



Going for growth resource sheets

Godly Play trainer, Peter Privett, introduces the method and ethos of Godly Play.

Godly Play – an introduction

Godly Play is a method of Christian education and spiritual direction, which uses religious language and symbol to help people become more aware of the mystery of God's presence in their lives.

- Stories and material are offered in an open way
- People are encouraged to enter into the stories, language and symbols
- Space is created to relate these to life and experience

The heart of Godly Play

Godly Play uses liturgical action and ritual to make meaning by:

- Creating sacred space
- Building and working in community
- Learning religious language

What happens in a Godly Play session?

In a Godly Play session people are invited into a space to experience a sacred story, a parable or liturgical action. As well as words, objects and symbols are used to give a visual focus and tap into other ways of knowing.

Open questions follow, giving people an opportunity to explore and deepen the meanings of the story... to "play" with the possibilities.

This is followed by individual free work which might include using the physical objects/symbols, using silence, using writing materials or some basic art materials.

There is a free choice of activity designed to encourage further playing in the presence of God. A time of feasting and sharing closes the session, and at no time is anyone compelled to say anything.

Who is Godly Play for?

Godly Play was originally conceived by an American Episcopal priest, Jerome Berryman for church Sunday School children. Undoubtedly it is successful with children up to the age of around 13, but it also seems to be very effective with adults, especially those seeking to explore their faith through Biblical story through reflection. Godly Play can also be used with teenagers, but perhaps more selectively, as some of the stories are more child-orientated than others. However, Godly Play allows people to enter the story at their own level, and this should not be underestimated when working with children and younger teenagers.

Godly Play has its roots in the Montessori method to help people learn how to listen carefully so that they can make existential meaning about their lives with this powerful language. This influence is principally found in the way that the room is organised and the way the community of children/people is supported.

The teaching is indirect, uses teaching objects and invites children to "play" their way seriously into the lessons/sessions. It is also spiral - a child might meet something when quite young and then again when they are older and in a different "cognitive period". (This is why, for example, the parables are introduced by allowing for the possibility that the listener may not understand the parable the first or even second time they hear it).

The four main elements of Godly Play (GP)

1. Creating sacred space

GP has a focus, a Christian symbol or a bright clean cloth. The story telling area is seen as separate from other activities and is quiet and still and the participants enter the space with respect and reverence.

2. Building and working in community

This is about the way in which relationships operate or how people are supported and of how silence is respected. This is a place in which people are offered choices, where they are affirmed and where they take responsibility for their own responses and work. There are no wrong answers. There may be a final plenary session where participants may share how their thinking has developed through the activities they have done subsequent to the story part of the session.

The session may end in a feast - squash, biscuits etc. These days, space and opportunities for children and adults to reflect, talk, and just "be" are becoming scarcer. Some participants may like to take themselves off to somewhere quiet and simply think about things.

3. Learning religious language

GP offers the powerful language of stories and returns to the person-centred style of story telling. The way beautiful objects and artefacts are used to tell stories and the way in which the storyteller focuses on the visual material is essential and often remarked upon. GP seems to suggest that there are alternatives to the usual hyped up methods of working with children and young people, and it is this stillness which probably makes it effective for adults too.

4. Using religious language to make meaning

The wondering questions which are a vital part of the Godly Play experience. The style of wondering is open, non-judgemental and allows for the participants to make meaning of the story for themselves. Silence is also part of their response to the questions. How does the free choice of activity enable the participants to enter more deeply into the story?

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