

What We Can Learn From Jewish Parents

✖ Torah-adherent Jewish parents take time to teach their children prayers, study the Torah and the Talmud, and speak blessings for their future. As a Bible believer, you can follow the same biblical examples and customs of our Jewish counterparts by making operational seven important life truths for your children.

Parents know that there is an inbred tendency in all children to eventually rebel against instruction. There is a Hebrew word, *yetzer*, which means, “tendency or inclination.” Judaism teaches that man is created with two opposing tendencies: to do good (*yetzer ha’tov*), and to do evil (*yetzer ha’ra*). Each human is created with a free will to choose either good or evil.

Before the Flood, God said of mankind: “Every intent [*yetzer*] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). The Talmud teaches that God gave the Torah to accompany man on his journey in life, that by studying God’s Word, man can control the *yetzer* and dissuade his evil inclination.

1. Teach Your Children

Children love learning by example, not just words. Scripture says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Many parents are not as concerned about the way their child should go, but more concerned about the way their child should not go!

Orthodox Jewish fathers living in Jerusalem relate various stories of sons from the Bible to teach their own sons how to act responsibly. For example, in Jerusalem’s Kidron Valley there are a series of ancient tombs carved out of the limestone rock. These hewn tombs, like stone towers, are a

silent reminder of men who once had influence in the Holy City. One tomb is traditionally identified as the tomb of Absalom, the son of David. Absalom secretly revolted against his father and attempted to hijack the kingdom. His stubbornness and rebellion led to his demise and early death. (See 2 Sam. 18 and 19).

Orthodox Jews bring their sons to the tomb of Absalom, located near the edge of a Jewish cemetery, and recall the tragic story of Absalom's rebellion against his father. Their purpose is to paint a vivid mental image of the dangers of disobedience and the high price a son pays when not following wise counsel.

A similar method was employed by a youth minister who took his entire youth group to a local cemetery and had them sit down on the grass. Near him was a tombstone with the name of a young man who had once served the Lord but had died in a sinful condition. He began telling about this young man's life and revealed how his life was cut short by his rebellion.

He said the image painted by his message and the setting of the graveyard impressed the minds of the youth, and he noticed an immediate change in the attitude of the entire group for many months, especially after they discovered it was the grave of the youth leader's own brother.

Visual learning helps stimulate recall. Our weekly telecast, Manna-fest, uses large props and graphics to form visual images of the message. Parents of young children often tell me, "My kids love your program. They love to see what props you use."

2. Teach your children how to pray.

Christ's disciples said, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They knew Christ engaged in early morning prayer (Mark 1:35) and witnessed miracles resulting from His prayer life. The best way of teaching your children how to pray is to be an example

and pray yourself!

As a child in the 1960s, I can recall my father praying in his upstairs church office with the windows opened. I just knew they could hear him across the river at the county jail. Many times in the evening I could hear Dad's prayers filtering up through the air vents in my bedroom floor as he interceded in the basement of our house. When I was sick or in difficulty, I believed God would hear Dad's prayers. His prayer life was an example and a pattern for me to understand how to pray. Let your children see and hear you pray at home and not just in church.

The simplest beginner prayers are praying at bedtime. In bedtime prayer, Orthodox Jews mention four archangels, two of whom are mentioned in the Bible (Michael and Gabriel) and two found in Apocryphal (nonbiblical) sources. They pray, "In the name of the Lord, the God of Israel: Michael on my right, Gabriel on my left, Uriel before me, Raphael behind me, and above my head the Shekinah [presence] of God."

Raphael was traditionally an angel of healing, and Uriel was believed to be the guiding light of the Holy Scriptures. Children should learn a bedtime prayer as soon as they can speak.

Before sending a child off to school, a parent should pray with them. Using the Scripture, "So Abraham rose early in the morning" (Gen. 22:3), the Shacharit, meaning "early morning hour," prayers were the first of three daily prayers. The moment a devout Jew awakes, he prays, "I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul within me with compassion—abundant is your faithfulness."

We know Christ prayed a great while before sunrise (Mark 1:35), and at the temple, morning prayers were offered as the sun rose, beginning a new day. As a parent, speak a protective prayer over your children before they depart from the security

of your dwelling.

3. Involve your children in a local assembly.

Most churches in North America have a children's ministry. Growing up, our church's children's ministry was more of a babysitting service where kids went to kill time while their parents worshiped in the main sanctuary. Today, some of the most progressive church programs are found in a local children's ministry, especially among the larger congregations.

Traveling with us until he was eleven, my son Jonathan was a connoisseur of children's ministries. After a service he would inform me where that ministry's strengths and weaknesses were as well as their communication skills at reaching the kids. If you attend a church without a children's ministry, consider getting with the leadership and initiating a ministry for the children.

4. Speak blessing over your children.

Words are arrows that can cut or a balm that can heal. As it is written, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Prov. 18:21). Parents and grandparents should never speak down to their children in a condescending manner. A child should never hear, "You're dumb. You're stupid. You're never going to amount to anything." Throughout their life, children remember wounding words.

The patriarchs are examples of how to speak over your children. They knew when it was time to rebuke their sons when they did wrong (Gen. 34:30), but they also knew how to commend them when they did right. Speaking blessing is not an exemption from discipline but is an affirmation to the child for choosing the right path.

5. Pray for their spiritual growth and protection.

There is never a day that passes without me petitioning God to

bless my children and family in the morning and evening. I find myself praying the same prayer my father prayed over his four children: "Lord, protect them, keeping them from harm, danger, and any disabling accident." Do not assume that just because the Scriptures give promises of protection, these promises operate automatically without any effort of the believer to claim the promises personally.

In the same manner Christ did in Matthew 4:1-11, we must read, believe, and verbally speak (confess) the Scriptures for them to be activated and effective.

6. Lay hands upon them and bless them (Matt. 19:13).

Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18: 15-16, NKJV).

The Jewish tradition of having a righteous person bless a child was repeated by Christ throughout His ministry. In the Jewish faith, the Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset (about 6 p.m.). Every Friday night, the devout father will lay hands upon his children to bless them. This custom comes from Jacob's blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48). As a Christian, you can follow the role model of Jacob and bless your children each week during the Jewish Sabbath or the traditional Christian Sabbath.

7. Have men and women of God bless your children.

When I was a child, many great men and women of God ministered at my dad's churches. I was always in awe of their amazing testimonies and faith-building stories. I also sat under large tents and witnessed men of God praying for those in need and can recall the excitement charging the atmosphere. When these individuals would pray over us, I experienced a spiritual and emotional charge, which I still remember. There is heavenly reaction through prayer, and spiritual authority is released

through the power of the blessing.

When you are in the presence of great servants of God and those carrying God's presence in their life, ask them to pray over your children as Christ did the children He encountered.