



What is Godly Play®?

The result of a lifetime of research and practice by theologian, author and educator The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman, the *Godly Play*® method is a curriculum of spiritual practice exploring the mystery of God's presence in our lives. The *Godly Play* curriculum engages what is most exciting about religious education:

God inviting us into—and pursuing us in the midst of—Scripture and spiritual experience. *Godly Play* practice teaches us to hear what God is saying and then to make authentic and creative responses to God's call in our lives.

The *Godly Play* method teaches Christian language as a means to know God and to make meaning in our lives. Different from the traditional model in which a teacher tells us what we need to know, *Godly Play* practice is not just about learning lessons or being entertained. It is about locating each lesson in the whole system of Christian language and involving the Creative Process to discover personal relevance and meaning. It is about understanding how the stories of God's people connect with our own experience and relationship with God.

- ***Godly Play*** is a creative, imaginative approach to Christian formation and spiritual guidance.
- ***Godly Play*** has a foundation of 30+ years of research and practice.
- ***Godly Play*** allows participants to make meaning for themselves by inviting them into stories and providing space to connect Scripture with personal experience and open-ended response.
- ***Godly Play*** nurtures us to larger dimensions of belief and faith through wondering and play.
- ***Godly Play*** values process, openness, discovery, community and relationships.
- ***Godly Play*** models the worship life of Christian congregations through deeper understanding of stories, symbols and rites.

What does Godly Play® do educationally and theologically?

Providing structure for spiritual practice, the *Godly Play* method engages our innate spirituality and nourishes use of religious language to make meaning from Biblical stories through the Creative Process.¹ Originally designed as a curriculum for the spiritual guidance of children, the *Godly Play* method firstly aims for fluency in the Christian language before adolescence so that children entering this next stage of development have the ability to explore their existential limits and articulate their experiences in community.

Fluency does not mean “remembering the language as an end in itself.” Instead, a “conscious and functioning language system” develops because “religious language acts as a door into the pure coordination of actions among God, self, others and the creation.”^{2, 3} Because language names and orders thoughts, the based language to construct reality plays a significant role in the reality itself. Pre-language, conceptions of self, God, others and nature connect and communicate directly with one another.⁴ When language is added, “the primary relationships are now refracted through the prism of the language.”⁵ In practice, the language domain influences relationships, meaning, and use of one’s knowledge and experience.

The art of using language is acquired through modeling and immersion; words are only part of the process. Since both spoken and unspoken meaning foster full language acquisition, the environment and culture of *Godly Play* practice is critical—the method is much more than a clever way to tell Bible stories.⁶ The *Godly Play* curriculum guides participants through self- discovery, which is fundamental to the Montessori tradition from which *Godly Play* developed. While the *Godly Play* method is a spiritual practice, spiritual experiences during *Godly Play* sessions are actually the mechanism for “being in religious language.”⁷ These experiences serve as both a conditioner for our existing spiritual connection with God and as the instrument for grounding spirituality in the Christian language and community of religion.

Where is Godly Play[®] practiced?

Largely *Godly Play* is practiced in church with children. The spiral curriculum works through three sets of three-year intervals based on the progression of language acquisition: Hear It (ages 3 – 6), Speak It (ages 6 – 9), and Think It (ages 9 – 12).

Yet, because spirituality and Christian language acquisition are lifelong journeys, use of the *Godly Play* method has quickly grown to include adults, the elderly and children in a diverse variety of setting such as hospitals, residential care facilities, prisons, and by facilitators of social justice.

Godly Play was founded in the United States and is used widely throughout the fifty United States. *Godly Play* also has a global presence with established associations in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Norway, Spain, and United Kingdom, rapidly growing programs in India and South Africa, and emerging usage in Estonia, Ireland, Sweden, Latvia, Pakistan, Tanzania, and beyond.

How do we begin using Godly Play[®]?

Because *Godly Play* is more than just the *Godly Play* story lessons, using the *Godly Play* curriculum requires a holistic approach. Below are the basic steps for getting started. Please visit the [Godly Play Foundation](#)⁸ for more ideas on launching your program.

1. **Read [Teaching Godly Play](#)⁹ by Jerome W. Berryman** (Kindle¹⁰ immediate download)

The most comprehensive explanation of practicing the *Godly Play* method, *Teaching Godly Play* details the processes and culture of the *Godly Play* room and dips into the educational and theological foundations of *Godly Play* practice.

2. **Visit the [Godly Play Foundation's YouTube Channel](#)¹¹**

Start by viewing the channel welcome by *Godly Play* Founder, The Rev. Dr. Jerome Berryman. Then check out some of the *Godly Play* stories. These professional videos

presented by experienced *Godly Play* Trainers and storytellers will give you a sense of the lesson used in leading *Godly Play* sessions.

3. Attend a [Godly Play Training](#)¹²

Because the *Godly Play* method is centered on experience and relationship, face-to-face training with a circle of practitioners and a *Godly Play* Trainer can be very helpful to establishing a successful *Godly Play* program. We recommend that every adult *Godly Play* mentor attend a training before or shortly after beginning to work in the *Godly Play* room. Training provides attendees the practical pieces of setting up a *Godly Play* room and leading participants through a *Godly Play* session—as well as both the theology behind those processes and the time and space for personal retreat through *Godly Play* practice.

4. Order the *Complete Guide to Godly Play* from [Church Publishing](#)¹³

Godly Play lessons and instructions are now available in both print and digital formats. In digital format, lessons are purchased and downloaded individually. Both editions also contain classroom layouts and direction to create and sustain a vibrant *Godly Play* classroom.

5. Order *Godly Play* story materials from [Godly Play Resources](#)¹⁴

A carefully prepared *Godly Play* environment provides the safe, sacred space for a circle of participants to engage fully in *Godly Play* practice. Beautiful, well-made story materials arranged in a specific way on easily accessed shelves become part of the unspoken lesson modeling the Christian language system in exploring the mystery of God's presence in our lives.

Story materials are made in the United States by [Godly Play Resources](#), a division of the *Godly Play* Foundation. The Foundation also licenses manufacturers in Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Please visit the [Godly Play Foundation's Resources page](#)¹⁵ for links to these international sites.

Resources

- Godly Play Foundation – www.GodlyPlayFoundation.org
 - Godly Play Training – www.godlyplayfoundation.org/godly-play-training/
 - Godly Play Resources – www.GodlyPlayResources.com
 - Center for the Theology of Childhood –
www.godlyplayfoundation.org/center-for-the-theology-of-childhood/
- Official YouTube Channel – www.YouTube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn
- Official Facebook Page – www.Facebook.com/GodlyPlay

¹ Jerome Berryman. *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* (New York: Church Publishing, 2009), 136-137.

² Berryman. *Teaching Godly Play*, 119.

³ Berryman. *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 103.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁸ www.godlyplayfoundation.org

⁹ www.churchpublishing.org/products/teachinggodlyplay

¹⁰ www.amazon.com/Teaching-Godly-Play-Spiritual-Development-ebook/dp/B004L622LE/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1496341915&sr=8-1&keywords=teaching+godly+play+kindle

¹¹ www.youtube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn

¹² www.godlyplayfoundation.org/godly-play-training/

¹³ www.churchpublishing.org/complex/godlyplayprint/

¹⁴ www.godlyplayresources.com

¹⁵ www.godlyplayfoundation.org/godly-play-resources/godly-play-materials/

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