

How to Use Godly Play

What is Godly Play?

Godly Play is a creative, innovative and experiential way of helping children (and adults) engage with the stories in the Bible. It offers way to worship with children in an environment where God is not just learned about but is experienced too. The aims of Godly Play are:

- To make faith come alive for children
- To assist their spiritual development
- To help faith become part of daily life
- To make the language of faith familiar

Each Godly Play session uses parables, sacred stories, silence, and simple liturgical actions to help children become more fully aware of the mystery of God's presence in their lives. The story telling is accompanied by simple movement and illustration using two & three dimensional figures. In each session time is given to allow the children to express their thoughts, feelings, ideas, opinions and gifts in a safe environment. Children are encouraged to respond to the story through 'I wonder' style questions and art work. Godly Play is an act of worship which allows children to decide their own responses. Godly Play can be used with smaller and larger groups of children. In smaller churches with flexible furnishings Godly Play could easily be used in a service of worship. The experience of adults with Godly Play is overwhelmingly positive.

What happens in a session?

There are three elements in each Godly Play session:

- The bible story is told. This is done slowly and reflectively using a full script read word for word.
- While the story is told the leader uses a small number of materials and simple objects to illustrate the movement in the story. For example, the desert is illustrated by a gold coloured cloth, a river by a strip of blue cloth. The telling of the story will take no more than ten minutes

- Once the story has been told the leader introduces a 'wondering time'. This is an opportunity for the children to express their thoughts and reactions to the story. It is done very simply by the leader simply asking questions such as "I wonder how the people felt when they were slaves in Egypt? This part of the session can be as long or as short as the children want it to be as they wonder together.



Preparing a Godly Play session

Good preparation is essential. Firstly leaders will need to gather all the materials and objects that are needed to accompany the story telling. Each Godly Play session in *Preach Exodus!* provides a full list of all the materials that are needed. Secondly leaders will need to familiarise themselves with the Godly Play script. There is no need to memorise the passage; it can be read from the paper while leading the group but it is important that the leader is familiar with the flow of the story. The full script for each session is provided by the *Preach Exodus!*

Godly Play and *Preach Exodus!*

A Godly Play session can comfortably last up to half an hour and for Sunday Schools and other children's groups it may well provide all that is necessary for the time available. Should the sessions prove shorter or more time be available children's ministry leaders should explore the [Action Scenes](#) that are also provided within *Preach Exodus!*. These Action Scenes are pictures that retell the Bible passage and can be used to supplement the wondering session in Godly Play. Younger children might

Preach Exodus!



simply colour in the scenes while older children might use the guidance notes to explore the Action Scenes in greater depth. Each Action Scene comes with suggestions for how to use the picture in a group setting.

Table top tableau

In many churches Godly Play will be used in separate children's groups while adults explore the Exodus story or indeed read another Bible passage altogether. A Table Top tableau builds a simple tableau from the materials already used in the Godly Play script. It really does go on a table top and each week another element is added as the story is told. At the end of each Godly Play script instructions are given for setting up the tableau and a case study from [Holy Trinity Wavertree](#) illustrates how this can be done to good effect. The tableau is an excellent way of reminding the children of the Exodus story so far and will be important for children who have not been there every week. It is also very valuable as a way of showing the adults what the children have been doing. Work with the church leadership to see how the tableau can be shown to the wider congregation to maximum effect.

Resources

Godly Play was developed and classroom tested for more than twenty years by Episcopal priest and teacher Jerome Berryman. It is currently being used in churches of many denominations throughout the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. There is a website at www.godlyplay.org.uk. He has published many books including *Godly Play; Young Children & Worship* (with Sonja M. Stewart) and *Teaching Godly Play*. Materials can be home-made or ordered from:

*St Michael's Cottage Crafts,
Bowthorpe Community Trust,
Bowthorpe Hall Road,
Bowthorpe,
Norwich NR5 9AA
Tel: 01603 746 106*

More information is available from:

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