



**Godly Play® Foundation**

## **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 listen for God and to make authentic and creative responses to God's call in our lives.

**Godly Play** is a creative, imaginative approach to Christian formation and spiritual guidance.

**Godly Play** has a foundation of 40+ years of research and practice.

**Godly Play** values process, openness, discovery, community and relationships.

**Godly Play** models the worship life, stories, symbols and rituals of Christian congregations.

**Godly Play** allows practitioners to make relevant and personal theological meaning.

**Godly Play** nurtures participants to larger dimensions of belief and faith through wondering and play.

## **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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2,3</sup> Because language names and orders thoughts, the base language used 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.<sup>4</sup> When language is added, "the primary relationships are now refracted through

the prism of the language.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.

Founded in the United States, Godly Play is widespread throughout all 50 states. Godly Play also has a global presence with established associations in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom, rapidly growing programs in India and South Africa, and emerging practice in Estonia, Ireland, Sweden, Latvia, Pakistan, Tanzania and beyond.

## **RESOURCES**

- Godly Play Foundation – [www.GodlyPlayFoundation.org](http://www.GodlyPlayFoundation.org)
- Official YouTube Channel – [www.YouTube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn](http://www.YouTube.com/user/GodlyPlayFndn)
- Official Facebook Page – [www.Facebook.com/GodlyPlay](http://www.Facebook.com/GodlyPlay)

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<sup>1</sup> Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, 136 – 137.

<sup>2</sup> Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, 146.

<sup>5</sup> Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, 79-109.

<sup>7</sup> Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, 103.