



How to ...

Do Godly Play

What do children know?

For many of us in churches we are often met by the idea that children just need to be told what Jesus meant, what God is telling us in the stories of the Old and New Testaments and what it all means.

The Godly Play approach to the stories of the Bible and differing church traditions turns this upside down. The Godly Play process, whether used with children or adults, invites everybody into the stories to wonder “what do I like about this story - what do I think is most important about it? – is there anything in the story that is in my life or that I am in”...and more.

How does this happen?

Questions like these are asked as part of every session – they are questions without right answers; they invite exploration, wondering and query.

The sessions themselves use the simplest of equipment to tell the stories alongside the carefully written words. There is then a combination of movement and words as the story unfolds. This often creates an atmosphere of stillness and attention.

The focus is on the story and not on the storyteller. One of the varied origins of Godly Play lies in the Montessori educational approach where the child is at the centre of learning and equipment used in the learning is simple, uncomplicated.

In Godly Play there are plain wooden figures, painted panels and shapes, fabric, sand and felt. As well as welcome, story and wondering, every session includes creative reflection time, a shared feast and a blessing or prayer. The creative element is a personal time for the child or adult.

The pattern of the stories fits the Liturgical calendar. There are three core types of story drawing from the old and new testaments and the liturgical, faith life, of the church. Some church communities have also worked on developing stories that reflect their particular traditions.

People who see Godly Play for the first time will often say how they are amazed by the ability of children to be attentive to big stories. In a way we shouldn't be surprised – a process like this can draw out, encourage the natural religious and spiritual abilities of the child – or people of any age.

A Godly Play session can look beautiful as well as messy, at times. Of course, when this is used in a children's work setting you can never quite know what is going to happen – there are always surprises and, sometimes, frustrations and disappointments. To be sure, there will always be learning.

You can find out more about Godly Play and book to attend one of their regular training events online at www.godlyplay.uk

Written by Chris Nickolay.

Chris is a Godly Play trainer based in Hertfordshire. I first encountered Godly Play when I worked as the Children's Work Officer for Quakers in Britain. I am particularly interested in using Godly Play with adults in churches and other settings to aid and complement their religious and spiritual seeking.