



The Complete Guide to Godly Play

Volume 2, Revised and Expanded

Jerome W. Berryman

An imaginative method for nurturing the spiritual lives of children

Beginning the Godly Play Year Orientation Session



Introduction

This Godly Play presentation is part of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, a collection of over one hundred Godly Play stories and Godly Play support materials available from Church Publishing Incorporated. It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

Developed by Jerome Berryman, God Play® is an interpretation of Montessori religious education. It is an imaginative approach for working with children, an approach that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than to what we generally think of as children's education. It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their moral and spiritual development.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission, and understanding to express and enjoy that in our culture. In Godly Play, we enter into parables, silence, sacred stories, and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to first download and digest *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at: www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons* will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one, or establish a Godly Play program in your church.

There are additional Godly Play resources available from Church Publishing Incorporated at the site from which this lesson was downloaded. You will find these at: www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. All of the stories can also be found within the printed eight volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play* found at: www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplayprint. You will also find a number of books by Jerome Berryman about the spirituality of children as well as the Godly Play method at www.churchpublishing.org.

In addition, you can learn more about Godly Play at the website of the Godly Play Foundation, found here: www.godlyplayfoundation.org. The Godly Play Foundation also offers Godly Play training for those interested in

Play

becoming Godly Play mentors and/or starting Godly Play programs in local congregations.

Beautifully crafted materials for telling Godly Play stories are available from Godly Play Resources. Visit them at www.godlyplayresources.com.

Enjoy the wonder of Godly Play, and blessings on you and the ones you lead in this transformative experience!

Wonder

Orientation Session

Beginning the Godly Play Year

We suggest that you have a formal gathering of children and parents to begin the program year. What follows is a sample gathering for churches, but it can be adapted for schools and other settings for Godly Play.

The Orientation

Set up a table by the doorway to your community space for welcoming those who attend. They can be directed to the tables where each Godly Play room is represented. The two lead mentors for each room are at each table and on the tables are a few Godly Play materials with the many books that have been published about Godly Play.

At the welcome table by the doorway, there are several kinds of information. They can be explained and handed out. These will be described below:

1. Annual Schedule for Children
2. Parent Education Schedule
3. The “Ten Best Ways for Parents”
4. Guide to your church or school’s complete program for children and families

After the children and parents have met the lead mentors for each Godly Play room, they can move to the table with simple food and drink to visit together and mingle until it appears most people have arrived. The leader of the orientation session, who was met at the welcoming table, then announces that it is time to go visit the Godly Play rooms. The Godly Play mentors guide their group to each room and ask them to wait outside for a moment. The mentors take their places in the room and welcome the children and parents in. This is a modified way of welcoming that the children will experience each Sunday.

The purpose of this orientation to the room is to provide a general introduction and then answer questions. Experienced children will want to show their parents some of their favorite Parables, Sacred Stories, and Liturgical Action materials and such things as where the art materials and cleaning materials are kept.

This should take only about fifteen minutes. When the time is completed, the mentors say good-bye to everyone and the orientation is completed.

The Handouts

Annual Schedule for Children

This shows clearly what lessons will be presented on each day of the school year. This allows families to plan ahead and shows such things as what happens during the summer and how Christmas and Easter are organized.

Parent Education Schedule

Parents naturally want to know what goes on during a Godly Play session. The best way to “explain” this is to show them. During the year, schedule times for parents to experience Godly Play on their own and following the session to ask questions. This means that when you have these sessions for parents, you also need to provide activities for the children so that the parents can focus on their own experience of Godly Play.

Parents need to be reminded that this experience is for them as adults, so there is no need to role-play how they think children might act. They also need to be assured that they don’t need to sit on the floor unless they want to. They also need to hold their questions until the end when ample times will be provided to visit about what they have experienced.

You may also choose to offer Godly Play regularly for adults, even if they don’t have children experiencing Godly Play. *Graceful Nurture: Using Godly Play with Adults* (Church Publishing, 2017) by Rebecca L. McClain lays out four creative “courses” for adults: The Heavenly Banquet—for preparing adults for Baptism, Confirmation, and Reaffirmation of Vows (12 weeks); Dessert Only—for preparing families who are beginning Godly Play; Slow Cooking—a Godly Play retreat weekend; and Coffee and Cream—using Godly Play on Sunday mornings (12 weeks). *Graceful Nurture* includes why and how to use Godly Play with adults and in-depth suggestions for adapting twelve Godly Play lessons for an adult audience.

“The Ten Best Ways for Parents”

The presentation for children about the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai is called “The Ten Best Ways.” There are also ten ways that parents can effectively support their children in the Godly Play program.

1. Follow the schedule as faithfully as you can.
2. Please help your children arrive in plenty of time so they can be relaxed.
3. It is best to say good-bye to your children at the doorway. This helps the doorknocker help the child enter the room appropriately.
4. It is also best not to hover at the doorway. Once your child enters the room, he or she will be safe. The mentors may be volunteers, but they are well trained.

5. When you pick up your children, they may not be able to put into words what the lesson for the day was. They are not asked to memorize a summary or a Bible verse. They are invited to wonder together what the lesson means and how it is important for their lives. Summaries and Bible verses are important, but that is not the emphasis. The emphasis is on learning how this language helps them make meaning for their lives.
6. When you pick up your children, you will want to know what they have learned, but they will not always be able to tell you. They also may not have an art project or a work sheet to show you. We don't use either. The art is expressive art, and they may want to keep this private. Much of the significant communication in the room is nonverbal, and the history of the Christian tradition is full of teachings about how the mystery of God's presence is difficult to express.
7. Please don't come into the room during the session so that the room can remain for the children. The mentors have been trained how to help maintain this child-centered focus by such things as talking softly and keeping down below the invisible ceiling that is about the height of the average child in the room. You are always welcome to come into the room after the class.
8. You are welcome to come to the parents' sessions, where you can experience directly what your children do. That is a great time for good discussions about what is going on.
9. Would you like to help? We welcome volunteers to help with the "feast," to help repair the materials, and to refresh the room. There are things to do that can help make the program more effective in your setting.
10. Don't forget about the schedule for parent classes and the many books and articles about Godly Play. This is a very well-researched program with a strong foundation. It began in about 1960 with Jerome Berryman's questions about how to make Christian education more appropriate for children. Ask about how Godly Play was founded and what these resources are.

Guide To Your Church's Complete Program for Children and Families

Godly Play is an essential part of a complete program for children and families. The following are also needed: pageants (such as at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost), children's choirs, service projects, helping with worship, and other things. Offering an orientation at the beginning of the year is a good time to make the complete program known and to explain what its goal is. You will also want to begin to gather volunteers to make this larger program work.