

THE 21-DAY DAD'S CHALLENGE

THREE WEEKS
TO A
BETTER
RELATIONSHIP
WITH
YOUR KIDS

GENERAL EDITOR

CAREY CASEY

CEO, NATIONAL CENTER
FOR FATHERING



FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY

“Proverbs tells us that whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, and nowhere is that more true than on the amazing journey of being a dad. I’m so thankful for this book full of wise words and thoughts on fatherhood from some wise men (and a wise woman).”

STEVEN CURTIS CHAPMAN

Dad of six; Grammy and Dove Award-winning singer
and songwriter

“This book is wonderfully written, timely, and needed for all men—especially African American men who are daily faced with caring for their fragile families. I highly recommend *The 21-Day Dad’s Challenge* and pray the challenges presented will be accepted and put into practice by everyone who reads it.”

JOHN PERKINS

Co-founder and chairman of the board, Christian
Community Development Association; president, John
M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development

“Would you believe that being a great dad can be fun? You and your child can enjoy growing closer at the ice cream shop, in a church service project, at the pet store, even at the junkyard—and this book shows how. And in only three weeks! The smallest changes can make the biggest difference. Day by day, this book brings you closer to being the dad you really want to be.”

GARY SMALLEY

Author, *Change Your Heart, Change Your Life*

“Desiring for decades to parent more effectively, I wish Carey Casey had provided his illuminating book years ago. Fortunately, I can now use its inspiration to become a better father to my adult children and eventually my grandchildren.”

BARRY C. BLACK, PH.D.

Chaplain of the United States Senate

THE 21-DAY DAD'S CHALLENGE



THE 21-DAY DAD'S CHALLENGE

THREE WEEKS
TO A
BETTER
RELATIONSHIP
WITH
YOUR KIDS

CAREY CASEY
GENERAL EDITOR

FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

The 21-Day Dad's Challenge: Three Weeks to a Better Relationship with Your Kids

Copyright © 2011 Focus on the Family

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

Focus on the Family and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, CO 80995.

TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Tyndale's quill logo is a trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.zondervan.com).

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission of Focus on the Family.

Cover design: Erik M. Peterson

Cover photo: Silhouette of man copyright © DNY59/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © Carey Casey. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The 21-day dad's challenge : three weeks to a better relationship with your kids /

Carey Casey, general editor.—1st ed.

p. cm.

“A Focus on the Family book”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-58997-681-8

1. Fathers—Religious life—Textbooks. 2. Fatherhood—Religious aspects—Christianity—Textbooks. I. Casey, Carey, 1955- II. Title: Twenty-one day dad's challenge. III. Title: Three weeks to a better relationship with your kids.

BV4529.17.A15 2011

248.8'421—dc23

2011030114

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 / 16 15 14 13 12 11

CONTENTS

DEDICATION	xiii
Carey Casey	
INTRODUCTION	1
Carey Casey	
DAY 1: THE FUN OF FATHERHOOD	5
Carey Casey	
DAY 2: WHERE CLOSENESS COMES FROM	11
Josh D. McDowell	
DAY 3: DO THE THINGS YOUR KIDS WANT TO DO	19
Tony Dungy	
DAY 4: WHERE'S DADDY?	25
Dr. Gary Rosberg	
DAY 5: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME	31
Joe White	
DAY 6: NO EXPERIENCE REQUIRED	37
Jim Daly	
DAY 7: "I'M SORRY, I WAS WRONG!"	43
Gracia Burnham	

DAY 8: WHERE SELDOM IS HEARD AN ENCOURAGING WORD	49
Gary J. Oliver, Ph.D.	
DAY 9: UNFORGETTABLE	55
Clark Hunt	
DAY 10: WHAT'S IN A NAME	61
Shaun Alexander	
DAY 11: THE FOREVER STAMP	67
Mark DeMoss	
DAY 12: BUY A UNICYCLE.	73
Jay Payleitner	
DAY 13: YOU LEAD, THEY SUCCEED	79
Chip Ingram	
DAY 14: DON'T PANIC!	89
Michael Catt	
DAY 15: OOOH, TOUGH WORD!	95
Jim Moore	
DAY 16: WALKING THROUGH LIFE WITH YOUR KIDS	103
Bryan Clay	
DAY 17: RAISING FAITHFUL STEWARDS	109
Randy Alcorn	

DAY 18: IMPROVING THEIR SERVE. 115

Stuart Briscoe

DAY 19: HELPING KIDS LEARN RESPONSIBILITY 121

Lee Paris

DAY 20: BE A STORYTELLER. 129

Marcellus Casey

DAY 21: HOLDING KIDS ACCOUNTABLE. 135

Carey Casey

AFTERWORD. 141

Carey Casey

Bonus Challenges

LISTENING UP 151

Dr. Wayne “Coach” Gordon

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE. 159

Dr. Ken Canfield

NOTES 165



Introduction

BY CAREY CASEY

Snap on your chin strap, dad. You're about to be hit with some powerful insights that will inspire and equip you to be the father your children need.

I hope you'll get used to the idea that a better father is on the other side of reading this book. Whether your fathering needs minor adjustments or a radical overhaul, start preparing for it now. Allow God to work in your life through His Word and the experiences that have helped to shape me and the other authors of this book. Soak in the fatherly wisdom and take full advantage of the challenges and the action planning exercises included in each chapter.

I'm humbled and grateful to be part of the writing team with these other men (and a woman). These are people I greatly respect and admire. There's even one chapter by a young man who saw the best and the worst moments of my own fathering—my son Marcellus. You probably can imagine the fear and trepidation I felt as I read his chapter. But he did a fantastic job, along with the others who are part of this project.

I'm confident that you—and your children, and *their* children—

will receive benefits and blessings because you picked up this book. Your involved fathering will make a lasting difference.

Allow me to share a larger perspective for you to keep in mind before you start filling your brain with these twenty-one great ideas.

I always say that the things that will change our society don't cost a lot of money or require new ideas from the sharpest minds. Mostly, effectiveness in life is about being faithful with the basics—following through on the bedrock values and priorities that are truly meaningful.

It's the same with your family. According to our research, you can have a great impact on your children through simple acts of loving, coaching, and modeling—the three fundamentals of Championship Fathering. I know being a dad is a challenge, but it isn't rocket science. A simple approach will help you do your best.

When I see or hear about a dad doing simple but outstanding things—like helping his child with music lessons—I'm inspired. When I see a father and child playing a board game together, I think it's incredible! I'm moved when I drive on the freeway and see a father talking with his daughter, both of them smiling and laughing in the lane next to me.

It's the simple things that matter: reading Bible stories, going fishing, watching a movie and eating popcorn together, talking about the day, having a water fight, building something together, helping with homework, telling jokes, watching the sun go down. The possibilities are limited only by a child's imagination and a dad's willingness to go with the flow.

My bride, Melanie, and I have four children. Our three oldest—two daughters and a son—are married and raising amazing grandchildren. My youngest son, Chance, is a teenager. Being in my fifties, it isn't easy, let me tell you! But I'm convinced that one of the

reasons God gave us Chance at our age is to remind me of the simple things. I try to join him outside and play, just like any other dad. We read a chapter of Proverbs every morning; we fix breakfast together. Although I played football, Chance enjoys tennis, so I often practice with him. Some days I sit outside in the grass with him, just doing whatever he wants at the time. More than anything, I'm trying to be there on a daily basis. It's all everyday, simple stuff.

I believe one of the reasons God gives us children—at any age—is to help us learn to appreciate the value of the small, uncomplicated things of life. From an eternal perspective, what could we possibly do that's better than hanging out in the backyard with a son or daughter, going on a family picnic or bike ride, helping a child look at leaves under a microscope, or lying on the grass at night and looking up at the stars?

Over time, making those simple investments in your children will have the biggest effect. I don't mean to imply that "simple" is synonymous with "easy." Fathering does require some sacrifice. You will be asked to give up or delay some things that you enjoy, and that's never a breeze. In truth, though, "sacrifice" probably isn't the best word for this, because you and other dedicated fathers will probably view this as a wise trade because that's where your priorities are. What you're asked to give up isn't nearly as important as your critical role in your children's lives. Making those eternal investments is what you're all about; the benefits far outweigh the costs.

I know one dad who made a commitment to get up at 5 A.M. every day so he could practice basketball with his son. He wanted to help his son chase a dream, and that was the time when it worked for both of them. That son eventually earned a college scholarship to play basketball.

Another dad, one of our master trainers at the National Center,

took up fencing because it was an area of interest for his son and there was no local program for young boys. This father joined the adults' fencing club and then helped his son learn the sport. Through the years they continued to practice together and began traveling to competitions. More than ten years later, they coach each other—talking strategy, offering encouragement, pointing out ways they can improve, and celebrating victories. They've traveled to major fencing events in the U.S. and abroad, and both have earned great accolades.

Neither of those dads came up with revolutionary parenting approaches; they just made commitments that asked them to stretch and adjust, and did so willingly. Today they aren't looking back and thinking about what they gave up for their kids; they're happy for the memories they made. They overcame obstacles and found ways to invest in their children's lives. Their actions were simple and heroic.

I'm convinced that if we make that kind of commitment to do the simple things as fathers, we can transform our families for the better. Collectively we truly can have an impact on a culture where, according to statistics, more and more kids are at risk—and the future for children looks ominous.

I pray that these twenty-one tips will be useful in shaping your fathering habits, even if only ten or twelve really resonate with you or fit where you are as a dad. Make the most of the great ideas and inspiration you find here. But keep in mind that your simple, everyday commitment is likely to have the greatest influence on your fathering.

You don't have to fix everything or have all the answers. Your children need you to *just be Dad*.

As much as anything else, they need to know you're committed to them—and that no matter how challenging fatherhood may be, nothing can change that.



DAY 1

The Fun of Fatherhood

BY CAREY CASEY

My son Chance is now a teenager, which brings its own set of joys and challenges. A lot of things are changing—for him *and* for me. Some days we get along great, but of course we have our share of tension and disagreements. Some days he's a knucklehead, and I know I am too at times. So I need to be *balanced* as I relate to him.

On one side is the fun. To help maintain a strong relationship, I've started a regular routine on school days. He goes out in front of our house to wait for the bus; I grab a cup of coffee and join him for a few minutes while he's waiting. He's a captive audience then, and it's a great opportunity to check in, ask him a few questions, and just be together.

Oh, yeah, I should probably mention . . . I do all this while *still wearing my bathrobe*.

So, as the minutes pass, he'll get this look on his face and just stare at me.

"What's wrong, Son?" I'll ask.

He'll say, "I'm waiting for you to go back in the house."

He never enjoys my mischievous smile at this point. "Dad," he'll

say, “don’t stand out here! The bus is coming around the corner in a few seconds.”

It’s probably Chance’s biggest fear right now that I—his out-of-touch father—would embarrass him more than I already have. If I ever stayed outside in my bathrobe when the bus pulled up—or maybe went to the curb and waved to all his classmates—his life would be over right then and there. So I always manage to be back in the house before the bus gets close.

But, don’t you know, I like to have some fun with it. On my way back in the house, I’ll flirt with that front door a little bit. “Hmm. You think they could see me if I stood *here*? How about *here*?”

He’ll say, “Dad, *don’t!*” But he knows I’m just having fun. And I know he’ll find other ways to get back at me.

Isn’t it part of a father’s job to embarrass his kids? Did your father do that? Since we’re going to be uncool for a few years in our kids’ eyes, we may as well have a little fun with it, right? It’s okay to pick them up from school in the oldest car we have, blasting classic rock or R&B out the windows, or start the wave at the next sports event. Maybe we could even wear our favorite Hawaiian shorts around their friends, or pull out the baby album when they bring a date home for dinner.

I do believe we need to have a lot of fun with our kids, and humor will actually help them develop higher creative and coping skills. There’s even room for some good-natured teasing, as long as we’re sensitive to the possibility of going too far and becoming mean-spirited.

That’s the other side—the humility we need to show our kids. Not long ago, I was joking around with Chance and I did go too far. I said something in fun that I later realized had cut deeper. So I went back to him and said, “Son, Daddy has to ask for your forgiveness.

The words I said to you this morning and how I said them were not right, and I'm sorry. I have to be more discerning and more sensitive to what you're going through."

As we relate to our children and coach them to be responsible, God-fearing adults, there's a lot of room for humor, energy, and fun. Those activities bring more interest and excitement to life, and they provide great bonding opportunities. But we must balance this with self-control and humility. Balanced fathering should be our goal.

I believe that kind of balance is part of what Paul had in mind when he wrote in Ephesians 6:4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Dads who don't have fun with their kids will exasperate them. If my fathering is always about making sure my son behaves or performs to a certain standard, he'll be frustrated and want to give up. More than once there's been no patience or kindness in my voice when I've said to him, "Chance, why isn't your room clean?" Or, "Son, why do you continue to do that when I told you it needs to be done *this* way?"

I often stand in front of dads' groups and say things like, "Don't sweat the small stuff. There are more important things than a clean room." Then I'll forget my own advice when I get home. Sure, Chance has to get better at some things—but I should know better, too.

I guess it shows I'm doing okay when I tuck him into bed at night and he reaches out his arms and says, "Dad, I need a hug." There's nothing quite like it.

But then, don't you know, the next morning we'll be in front of our house, me in my bathrobe and Chance giving me that anxious look—with a hint of a smile behind it.

It's good to be a dad.



YOUR CHALLENGE

Are you willing to try something new as you seek to have fun with your kids? Use your imagination! Being able to laugh with them—and at yourself—could open up new lines of communication and make you more approachable when serious matters arise.

A good place to start is to hang out in their world, figuring out what tickles their funny bone. During the next 24 hours, notice the kinds of things they and their friends are laughing at. As long as it's clean, join in. Read something humorous that your child likes to read, watch a video he thinks is funny, or check out a Web site she finds amusing.



YOUR PLAN

Use the following space to list three things you can look at, listen to, and laugh about with your child during the next day or so. Then write down some thoughts about these questions:

Would your kids say that you're a "fun" dad? Why or why not?

What routines or activities might be likely to bring out the joking or playful side of your personality more often?

What areas of your child's life are off limits when it comes to making jokes? If you're not sure, talk with your child's mom or someone else who knows him or her well. If you and your child have a history of "misunderstood" teasing or unappreciated pranks,

chances are good that you both need to make some changes. How can you do your part?



CAREY CASEY is CEO of the National Center for Fathering, headquartered in Kansas City, and the author (with Neil Wilson) of *Championship Fathering: How to Win at Being a Dad*. Speaking across the U.S. and around the world, Carey encourages and equips men to be the fathers their children need. He has served as a chaplain for NFL football teams and the U.S. Olympic team, and as an inner-city pastor in Chicago. For eighteen years Carey was on staff with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, serving as national urban director and president of the FCA Foundation. Carey and his wife, Melanie, have four children and five grandchildren.



For more help in taking today's challenge, scan the symbol with your smartphone. See instructions on page xi in the front of this book. Or visit <http://www.21DayDadChallenge.com/Day1>.

