

**Covenant Parenting: For This Reason...
Genesis 1:26-28, 1 Peter 2:9-10, Revelation 7:9-10**

Well friends, you may or may not be sports fans – but whenever major global sporting events and tournaments are held, it's not hard to notice that certain countries are known to, and expected to, do well in certain sports.

India, for example, is a Cricket powerhouse; Jamaica always cleans up at track events at the Summer Olympics; Cuba and Puerto Rico are known for producing some great baseball players, and when it comes to rugby it's hard to ignore the reputation of the New Zealand All-Blacks.

Closer to home the U.S. is known for "American Football" and the rest of the world lets them keep that game, while they argue passionately every four years at the World Cup about which country has the best "real football" team, Germany currently has the bragging rights to that.

Now Canada – as everybody knows – has hockey. Other nations may play hockey as well, but we consistently turn out

the vast majority of players and superstars in the NHL, the greatest names in the game are mostly Canadian!

And whenever an American franchise wins the Stanley Cup – those of us who are fans of Canadian team console ourselves by saying *"well their Canadians were just a little better than our Canadians."*

So why is it that certain countries are known for consistently producing the best athletes in a particular sport?

Well there are a number of factors involved to be sure – but one of the most significant is that the sport is just part of social fabric of the nation, it permeates everything...

From government; our Prime Minister always bets the leader of the opposing nation a case of beer when we play for an Olympic Gold medal in hockey... to school; when I was a kid we lived for recess when we could continue our game of street hockey... to business; would Tim Horton's be as Canadian as it is without sponsoring Timbit's Hockey program?

But all of this happens because hockey is a part of the family in Canada.

You see friends, nations which continually dominate in one sport have families that raise their children in that particular sport – it's just part of how you grow up in that country.

So in Canada – many parents raise their kids in hockey, from watching Hockey Night in Canada, taking them to Hitmen or Flames games, buying them a hockey stick and teaching them how to stickhandle and shoot in the basement or the garage or on the driveway...

Parents will put up with dents in the garage door from their kids hitting it with the hockey ball or the puck... Dads will make a hockey rink in the backyard in the winter time to let the kids skate and play hockey...

Parents will fork out huge sums of money to register their kids to play in organized hockey leagues. They will make a commitment to drive them all over the city for practices - at

6am in the morning, and across the province to different cities for games and tournaments - which take up entire week-ends!

And for many families in Canada, this is just part of growing up and being a family – it's what their parents did for them and what their kids will do for their families in the future – it's just what families do.

In fact when a young couple is expecting their first child, or perhaps a young couple has already had a few children, we will tease them... and say that they are working on building their own hockey team.

The sport permeates the social fabric all the way down to the family level.

And if you are wondering why this happens – after all we're talking about chasing a piece of frozen rubber around on skates trying to shoot it between two upright pieces of steel... why is hockey such a part of family life in Canada?

Or why is cricket such a part of family life in India, why is football part of family life in the U.S. or why is “real football” such a part of family life in the rest of the world?

Well let me put it this way, for as much as certain groups might want to “focus on the family” – the truth is that a family needs a focus...

Whether it’s a national sport, or a passion for music, or dance, or the arts, a family business, or a hobby of some sort, a family needs something to focus on and work towards together – that’s why we have that saying “*the family that plays together stays together...*”

And this should come as no surprise really... If you are familiar with the story of scripture and how things started off with the Covenant of Creation, you’ll know that this is built into how God created this world.

As we read Genesis 1:26-28 we see that God created humanity in His image – male and female, told them to have children,

and gave them the task of ruling over the creation – in other words God created family and gave them a focus.

So what we understand as the family finds its beginning in God’s intentions for His creation, and I dare to say that as part of how family develops from man and woman working together to image God in their focus out towards the rest of creation – that family in this sense, also bears the image of God.

So if we want to speak about what the bible says is “normal” for a family – then we can leave aside the term “*nuclear family*” and start using the phrase “*covenant family*” because the family has its origins in what God started in the Covenant of Creation.

And if we want to understand what the bible has to say about “*parenting*” in the context of the family - well you guessed it... we need to look at what the bible says about “*covenant parenting.*”

Now the term “*covenant parenting*” does not appear in the scriptures as such, but... as I was studying this whole issue of Covenant for our last series “the Christ of the Covenants” and as we went through and examined all the different Covenant administrations, I was struck by how dependent this whole enterprise was upon parents passing on the covenants to their children.

Maybe you noticed that to?

Right from the start in the Covenant of Creation, we see God revealing to Adam the specifics of the covenant relationship between God and humanity.

“You may eat from all the trees in the garden but do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” and the expectation is that Adam will be the one to pass on this knowledge and what it says about humanities’ relationship with God, to his children, just as he did for his wife.

So to, the subsequent promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Covenant of Commencement - *that one day one of the woman’s offspring would crush the head of the serpent who had enticed them to disobey God* - this also would be dependent upon Adam and Eve passing it on, explaining to their children why this promise would even be necessary and what God had said would the consequences of their disobedience.

And then the first few chapters of Genesis show how this knowledge and promise and consequences are passed along from one generation to the next, with the line of the serpent passing on rebellion and disobedience against God, and the line of the woman passing on Covenant faithfulness to God.

Then comes the Covenant of Preservation, where God preserves Noah *and his family* - from being destroyed in the judgment of the flood.

And after the flood God re-commissions Noah *and his sons* to go and once again multiply to fill the earth, gives them

permission to eat the animals, makes them responsible for punishing murderers, and makes the rainbow a symbol of what has taken place in this covenant.

Again the expectation and implication is that Noah and his sons must pass on these covenant commands, responsibilities and knowledge to future generations.

Do you see how this is shaping up?

It starts to become even more obvious when God established the Covenant of Promise with Abraham, because the essence of what God is doing in this Covenant is all about re-creating his original intentions of having a Covenant people for Himself, who would reflect His image to the world, and bless all nations as a result.

So God was very specific that this promise would be passed on from Abraham to Isaac and that all of Abraham's descendants must be circumcised by their parents in order to be included in this promise.

So again, the expectation is that parents must pass on the sign of the covenant to their children, and teach them about the promise God had made to them.

Then comes the Covenant of Law, where God makes the many descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, into the nation of Israel – His own covenant people – and gives them what He promised to Abraham.

And right with-in the Ten Words of the Law – the 10 Commandments - we find this instruction *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”* (Ex 20:12)

And the implication here - from all that we've seen so far as these Covenant administrations move along - is that father and mother will be passing on the Covenant relationship they have with God to their children.

They will be explaining to them what it is all about and how it applies to their lives, and teaching them how to respond faithfully to the God who has claimed their life.

So, honor your father and mother as they are your covenant parents.

And the responsibility to pass along the covenant becomes even more important when God makes the Covenant of Kingship with David.

It will be the responsibility of David and his heirs to lead the nation of Israel to be faithful covenant partners with Yahweh – if the King fails to pass this responsibility on to the son who will succeed him... then the whole nation is at risk of becoming disobedient and being subjected to the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness.

So, as I said – when you go through the covenants and studying them, you start to notice this whole “covenant”

approach depends upon parents passing things along to their children, and thus how covenant actually defines parenting.

In fact you could say that it was always God’s intention, from the beginning, that parenting would be *“covenant parenting.”*

So as we find ourselves included in God’s Covenant plans through our faith and trust in Jesus; who is the Christ of the Covenants, we discover that God’s intention for us as parents, and for our families, is that we become *covenant* parents who focus our families on God’s *covenant* intentions.

The Scripture declares to us *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

Now you might think this sounds a bit like something God would say to the nation of Israel as He formalized the

covenant of Law with them – and you are right, it certainly echoes God’s words in Exodus 19 – but this is the Apostle Peter applying it to those who believe in Jesus Christ, whom he now considers to be the covenant people of God. That’s us...

And in the Revelation of Jesus Christ 7:9-10, the Apostle John is shown that the end result of God’s Covenant restoration plan is a great people of God, gathered out of every nation, and it is so large he can’t even estimate how many people are a part of it.

And John is also shown a new heavens and a new earth, and hears God Almighty proclaim that His people will dwell with Him and He will dwell with His people and all things will be made new!

And God proclaims that He *“will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Rev 21:1-5)

Now friends I bring these scripture passages to our attention this morning because if we are to become *covenant* parents, and *focus* our families on God’s *covenant* intentions we must be reminded and remember that all of God’s covenant instructions and stipulations in the past administrations which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ - are for the purpose of creating a Covenant people who will live in relationship with God and reflect His image to a renewed creation.

So all the specific ways in which to parents, all the tricks and tips about raising children and so on – are all for this purpose.

And really friends the best way to be covenant parents is not to focus so much on family, but to give our families this focus.

So Covenant parenting is really about how you are leading and helping your biological family to be focused on becoming a part of God’s Covenant Family as we anticipate the renewed heavens and earth.

Now we're going to look at some specific ways of doing that over the next three weeks – but if you want an idea on how to start with that; just think about families can be focused on a national sport, like hockey, or football – both kinds..

and then imagine how you might switch out that sport for God's Covenant plan, and what you might do with your family as you are focused on that...

And if you need some incentive to get excited about God's covenant plan in the same way that hockey or football inspires you; think about what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:25.

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

Friends I think if more fathers and mothers grasped the ultimate reward of what it means to be Covenant parents; they would lead their families to worship at church and play at sports - instead of worshiping sports and playing at church...

Not that there is anything wrong with playing sports, but if we are honest friend... the focus that many families have on sports, or the arts, or whatever they may have their children involved in is often times a means to cover up the emptiness or compensate for the brokenness that affects all our families.

The reason God promises that He *“will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...”* is because ever since the Covenant of Commencement, the family has been primary place where the consequences of our sin and rebellion are passed to each of us and felt most keenly.

That's not a pleasant fact to admit but it's the truth.

Some people have experienced abuse in their family, others have been rejected by their family, some families are broken apart as marriages fail or children die.

So some have decided marriage and family are not worth it, some have determined they don't want to bring children into this world in its current state...

Others desperately want to have kids, but the biological consequences of Adam's Covenant unfaithfulness, in the form of sickness and disease, have resulted in the inability to produce children.

And for others this brokenness has taken other forms in their lives and has prevented them from developing the kind of relationship that could lead to starting a family...

And often when we try to "focus on the family" to address the way in which our sin affects it, our efforts only serve to exacerbate and amplify the pain and hurt and brokenness that many of us experience in different ways.

But friends, the good news this morning is that if we give our families a covenant focus instead – if we lead our biological families to become part of God's Covenant family – then the

grace and mercy and forgiveness and all the promises and benefits of God's Covenant are given to us – and to our family... and they start to restore what has been broken and damaged in our lives, and in other's lives as well.

Because God's Covenant family is the kind of family where anyone, who for whatever reason, does not have a biological family, can receive a new family through the grace and mercy of the Christ of the Covenants.

So anyone who is single, widowed, divorced, childless, or rejected... is brought into and included in God's Covenant family along with those who have biological families.

And together, all of us who have experienced the restoration of God's covenant purposes in our lives, we now work to pass on this truth to the next generation, and encourage them to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and live as faithful covenant partners with God through Him!

We are all covenant parents to the next generation in Christ.

This is also part of what it means to make our biological families part of God's covenant family – and it's not just a platitude that we say to make people feel included – it's the truth!

We promise to do this together as a covenant community each time we give the sign of the covenant, the sacrament of Baptism, to one of our children... and we live it out as we gather in community for worship and social events, as people serve in our children and youth ministries.

It's something that becomes an essential part of our social fabric as a community; it's just part of what it means to be part of Christ's Church, to grow up in this church...

So, just as some nations are known for excelling in certain sports and consistently producing great athletes in that sport...

I hope and pray that Valleyview gets a reputation for producing young people who grow up knowing about the Covenant, and the who know and trust in the Christ of the

Covenants, and that they in turn will pass this knowledge and truth on to their children – and teach them to respond in faith...

Because we know what Covenant parenting is all about, and we know that we are all Covenant parents – and that's just what we do for the next generation – because that just what it means to be a part of God's Covenant family through Jesus Christ.

Amen.