



IT'S GREAT BEING A DAD



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In tribute to (and in memory of) our own dads,
—Ken Payleitner, Leland Griffin, and Ralph Casey—
who showed us how to be good dads
and continue to teach and shape us even today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It's great being a dad. And it's great to work in an environment that lifts up the role of fatherhood. We are very aware that the "work" at the National Center for Fathering (NCF) is much bigger than we are.

As we endeavor to inspire and equip dads, so often we find ourselves inspired and equipped by others, such as the children who write priceless essays about their dads and all the dads who truly live out what this book is about with their children. We are thankful beyond measure for—and greatly humbled by—the faithful involvement of the NCF board of directors and many others who partner with us as trainers, volunteers, and/or financial supporters.

Through the years, so many wonderfully gifted individuals have been part of our team here at NCF. Currently on our hard-working staff are Steve Wilson, Brian Blomberg, Sherri Solis, Bea Peters, Chelsea Mudd, Steve Stiffler, and Yemescrach (Yemi) Wendemagegnehu. Our dedicated crew at WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) includes Eric Snow, Shelly Perry, Chris Danenhauer, Frank Hannon, Denise Griffith, Gloria Vaquera, and Keith Schumacher.

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From Carey: I am thrilled to acknowledge a few people who have influenced me to contribute to the writing of this book. I will forever be grateful for Mom and Pop, who modeled parenting and a strong marriage for me. I thank God for my bride, Melanie, who has given me four wonderful children. I have fun

being a dad of three adult children and a teenage son, Chance, who came 14 years later and is now off at college. As I often state, Chance keeps my fathering fresh. Thanks to Ken Canfield, our founder at NCF, for casting the vision and setting the course. And to all of the influencers who loved me, coached me, and modeled for me the importance of my role as a dad, thank you for your encouragement and support.

Brock sends his love and thanks to Tara, Cole, Brooklyn, and Devan—for making the journey so satisfying and for their patience and grace for a husband and father who is still growing. And to Dad and Mom (Leland and Janet Griffin) as well as Virgil and RuthAnn Warren and the entire Warren clan—for their continuing support and encouragement. To pastors and friends at Legacy Christian Church—for living the Word and helping us do the same. Also to Ken Canfield and Carey Casey, leaders at NCF—for creating space for me to use my gifts, for continuing to affirm those gifts, and for being key friends and mentors for fathering and for life.

Jay sends his gratitude to his growing family—Rita, Alec, Lindsay, Randall, Rachel, Max, Megan, Isaac, Kaitlin, Rae Anne, Judah, Jackson, and Emerson. You inspire and motivate me. I love you all.

And to our Savior, Jesus, who went to the cross for each and every one of us. Without your perfect love and perfect plan, none of this makes any sense.

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Introduction

We think being a dad is just about the greatest, most rewarding job in the world. And we want you to feel the same way.

On the book cover are the names of Jay, Brock, and Carey. But this book is actually a labor of love inspired by the millions of dads who have been touched by the work of the National Center for Fathering (NCF).

We love each one of those guys. We love every desperate dad who has walked through our doors looking for help. We love the men who have gone through our workshops and small-group training sessions and have committed to Championship Fathering. We applaud and appreciate the men whose names are inscribed in our Fathering Hall of Fame and who volunteer in their kids' schools through our WATCH D.O.G.S. initiative. We care deeply for thousands of dads who read our weekly blogs and sit in audiences inspired and challenged by NCF speakers. We are humbled that millions of men have tuned in to *Today's Father* broadcasts five days a week on hundreds of stations since 1993.

We pledge to expand our impact through books, e-books, essay contests, fathering court, and winsome social media campaigns. And we take seriously our responsibility to conduct groundbreaking research that helps shape national policy and impacts fathers and families across the country.

Are you with us? We'd like to stand shoulder to shoulder with you. Representing the National Center for Fathering, we coauthors have

logged untold hours researching, writing about, speaking on, advocating for, and simply pondering the concept of fatherhood. Carey Casey has headed NCF since 2006. Brock Griffin is the writing and publications director, having served on staff since 1991. Bestselling author, speaker, and producer Jay Payleitner has been affiliated with NCF for more than two decades. Altogether we have 12 children. Carey and Jay may or may not be adding grandchildren even as this book goes to press.

As you read, the collective voice you hear is ours. Carey, Brock, Jay. Despite all our experience—as fathers and as men who work with dads—we are far from perfect. We make our share of mistakes. We don't have all the answers. But that's the point and purpose of the National Center for Fathering and all we do. As dads, we're all in this together. We need to share ideas, take risks, lift each other up, ask forgiveness, and admit we need help sometimes. Ultimately, we need to depend on the power and presence of our heavenly Father. Otherwise, even our best efforts are going to fall way short.

So keep reading. We promise the wonderfully imperfect insight that follows is going to make you a better dad. It's all based on personal experience, interviews with thousands of dads, a vast amount of primary research, national polls commissioned in partnership with other organizations (including Gallup), and biblical authority.

You'll be glad to see we're using a format of short chapters that cover a lot of ground. That allows us to draw on the power of story and deliver user-friendly truths on a variety of topics without getting bogged down in one area. If you find one chapter doesn't apply to your situation, keep reading. Within a few pages, we'll be venturing down a new path. That's the approach we've been taking with our daily radio broadcast, weekly blogs, and social media posts, and it's clearly working.

Finally, we hope that somewhere along the way you have been (or will be) presented with a lovingly chosen or handmade coffee mug, pencil holder, or T-shirt that says, “#1 Dad” or “Father of the Year” or

“It’s Great Being a Dad.” Sentiments like that may sound cliché, but you can be sure that the young gift giver totally depends on you for guidance, adventure, unconditional love, and a roof over their head.

We desperately want all dads to experience greatness at every age and stage of fatherhood. We know firsthand that fathering can and should be a blast.

“It’s great being a dad.”

—CAREY CASEY, BROCK GRIFFIN, AND JAY PAYLEITNER



1

Kid Fix

Bob can't help himself. He has all the signs of severe addiction. Bob is a pastor and a father. This is his story.

His church staff first noticed it one day during a meeting. The discussion was intense, but Bob's eyes started wandering. "Bob," someone said, "did you hear me?"

"Oh...sure," he said, and his focus snapped back to the person's face. He leaned forward to study some papers on the table, and the meeting resumed.

A few seconds later, the withdrawal symptoms were more than Bob could take. Someone was in the middle of a sentence, and Bob stopped him. "I'm really sorry," he said, "but I just can't concentrate. Hold your thought, because we need to get through this. I just need to step out for a minute." And out the door he went.

The other people in the meeting were left with a confused look on their faces. Where could he have gone, and why couldn't it wait 20 minutes?

They waited. Angie twiddled her thumbs, Brianna crossed and recrossed her legs, Jason offered to get coffee.

Seven or eight minutes later, Bob shuffled back into the room. "Where were we?" he said. Everyone just looked at him, still perplexed.

"Okay," he said, "I'm sorry I left, but I couldn't wait. My kids are down in the day care, and I just had to have a kid fix."

Dad, has that ever happened to you? We hope so. It's one of the great rewards of being a dad.

But be warned. *Fatherhood is addicting*. Maybe you'll start with bouts of all-star wrestling when you get home from work. Before you know it, you'll be sneaking hugs before dinner, lingering at their bedside after prayers, and uttering words of encouragement when they leave for school. If you miss that opportunity to score a fix, you may have to resort to Bob's method—you'll call home in the middle of the day just to talk to your children. And then, if worse comes to worst, you'll become a pusher, like us.

At NCF, we plead guilty to being obsessed with promoting and peddling the powerful father-child addiction. And we also apologize for taking that analogy this far. We know far too well harmful addictions are tearing families apart. But don't miss the point.

Your children are precious and adorable creatures. We could go on and on about how they benefit from your involvement, consistency, and affection. They need you, and that should be enough motivation to be a good dad.

But we'll tell you—and Pastor Bob will concur—there are some incredible rewards for you as well. Plain and simple, fathering is a high like no other.

Go home tonight and get a healthy dose of your children. It may be a mind-expanding, psychedelic experience that changes your life. And theirs.

*"Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a reward from him."*

—PSALM 127:3 NLT



Rainy Days

During a recent rainstorm, a young woman named Alice listened to a friend complain about the dreary weather. “It’s like the world stops and you’re trapped.”

After a reflective pause, Alice gave an easygoing reply. “I love the rain.”
“What? You like this weather? I can’t imagine why.”

Alice explained, “When I was a little girl, my dad was a carpenter, and he did a lot of jobs outside. So if it was raining, I knew there was a good chance Daddy couldn’t leave for work that day. He’d be home, in his little shed out back, and I could be with him as he did his woodwork.”

She continued, “So now, a nice rainy afternoon brings all that back to me, and I have those same feelings of spending time with my dad and being close to him. When it rained, that meant he would be there for me.”

Can you picture that little girl? Cherishing that time with her daddy. Can you see her now as a young adult? Smiling at the memories. Most fathers don’t fully understand how much our children long for our time and attention or how much they simply want to be *with* us. Really, the best time we spend with them is not go, go, go. Memories are made doing simple, everyday activities together—weeding the garden, painting the porch, playing catch, or driving to the hardware store. You know, just hanging out.

For Alice, those times with her dad will be with her the rest of her life. Every time it rains, she feels special. The question to consider is how you can have that kind of impact on your children.

One clue from Alice's story is that she connected a regular event with a sense of expectation. Rain will forever be linked with time spent together with her dad. And memories were made. What's really interesting is that Alice's dad probably didn't even know he was creating images and emotions that would last a lifetime.

It's possible, Dad, that you're well on your way to making similar memory links with your kids. On Sunday mornings, do you read the comics together? On clear nights, do you point out constellations? During snowstorms, do you huddle together around the fireplace? When you're checking the fence line, do you make sure you have a son or daughter riding shotgun? When the Red Sox game is on, do you make room on the couch?

If that describes time spent with your child, then decades from now that grown-up kid will have plenty of moments that trigger memories of time with Dad and bring a warm smile and a wash of nostalgia. A Sunday newspaper, starry night, snowstorm, visit to a hardware store, or ball game is all it will take.

We encourage dads to be intentional about initiating activities and spending time together with their kids. When the kids are young, it's easy. They are eager to tag along, snuggle, or be Daddy's helper. As they get older, you'll want to find a regular time and place where your world intersects with their world—a hobby, a sport, a small business, an intellectual pursuit, or work where you get some good honest dirt under your fingernails.

Don't wait for a rainy day, Dad. With a little effort, you can begin to make some easygoing memories with your children this very week.

"Time spent with Dad doesn't have to be jam-packed with activities. Maybe the activity is just spending time with Dad."

—BROCK GRIFFIN



Airport Skipping

Ever see a normal-looking guy doing something really goofy? Chances are it had something to do with a kid.

Patrick was leading his family through an airport terminal as they were moving to a different city. He held on to his six-year-old daughter's hand as they made their way to a connecting flight.

Suddenly his daughter got an excited look on her face and looked up at him. "Daddy," she said, "let's skip!"

Now, you can imagine what went through his mind: *Hmm. In dozens of flights, I've never seen a 38-year-old businessman skipping through an airport. Maybe it has happened and I just missed it, but probably not.*

This was no earth-shattering moral dilemma, and yet the idea of skipping through an airport with his daughter really made him uncomfortable. Why? Are grown-ups banned from skipping? Would he see someone he knew? Or maybe the airport etiquette police would take him away on a cart with flashing lights.

But then Patrick realized maybe there was something higher at work here—higher than reputations and appearances and looking silly in public. Maybe he could pull off this one frivolous stunt and make a little girl happy. Maybe he could help her forget for a few minutes that she wasn't all that excited about moving anyway.

That's what committed dads do. We put our children's desires above our own. And sometimes it isn't easy. We may risk looking silly to put a bright spot in our daughter's day. We risk forgoing advancement at

work so we can spend more time with our children. Maybe we put a hold on our weekend plans because little Jackson wants to go visit a space museum on Saturday afternoon.

That isn't to say we let our children run our lives or that we hesitate to correct them when they need it. But maybe we should adjust our thinking so that our first thought is to give our children the desires of their hearts whenever those desires aren't for something harmful. We believe that's how God, our heavenly Father, responds to us.

And by the way, if you ever hear about some crazy, middle-aged guy skipping down the airport terminal, just remember, it made a six-year-old girl mighty happy.

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

—MATTHEW 18:3