They are always pushing against them! I know. That's why I said our kids like them! Our three children seem to get great satisfaction from pushing those boundaries to their full potential. I can only assume from the energy, excitement and enthusiasm they demonstrate when standing in front of a family boundary, that naturally they love them. They seem to get such great satisfaction out of pushing against each and every one that Mary and I set up.

Think of it this way: All children push the boundaries. If they had a job at their age, they would be paid to push the boundaries. They would get up, take a shower, change and go to work—pushing-boundaries work.

Several years ago, a theorist decided to try an experiment:

He decided to take down the chain-link fence that surrounded the nursery school yard. He thought the children would feel more freedom of movement without that visible barrier surrounding them. When the fence was removed, the children huddled near the center of the play yard. Not only did they *not* wander away; they didn't even venture to the edge of the grounds. Clearly, there is a security for all of us in defined boundaries.⁶

Boundaries are essential for families who desire to have a healthy life pace because boundaries define your space. Notice I said "your space." Think of having boundaries as your space for your pace.

Here are three examples of effective boundaries:

- 1. Our children will play one sport at a time.
- 2. Our entire family will have dinner together three times a week.
- 3. We will not say yes or commit to anything until we have discussed it together.

Take a few moments and brainstorm a few boundaries that could help create some space for your family's pace; then discuss them together. As you talk about the healthy boundaries that are right for your family, consider these three things:

- 1. Your family boundaries are individual!

 They are for your family alone. They are different from every other family's boundaries. For instance, a healthy no for your family could be another family's healthy yes.
- 2. Your family boundaries are identifiable!

 They should be written down and visible, because you won't be able to stay within your boundaries if you can't remember them.
- 3. Your family boundaries are intentional!

 Make sure you deliberately address a need in your family.

 The more specific you are with your wording, the more effective the boundary will be.

Once you establish a few healthy boundaries, you will notice things begin to change. Please understand, things won't change overnight; they will change over time. You will most likely experience a bit of negative feedback from your children, whose lives are suddenly altered. However, after the initial shock has worn off, you will all experience a less rushed and more focused family life.

If you have teenagers in the home, why not involve them in the conversation? Ask for their input and they will be more likely to get on board with family boundaries and do so with a good attitude.

The boundaries you set will protect your family from relentless hurry and protect your family's physical, mental, social and emotional space from intrusion. They also will protect you from traveling beyond their limits. They will give you power over your schedule and commitments and help you make future healthy choices.

Simply Simplify

We live in a world of bigger, better, faster, stronger and more. Some would even add "excessive," and while I don't believe there is anything wrong with having some nice things or many nice things, generally speaking more stuff equals more stress. I'm sure each of us could use a little simplicity in our family life. Picture a life less complicated, with clarity and, potentially, easier. Picture your family life with less calendar clutter and activity noise. Breathe in, breathe out, wax on, wax off.

Pardon the phrase here, but simple math would tell you that the more you have, the more you will maintain. If you were to Google "simplify life," a long list of sites would appear, and those wouldn't necessarily include the books, blogs, magazines and movies all geared to help you live life simply. This desire to simply simplify is "generally known as 'voluntary simplicity,' or the 'simplicity movement,' the need many of us see for a less stressful, more meaningful life."

Voluntary simplicity does not mean doing without things entirely or getting rid of everything you have. Voluntary simplicity is a much broader philosophy of living life in a balanced way.

With that in mind, here are seven ways to voluntarily simplify life right now:

- 1. Begin screening your calls. Don't answer the phone just because someone calls you. And if you don't recognize the caller ID, consider not answering the call at all!
- 2. *Turn off your cell phone*. Does it really need to be on all the time? Can't you (shouldn't you?) turn it off for a couple of hours? Maybe put it on airplane mode. Think baby steps if you can't simply throw the switch.
- 3. If you have a cell phone, consider getting rid of your land line. I haven't answered our home phone in over a year. Why? Because anyone that I want or need to talk to has my cell number. I recently went through the voice messages on our land line, and out of the many, and I do mean many, messages that were left, not one was life threatening, and over 95 percent of the messages were sales calls.
- 4. Let voicemail or the answering machine take your calls, especially when you don't want interruptions. If numbers 1, 2 and 3 are too out there for you, that's okay. Consider a baby step here with number 4. Let the call go to voicemail, and you can respond when you have time to do so.
- 5. Answer email twice a day. Just because someone needs a response "now" doesn't mean you need to respond now. Since I moved to answering email twice a day, I can't tell you how many problems seem to get resolved without my input or advice.
- 6. Stop answering all texts immediately. (I wanted to make sure you were reading and that you hadn't fallen into the "I can't do that" mode.) Pavlov was right. When I hear that alert letting me know I have a text, I start to salivate. We have been programmed to reach for our phones when we hear that sound. Reaching for our phones has become a reflexive—and excessive—way of life. But should it be? In the pilot episode of Modern Family, Phil calls for his kids to come downstairs: "Kids,

- get down here." One of the children enters the kitchen on her phone and says, "Why are you guys yelling at us? We were way upstairs. Just text me." Yes, texting is a part of life, but it isn't all of life. Shhh. Silence your text alert.
- 7. *Digitize everything*. No more paper. Go green, and put everything into digital files on your computer. Then back everything up in the cloud. No more looking through files that are hanging in those old file drawers. Now you can search for your files using key words, so finding the file you need or want is only a keystroke away.

Although I can't validate the story, urban legend suggests that Albert Einstein's wardrobe consisted only of black pants and white shirts. The reasoning behind the simple wardrobe was that it eliminated having to make choices (an end-to-end principle) every morning. By only having black pants and white shirts, he didn't have to spend any time thinking about what matched what or what pants went with what shirt. His choice of what to wear had already been made for him.

Whether or not you subscribe to Einstein's fashion philosophy—or hairstyle for that matter—isn't the point. The point is to simply simplify life!