

Parent Pages **volume 2** Revised and Expanded

the complete guide to  
**Godly Play**

**Jerome W. Berryman**



An imaginative method for nurturing the spiritual lives of children

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# Welcome

**Welcome to the Parent Pages** for *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 2, Revised and Expanded*. As a Godly Play mentor, you now have the opportunity to extend the Godly Play experience into the homes of the children who gather for your Godly Play presentations.

The *Godly Play Parent Pages* have been designed to accomplish two things:

- First, using the *Parent Pages*, parents help children recall—and in a sense *relive*—the Godly Play presentation at home. With this

in mind, each Parent Page begins with suggestions for encouraging this sharing, then offers a condensed retelling of the Godly Play lesson.

- Second, each *Parent Page* gives parents information to help them understand Godly Play's methodology and purpose.

The chart below indicates the correlation between the presentations in *Godly Play, Volume 2, Revised and Expanded* and the *Parent Pages* in this booklet.

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# Beginning the Godly Play Year

## Welcome to Godly Play!

Godly Play offers a creative, child-honoring way of entering into and experiencing the biblical story. In Godly Play, we play with the language of God and God's People: our sacred stories, parables, liturgical actions, and silence. Through this powerful language, through our wondering, through the community of players gathered together, we hear the deepest invitation of all: an invitation to come play with God.

## What Happens in a Godly Play Session?

### At the Threshold

A doorman waits by the door to the Godly Play room, warmly welcoming children as they arrive. He says (of course, "he" could also be a "she"), "I'm so glad you're here. Are you ready for Godly Play?"

### Building the Circle

Children make their way into the room and sit in a circle with the storyteller. She talks (of course, "she" could also be a "he") quietly and easily with the children, building a community where each and every participant is warmly welcomed.

The storyteller says, "We need to get ready for the story." She shows how by sitting quietly, legs crossed, hands at the ankles. Conversation yields to silence. She smiles and says, "Watch where I go to get this story."

### Presenting the Lesson

The storyteller goes to get the materials for the day's presentation—a box, a basket, or a tray. She brings these materials to the circle. Slowly, deliberately, she brings out the story figures and objects, gently moving and arranging them as she tells the story. The children's eyes

focus where her eyes and hands focus, on the small wooden figures, painted plaques, or beautifully finished props moving in the circle.

The lesson continues, moves forward...and concludes.

The storyteller sits back, but keeps her eyes on the figures. "I wonder," she says. "I wonder what part of this story you like best?" There is silence for a moment, and then a child answers...and then perhaps another. The storyteller affirms each answer.

"I wonder what part is the most important?" Children name different parts. Every serious struggle to answer is affirmed.

"I wonder where you are in the story or what part of the story is about you?"

"I wonder if there is any part of this story we could leave out and still have all the story we need?"

The storyteller listens respectfully to every answer, repeating it, never calling one response good or another wrong. It is the child's effort to speak theologically in a seriously playful way that is being supported.

### Response

The wondering sinks into silence. The children watch as the storyteller puts away the lesson. She invites them to think about what work they would like to do in response to the lesson. The children have been involved in the story and the wondering. Now that absorbed involvement continues as they, one by one, name what response they choose to make.

Some play mindfully with the materials from the presentation or from other presentations. Other want to paint. Still others work with

crayons. For at least a quarter of an hour, they work at their responses.

### The Feast

The storyteller turns the room lights off: a silent signal. She waits a moment, until all eyes are on her, then invites the children to put away their work and gather for the feast.

One child-server passes out the napkins to each child. Another puts down a healthy snack, and a third a cup of juice. After all have been served, a prayer is said, and the feast shared.

### Saying Goodbye

When the feast is finished, the storyteller draws the attention of the group: "It's time to say goodbye." One by one, children go to the storyteller and she holds out her hands. Some children take her hands, others lean forward and hug her. With each person she looks into their eyes, smiles, and says a quiet goodbye. "It was a pleasure to have you here today. Thank you for being with us."

## 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-by to your children at the doorway. This helps the door person help the child enter the room appropriately.
4. It is also best not to hover at the doorway. Once your child enters the room they 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 what the emphasis is. The emphasis is on learning how this language helps them make meaning for their life and death.
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 worksheet 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 warnings about how the mystery of God's presence is difficult to express.

7. Please don't come into the room during the session, so the room can remain for the children. The mentors have been trained how to help this child-centered focus by 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 when 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 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. Godly Play is not the "latest and greatest" thing in religious education. It began 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.

# The Circle of the Church Year

**Each year,** Christians move through a circle of memory and expectation to open themselves to the elusive presence of God. In the Godly Play room, we pay attention to this circle of movement, using a cloth wall hanging that has colored cloth “blocks” for the Sundays of the year and a golden arrow that moves from Sunday to Sunday.

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today’s Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today’s story?

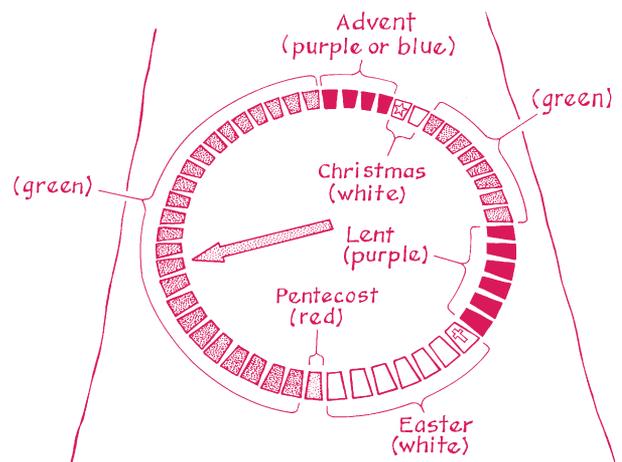
Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way. You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today’s presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today’s lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying “Amen.”

## The Presentation

There are three great times in the Church year: Christmas...Easter...and Pentecost. (Point to each of these days in the illustration as you mention them.) Each of these is a great mystery, but people can walk right through these mysteries each year, and not even know they’re there.



# Wondering

- **I wonder** which one of these colors you like best?
- **I wonder** which color is the most important?
- **I wonder** why the Church tells time with colors?

We need time to get ready to come close to these mysteries. There are three times for getting ready. The time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Christmas is called “Advent.” It is four weeks long.

The time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Easter is called “Lent.” It is six weeks long, even greater than the time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Christmas.

Easter is so great that it keeps on going. You can’t keep it in one Sunday. It overflows and goes on for six more Sundays.

The time for Easter is also a time for getting ready to come close to the mystery of Pentecost. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down. The Church was born. The Apostles glowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. They were more alive than they had ever been before. That’s why the color of Pentecost is red like fire.

Look at all of the great green Sundays of the year. Some come between Christmas and the beginning of Lent. The rest come after Pentecost and before Advent.

It is all here. Everything we need. For every beginning there is an ending, and for every ending there is a beginning. It goes on and on, forever and ever.

## Godly Play An Invitation to Godly Play

**In every Parent Page**, we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. Today we explore the importance of *play*, since Godly Play really is play. And play, by definition, cannot be coerced. An essential quality of play is its freedom: its lack of compulsion. Do you *want* to play? Do you want to join in *Godly Play*?

Godly Play has to be an *invitation* to play. For you to enter into Godly Play, you must find it enjoyable. You must want to play it

for its own sake. You must be willing to let go of the mundane details of daily life to enter deeply into the timelessness of play.

In Godly Play, the invitation is given not for play in general but for play with the language of God and God’s People: our sacred stories, parables, liturgical actions and silence. Through this powerful language, through the wondering, through the community of players gathered together, children hear the deepest invitation of all: an invitation to come play with God.

# The Holy Bible

**When you walk** into a Godly Play room, you are walking into **the Bible**. The stories on the shelves surround children with the contents of the Bible, where the Church's story comes from. The Bible (or "books" in the Greek) is a collection of books. When the printing press was invented the collection of books became a single book. The material for this lesson is a large, presentation-type Bible that sits on a book stand. Throughout the year, whenever the Godly Play mentors tell a story they will open this Bible to the lesson for the day.

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense—relives the experience of today's Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

Just listen. This is not a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child

tells you, but simply to listen. Listen in a supportive way. You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

If your family owns a Bible (or more than one) you might get them out and look at them together.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today's lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

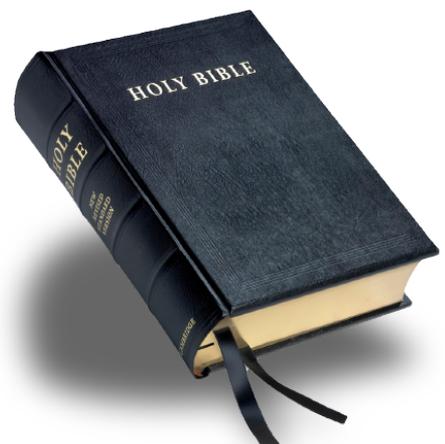
## The Presentation

This is the Holy Bible. It wasn't always a book. A long time ago it was stories around campfires in the desert and later in people's homes.

Then the stories were written down on pieces of soft leather, then on paper.

Finally the printing press was invented and the Bible became a book.

Today, you can even have the Bible on your computer or phone.



We can open the front door or the back door, but in the Godly Play room we like to open both doors and let all the stories out!

They are all over the Godly Play room. We still tell them in a circle, like around a campfire.

Sometimes parts of the Bible are in a video or movie, but here we still like to tell them the old, old way.

Now, I wonder what part of this story you like best?

I wonder what part is the most important?

## Godly Play **Crossing the Threshold**

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. Today we will discuss the threshold and the role of the doorperson (one of two Godly Play mentors in the Godly Play room).

The entrance into our Godly Play room is a threshold that sets apart but also provides the way into a different space. The threshold sets apart the language that will be taught in the room. It is very different from the language of everyday. Here we will use the language of sacred story, parables, liturgical action, and silence to make meaning.

When children approach the doorway to the Godly Play room they need to begin to get ready. This is like preparing to enter a church. A welcoming adult sits on a small chair at the eye level of the child at the Godly Play doorway. This “door person” helps the children step across the threshold in a way that prepares them to be mindful of where they are going.

We ask parents to be prepared to say good-bye at the threshold because we want the Godly Play room to be a special place for the community of children. Even the adult mentors keep their profiles low during a Godly Play session!

# The Books of the Bible

**Today's lesson** presented children with an overview of the entire Bible, focusing on both the individual books of the Bible and the kinds of writing included in the Bible. The material used in the presentation includes a small wooden bookshelf with wooden "books" to represent each book of the Bible. If you choose to retell the version of the lesson printed below, you will need a Bible.

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

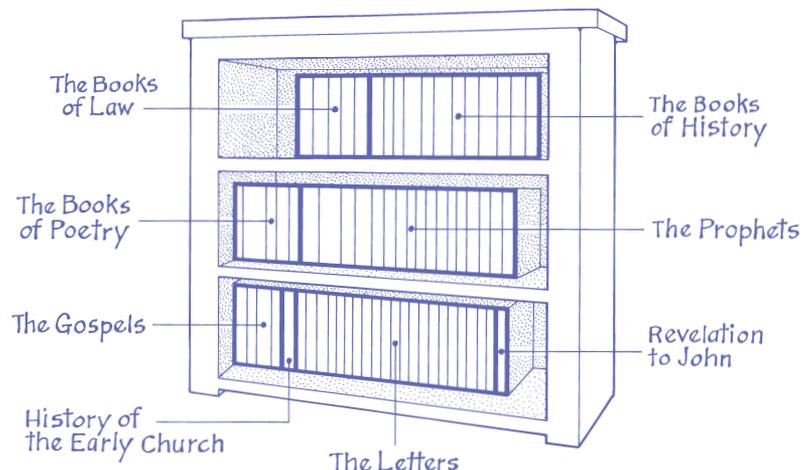
Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way. You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today's lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

## The Presentation

This is the Holy Bible. It wasn't always a book. A long time ago it was stories people told to each other. Then the stories were written down on pieces of soft leather, then on a kind of paper made from reeds called papyrus. Finally the printing press was invented and the Bible became a book.



# Wondering

- **I wonder** which one of the books you like best?
- **I wonder** which one is the most important one?
- **I wonder** which one is especially for you?

Here is the “front door” (*open the front cover*) and here is the “back door” (*open the back cover*). You can go inside either way. If you go in the front door, there is a list of everything inside. (*Find the Table of Contents.*) Look at all the books in the Bible. The Bible is like a whole library! Let’s count them.

There are different kinds of books, too. Some are books of law and story: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.*

Some are books that *only* tell stories: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.*

Some are books of poetry: *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs.*

Some are the writings of the prophets, or stories about the prophets: *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.*

Those are all the books in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we have the four gospels. They come first and tell the story of Jesus four times. They are named after the storytellers *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.*

There is one book that tells us the history of the Early Church: *Acts.*

There are also letters: *Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude.*

And finally, at the end of the Bible, there is a book called the *Revelation to John.*

See, here they are. All Godly Play stories come from the Bible.

## Godly Play The Importance of Stories

**Children love to hear** and tell stories. Stories are where all of us, children and adults together, find our identity, our family. In stories we challenge the messages of the powers-that-be—greed, poverty, powerlessness—that rob us of relationships and meaning.

Through story we also invite one another to give meaning to our world and ultimately to our lives. In research done in Houston, one common factor found in at-risk youth was that they had no stories. Sharing stories and

fully entering into them is how we mature. Telling and actively listening to stories is more important than it seems.

To carry stories within us is to become wisdom-bearers, God-bearers, like Mary herself. The elders of a community tell their stories, and children find meaning in those stories and relationships with those elders. Perhaps the best way to sum up many of the possibilities and limitations of narratives and language itself is to tell a story about your family right now.

# The Holy Family

**The Holy Family** holds significance for the entire cycle of Godly Play lessons—and the Church year. The Holy Family is the *matrix*—the Latin word for womb—out of which new life comes. Christ’s incarnation changes everything. Most especially, it changes the way we understand ourselves, each other, the Creator and the created world around us.

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustrations below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today’s Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawings. You might say, for example:

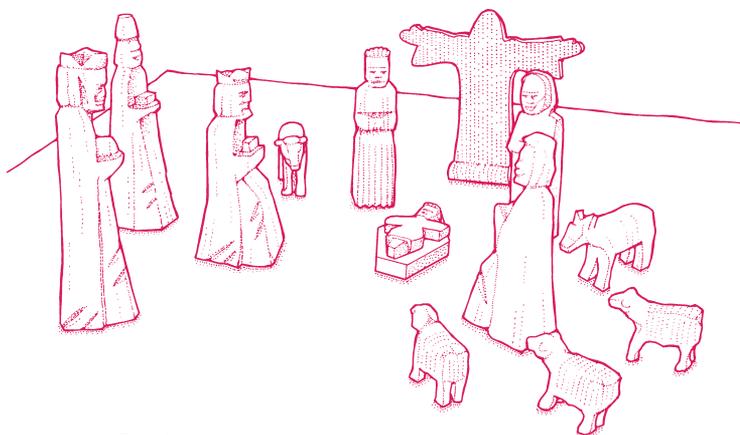
- I wonder what you can tell me about these pictures?
- I wonder what these pictures have to do with today’s story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

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Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today’s presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today’s lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying “Amen.”

## The Presentation



This is the Holy Family.

This is the Christ Child. He is holding out his arms to give you a hug. (*Point to each figure as you talk about it.*)

Here is the Mother Mary. Here is the father, Joseph. Here is the donkey that Mary rode when she and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be counted by the Roman soldiers. Mary was about to have a baby, so it was hard for her to walk.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of the Holy Family you like best?
- **I wonder** what part of the Holy Family is the most important part?
- **I wonder** if there is any of the Holy Family we can leave out and still have all we need?

Sometimes she rode on the donkey. It is also hard to ride on a donkey when you are about to have a baby. Sometimes she got down and walked.

Here is the cow that was in the stable when the baby was born. She was surprised to find a baby in the feed box, the manger, where she usually found her breakfast.

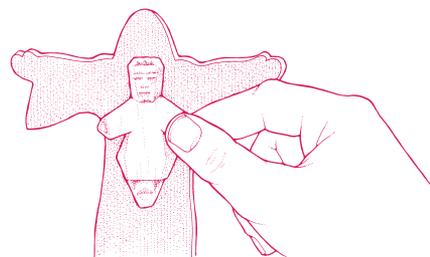
Here is a shepherd who saw the great light in the sky at night. Here are some of the sheep.

When the shepherds saw the light in the darkness, they were afraid. Then they heard singing. The angels sang that they came to bring peace on earth and good will to all people. The shepherds were to go to Bethlehem, and they did.

Here are the three magi, the wise ones. One day they saw the wild star. They knew where all the stars were supposed to be in the sky, but this star moved. They were curious and followed it. It led them to the stable where the Christ Child was.

The wise ones brought with them gifts for the Christ Child: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Here is the little baby reaching out to give you a hug. He grew up to be a man...and died on the cross. That is very sad, but it is also wonderful, in an Easter kind of way.



Now he can reach out and give the whole world a hug. He is not just back then, in this place or that place. He is everywhere, and in every time.

## Godly Play **Why Godly Play?** (Part I)

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. In this and the next few Parent Pages, we list several of the many reasons why we believe in and use Godly Play in our church:

■ Godly Play reminds us of the sacredness of the everyday things of the world, such as bread, wine, candles, oil, wood, linens, and clay. Godly Play teaches a sacramental worldview in a society that is so often utilitarian and materialistic.

■ Godly Play teaches children and adults that being quiet and deliberate about their work can be as satisfying as being noisy, busy and pushy, and delivers this counter-cultural message in a comforting and consistent way.

■ Godly Play allows children to work with materials that engage all the senses in a safe, stimulating environment. In this way, Godly Play combines and integrates the two primary gateways to knowing for young children—language (the verbal system) and play (the nonverbal system).

# The Days of Creation

## Genesis 1:1–2:3

**In the story of creation,** we begin to trace God’s elusive presence with God’s People. In the Godly Play presentation for Creation, children see the seven days of creation illustrated on a series of seven cards, laid out one by one. The cards are illustrated in the presentation below.

### How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustrations below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today’s Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawings. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about these pictures?
- I wonder what these pictures have to do with today’s story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive

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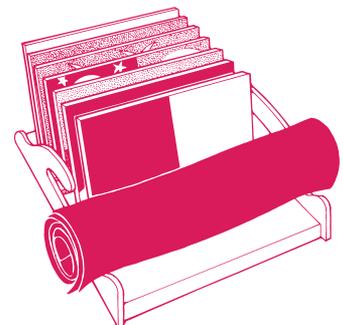
Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today’s presentation offered below. (If you retell the presentation, you might like to use the home version of the Godly Play materials for Creation, available from Godly Play Resources, called the “Mini-Creation”; call 1-800-445-4390 or visit [www.godlyplayresources.com](http://www.godlyplayresources.com)).

Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today’s lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying “Amen.”

## The Presentation

In the beginning there was...*nothing*. Then, on the very first day, God gave us the gift of light. So now there is not just darkness, but there is light and dark. When God saw the light, God said, “It is good.” And that was the end of the first day.

On the second day, God gave us the gift of water. God gave us the gift of all the water that is water. This is the water that all the rest of the water comes from. God put the firmament between the waters above and the waters below, to separate them. When God saw the water, God said, “It is good.” And that was the end of the second day.



# Wondering

- **I wonder** which one of these days you like best?
- **I wonder** which day is the most important?
- **I wonder** if we can leave out any one of these days and still have all we need?

On the third day, God gave us the gift of the dry land. God divided the water and the dry land, and gave us the gift of green and growing things. When God saw the dry land and the green and growing things, God said, “It is good.” And that was the end of the third day.

On the fourth day God gave us the gift of the day and the night. God gave us a great light that rules the day—the sun—and the lights that rule the night—the moon and the stars. When God saw the day and the night, our way to keep time, God said, “It is good.” And that was the end of the fourth day.

On the fifth day God gave us the gift of all the creatures that fly in the air and all of the creatures that swim in the water. When God saw all of the creatures that fly and swim, God said, “It is good.” And that was the end of the fifth day.

On the sixth day God gave us the gift of all the creatures that walk upon the earth: the creatures that walk with two legs, like you and like me, and all the creatures that walk with many legs. When God saw the creatures, God said, “It is very good,” and that was the end of the sixth day.

On the seventh day God rested and gave us the gift of a day to rest—and to remember the great gifts of all the other days.



## Godly Play **Why Godly Play?** (Part 2)

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. In a previous Parent Page we listed several of the many reasons why we believe in and use Godly Play in our church. Here are a few more:

- Godly Play is a *discovery* method of teaching which engages the *whole* child—hands, heart, mind, senses and intuition.
- Godly Play uses art activities, but differently than most curricula. Each child

creates an expressive response to what is individually thought and felt after receiving the presentation. The children have the opportunity to enter the story, wonder about it and *then* create meaning for their own lives.

- Godly Play teachers focus their attention on entering deeply into that week’s story and responding with complete presence to the community of children who gather there.

# The Flood and the Ark

## Genesis 6:5–9:17

**With the People of God**, we move from the story of creation to the re-creation of the world. God promises to Noah, to God's family, and to us that God will never again destroy the world with a flood. In the Godly Play presentation for the flood, children watch as the rains fall and the waters rise, while God keeps Noah and his family safe in the ark.

### How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustrations on the back page and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawings. You might say, for example:

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## The Presentation

When God created everything, God said, "It is very good."

But people began to do bad things.

God decided to send a great flood of water to wash everything clean and make it new again.

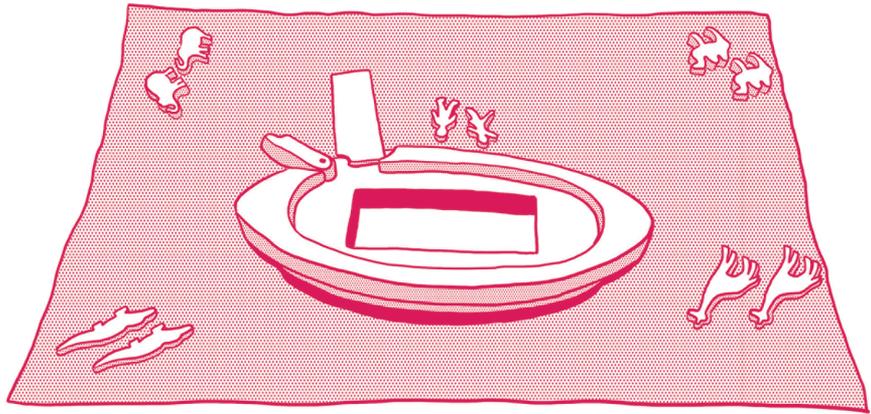
Then God saw a good family. The father was Noah. Noah came so close to God, and God came so close to Noah, that Noah knew what God wanted him to do. God wanted Noah to build a big boat called an ark.

As Noah and his family built the ark, animals came from all four corners of the earth. They came two by two to fill the ark.

Then it began to rain. Water came down from the heavens and up from the earth. It rained and rained...and soon the water covered everything.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of this story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part is the most important?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?

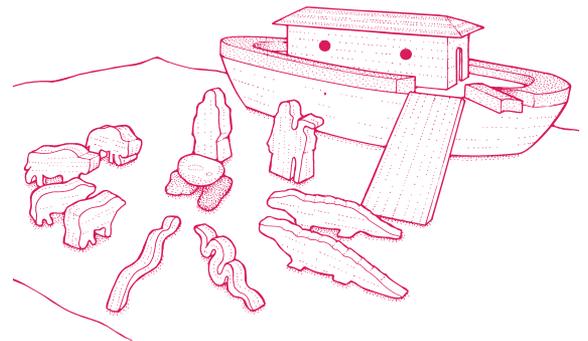


But God did not forget the creatures on the ark. After forty days and forty nights the rain stopped. God sent a great wind to dry up the water.

Finally the ark came to rest upon the earth. The creatures began to come out of the ark. Noah and his family were so happy to be home again that they made an altar and gave thanks to God.

Suddenly, they saw a great bow in the sky, a bow of many colors. You can still see it today when there is rain and the sun is shining. We call it a rainbow. This rainbow was God's sign to say that God will never send such a flood again.

The creatures then went out into all the four corners of the earth and filled it up again with life.



## Godly Play Why Godly Play? (Part 3)

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. In the previous two Parent Pages we listed several of the many reasons why we believe in and use Godly Play in our church. Here are a few more:

- Godly Play teaches reliance upon a gracious God who is real and accessible in all the mystery of life, both sad and joyful—rather than dependence upon the transient “magic” that comes from the latest movie, toy or video game.
- Godly Play teaches children to respect the things and people they work with, and to enjoy each with care and patience.
- Godly Play teaches the classic rhythm for living modeled in the Bible: the alternation of action and reflection, engagement and prayer.
- Godly Play teaches kindness and mutuality through its rituals and by the way it organizes physical space, objects and the community of children. A Godly Play community embodies the biblical ethic of how people are to live together.

# The Great Family

## Genesis 12–15, 24

**We continue to seek** the elusive presence of God. God was present at creation, blessing all that was made. Noah walked with God and was led by God's presence to build the ark that preserved life. Now Abraham and Sarah discover that God is present everywhere, putting their lives on the line to test the promises of God.

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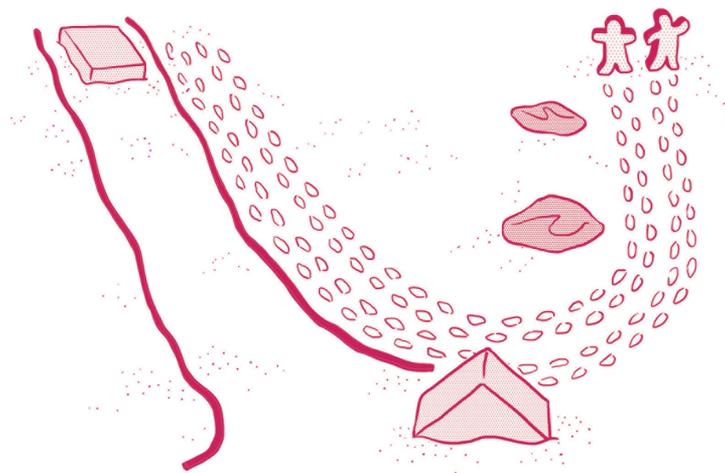
- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
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## The Presentation



One night God brought Abram outside. He looked up into the sky. God came so close to Abram, and Abram came so close to God, that Abram knew what God was saying. "You will become the father of a great family, and Sarai will be the mother. The members of the great family will be as many as there are stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert."

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of this story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part is the most important?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?

Abram laughed. He and Sarai were very old. God's promise sounded impossible, but God said to change their names. Abram was to be *Abraham* and Sarai was to be called *Sarah*.

One day, as Abraham was sitting by his tent, three strangers came out of the desert. Sarah fed them, as was the custom. They told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son, and Abraham laughed. Sarah was standing by the tent, and she laughed too. They were too old.

Abraham and Sarah had a son. They laughed again, so they named the baby "Laughter." In their language the word for "laughter" is "Isaac."

When Isaac was grown, Abraham sent his most trusted helper back to the land of his people to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham's helper stopped by a well. Rebekah offered him water to drink. She helped him give water to his animals. Rebekah then invited him home. He told her family about Abraham and Sarah and the Great Family. Rebekah decided she would like to be part of that Great Family, so she went to Hebron.

Isaac saw them coming and came out to meet them. Then Isaac and Rebekah were married.

Isaac and Rebekah had children, and their children had children, and those children had children. This went on for thousands and thousands of years until your grandmothers and grandfathers had children. Then your mothers and fathers had children. Now *you* are part of that great family which has become as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert.

## Godly Play Why Godly Play? (Part 4)

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. In the previous three Parent Pages we listed several of the many reasons why we believe in and use Godly Play in our church. Here are a few more:

- Godly Play offers a child-accessible version of the ancient spiritual practice of *lectio divina*: holy reading, wondering, and responding to the Bible's sacred stories. Instead of analyzing God's word, the children meditate in an artistic and kinesthetic way. Godly Play helps children know God and the Bible instead of simply knowing *about* God or *about* the Bible.
- Godly Play teaches that everything in God's creation is charged with the possibility of holiness, including each of us, and that we are in relationship with everything in Creation. There is no sacred versus the profane; all ground is holy ground.
- Godly Play teaches that there is *kairos* time (significant time) as well as *chronos* time (chronological or clock time). *Kairos* time is not concerned with knowing *what time it is*. Instead Godly Play gives us time to see God in the center of daily life and to reflect on what time is for.

# Exodus

## Exodus 11:1–15:21

**God was with the People** as they “went out” (the literal meaning of the word *exodus*) from slavery into freedom through water. The People of God look back to this time to sustain them when God is hidden and they feel lost. For the Jews, especially, the Feast of Passover keeps alive this core event. For Christians, Baptism reawakens this event.

### How to Use this Parent Page

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## The Presentation

When the People of God came into the land of Egypt, they found food and work, but the Pharaoh trapped them. They could not go home again. They had to do everything the Pharaoh said. They were slaves.

One of the people, whose name was Moses, came to the Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go.” The Pharaoh said, “No.”

Moses went back many times to tell the Pharaoh to let his people go, but the Pharaoh always said, “No.”

Then something terrible happened. The oldest boy in each Egyptian family, even in the family of the Pharaoh, died. The oldest boys in the families of the People of God did not die, because the people made a mark on the doors of their houses, and the Angel of Death passed over them.

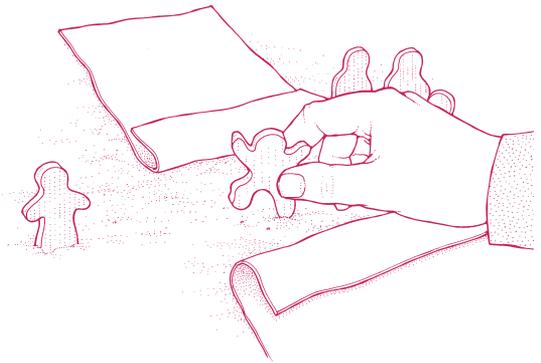
When Moses went back this time and said, “Let my people go,” the Pharaoh said, “Yes.”

# Wondering

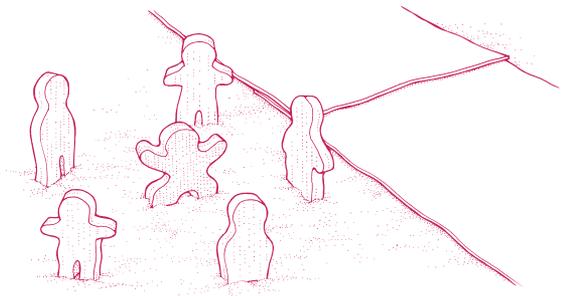
- **I wonder** what part of this story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part is the most important?
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The people quickly packed all they could carry. They baked bread for the journey. They left as fast as they could. Suddenly they heard the sound they did not want to hear. The Pharaoh's army was coming after them! The army pushed the people against the water. What could they do?

God came so close to Moses and Moses came so close to God that he knew how to take the people through the water into freedom. When all the people were safe on the other side, the water closed behind them and they were free! The army of the Pharaoh could not get them.



Now all of the people were free on the other side. They were so happy they just had to give thanks to God, and Miriam, Moses' sister, led the dancing!



# Godly Play

**In today's Parent Page,** we offer a brief but delightful "Godly Play moment," as related by Godly Play Trainer Nancy St. John:

One Sunday, when I was teaching my fourth-grade class, the story ended and the wondering began. After some silence, I looked up at the children and was about to ask another wondering question when one of the boys said, "Oh no! Here comes another wondering question!"

Another said, "How come you always say, 'I wonder?'"

Before I could say anything, someone said, "That's because she doesn't know the answers either!"

At this point I was not at all part of the conversation as another child said, "No that's not it. She wants us to find our own way." The circle fell silent. Amazing how the teaching happens without the teacher...

# The Ten Best Ways

## Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21

**We continue to witness** God's elusive presence with God's People on three occasions at Mt. Sinai:

- First, in the burning bush when God revealed to Moses the name of God (Exodus 3:1-6).
- Second, when God gave the Ten Commandments to the people through Moses (Exodus 19:18–20:1-17).
- Third, when, after breaking the tablets in anger, Moses climbed up Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments a second time (Exodus 34).

On this last occasion, Moses bargained with God three times to see God's face, but God did not allow this. No one could see God's face and live, so God put Moses in an opening in the rock and covered him until the dazzling light of God's presence had passed by.

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## The Presentation

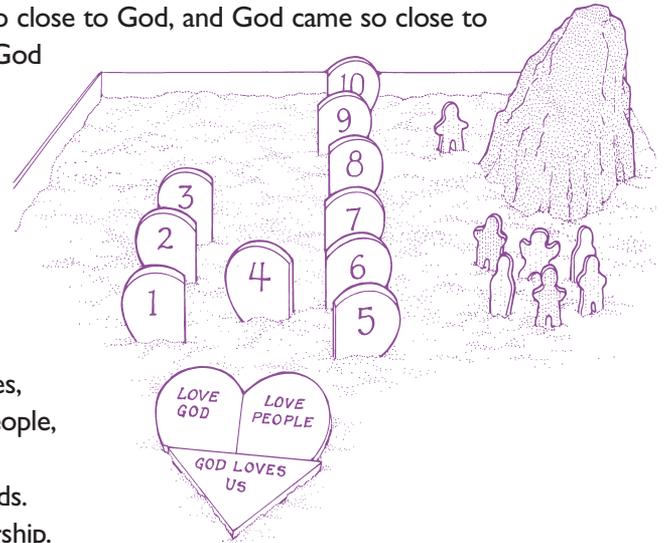
God loved the People so much that God showed them the Ten Best Ways to Live. Sometimes these ways are called the Ten Commandments.

As the People of God traveled across the desert, they began to complain: "There's not enough food! There's not enough water!" God helped them find food and water.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** which one of the Ten Best Ways you like the best?
- **I wonder** which one is most important?
- **I wonder** which one is especially for you?

Then the People came to a great mountain, covered with fire and smoke. Moses climbed up into the fire and smoke to meet God. There on the mountain, Moses came so close to God, and God came so close to him, that he knew what God wanted him to do. God wanted him to write the Ten Best Ways to Live on stones and bring them down the mountain to the People.



God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, who gave them to the people, who gave them to us:

1. Don't serve other gods.
2. Make no idols to worship.
3. Be serious when you say my name.
4. Keep the Sabbath holy.
5. Honor your mother and father.
6. Don't kill.
7. Don't break your marriage.
8. Don't steal.
9. Don't lie.
10. Don't even want what others have.

When you add up all the Ten Best Ways you get only two: *Love God. Love people.* God loves us to show us how and to make this possible.

## Godly Play Story

**At the heart** of most Godly Play sessions is the telling of the story. Story is one of the most ancient and elemental forms of knowing. In the West, beginning in the 17th century, story as a way of knowing was eclipsed by the technique of knowing that we call science. But story is not a diversion or simply entertainment, but a unique way of knowing, as valid as science though different in its usefulness.

There are two primary ways of using scripture stories: *monastic* and *scholastic*. The monastic approach, known as *lectio divina* (holy reading), emphasizes reading as meditation and prayer. The reader seeks an intuitive understanding,

to savor the aesthetic value of the words and, ultimately, to encounter God. This monastic approach to stories is similar to the way we begin in Godly Play.

The scholastic approach emphasizes reading as an act of questioning and testing. The reader comes to the text to seek logical understanding, grow in knowledge and analyze for ideas and theories.

As children approach their teens, this more analytical approach develops in Godly Play, too. In Godly Play, you will notice the integration and appropriate use of these two ways of knowing in each presentation.

# The Ark and the Tent

## Exodus 25–31, 35–40

**Moses experienced God’s presence** on Mt. Sinai, but also in the tent of meeting. In addition, God’s presence was in—or more likely seated on—a throne above the ark of YHWH (a box or chest that contained at least the tablets of the commandments, and possibly the rod of Aaron and a vessel of manna). The two traditions of the tent and the ark came together in the tabernacle, described in today’s story.

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## The Presentation

When God gave the People the Ten Best Ways to live, they loved them so much that they wanted to have them with them. God told them to build a box called an ark to keep them in and to cover the ark with gold. The people carried it with them wherever they went.

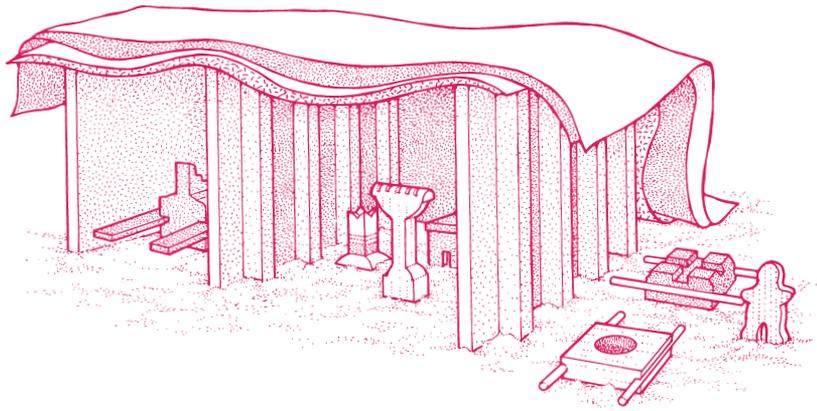
You can’t just walk up to something so precious as the Ten Commandments. You need some way to get ready. The People wondered what they could do. God told them to put an altar of incense in front of the ark. They could burn the incense to make a good-smelling cloud of smoke.

God then told them to put a table with twelve pieces of bread on one side and a seven-branched lampstand called a menorah on the other side.

Next they put a tent around the ark, the incense altar, the table, and the menorah to keep this place set apart. Inside the tent they made a place called the *Holy of Holies*.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of this story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part of the story is most important?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?



In front of the tent they put an altar made of bronze for sacrifices. They made a huge bowl of bronze for the priests to wash in and put that in front too.

Outside they put a fence made of cloth that could be rolled up and carried with them when they traveled. It marked the whole, special area, called the *tabernacle*.

This was not all. The priests began to wear special clothes to help them get ready to go inside this special place. Moses blessed the tabernacle when it was finished. Aaron and all of his sons were made the priests, and they took the tent and the ark wherever the People of God traveled.

God gave Aaron and his sons these words to bless the People of God: “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

## Godly Play Connections

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. Children (and adults!) often make surprising connections in Godly Play. Themes come alive as children experience the stories of the People of God.

Over the years, many theme phrases have found their ways into Godly Play stories, repeated from story to story. Here are several examples:

- The desert is a dangerous place. People don't go into the desert unless they have to.

- They were on the same journey we are.
- There was once someone who said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people followed him.

We experience these connections and themes in many ways, but perhaps with special force in the three larger themes around which Godly Play presentations are organized: *Sacred Stories*, *Parables*, and *Liturgical Actions*. In the next few Parent Pages, we explore each of these individually.

# The Ark and the Temple

## I Kings 5–8; 2 Chronicles 2–8

**King David set up the ark** and the tent of meeting inside the wall of Jerusalem. He wanted to build a house for God, a temple, but God told David that David's son would build the temple. When it was finally built, the theology of the presence of God changed from a theology of God's name (a primarily auditory experience) to a theology of God's glory (a primarily visual experience). God no longer sojourns but abides. Meeting God with openness shifts to an expanding need for certainty about God's presence in a particular place.

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## The Presentation

Solomon built a temple for God, and everyone had to help. Some went to cut down and bring home great cedar trees. Others cut stones out of the mountains nearby.

The temple began to grow. There was a great hall for people to come close to God, and an inner room, called the Holy of Holies, which was for the Ark. The temple was as beautiful as they could make it.

Inside the temple were the same things that helped them get ready to meet God as when they were in the desert. The Ark was carried inside by the priests. Wonderfully smelling smoke filled the temple as the incense burned. There was the table with the bread for each of the twelve tribes. And finally, there was the menorah with its seven branches and lamps burning. In front of the temple was the altar as it had been in front of the tent, but now it was bigger. The same was true for the great basin of water, the laver.

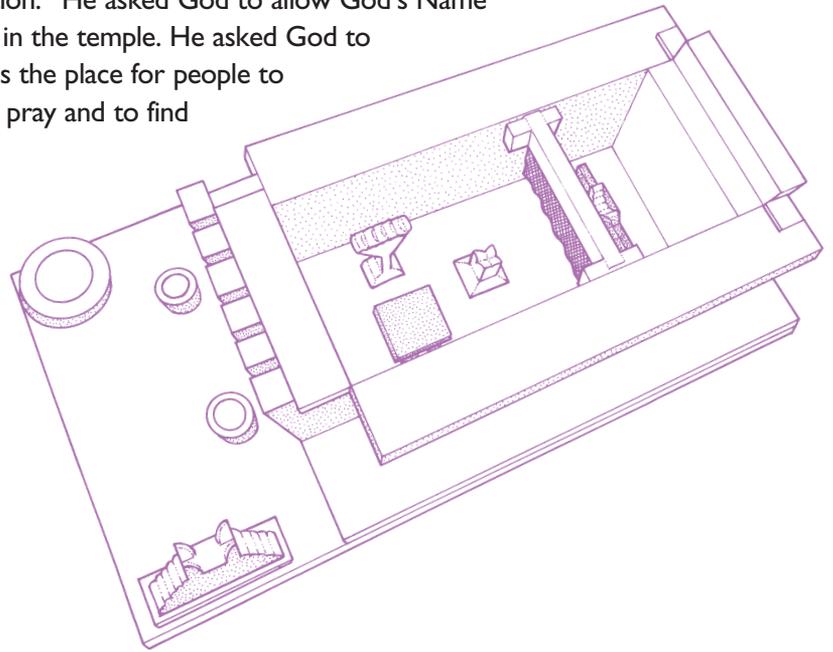
# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of the story you liked best?
- **I wonder** what part of the story is most important?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? I wonder what part of the story is about you?

On the day the priests first carried the Ark inside, a great cloud of dazzling light filled the temple. God was there.

When the temple was completed, King Solomon came before all the people and prayed. He said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication.” He asked God to allow God’s Name to abide in the temple. He asked God to make this the place for people to come to pray and to find justice.



## Godly Play Sacred Stories

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. For example, many Godly Play lessons present Sacred Stories. Sacred Stories stimulate our sense of Christian unity and provide raw material for the development of a coherent, mature sense of Christian identity. In Sacred Stories, we tell the story of God’s People to invite children to become part of that story.

The story of God and God’s People is almost like playing the game of

Hide-and-Seek with God. God calls people into relationship, who then respond by trying to connect with what they experience as an *Elusive Presence*. Both words of this phrase are significant: we cannot fully capture our experience of God in any story or rite—yet it is God’s presence that invites us endlessly to follow what glimpses we find. The very existence of the game communicates to us the existence of a divine Player. This game is played for the pleasure of its playing and not to win or lose, which would end the game. As we seek and find, we could sum up our story with the word *Aha!* Another glimpse!

# The Exile and Return

## 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:13–23; Ezra; Nehemiah

**In today's story**, the Babylonians capture Jerusalem and take God's People into exile. Even though this journey is forced upon them, they make an astonishing discovery: God is not just in one place, in the temple in Jerusalem, but also in a foreign and strange land. God's presence is not here or there, but everywhere, waiting. To be found. *To find us.*

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## The Presentation

Around the city of Jerusalem stood a high wall. Inside the city rose the temple built for God. The People of God knew that God was in the temple, but they also thought that it was the only place where you could pray to God.

People thought that the wall of the city would protect them from everything. Then the Babylonians came. Their king wanted the city of Jerusalem for himself. They broke down the walls and burned the temple.

They took many of the people away. Only a few were left in the land.

The soldiers marched God's people away from Jerusalem. They looked back at the smoke of the burning city and wondered if they would ever see it again. As they walked through the desert, they had to get up when the soldiers said. They had to eat what the soldiers said. They had to go where the soldiers said. They grew weary, and some died. It took a long time.

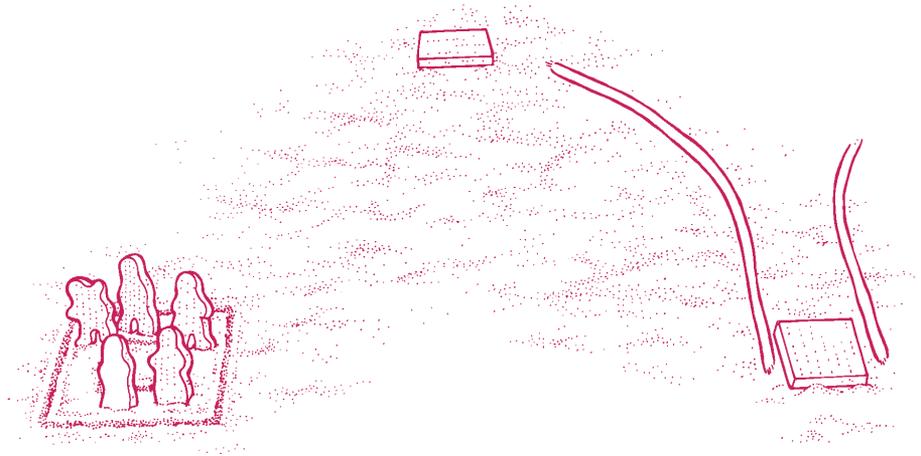
They were in exile. They could not go home.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what part of this story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part is most important?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?

They hung their harps on the weeping willow trees and sang sad songs. They dreamed of home, but could not go back. They even faced toward Jerusalem when they said their prayers. Slowly, God's people began to understand that God was in *this* place, too. God's presence came to them as they gathered to read the Scriptures, tell the old stories and pray.

The king of Babylon allowed many of God's People to work. They set up stores. Some worked for the king. What a shock when the king of Persia came with his army and took Babylon for himself! This new king began to let some of the people go back to Jerusalem. Some went with Ezra to rebuild the temple. Others went with Nehemiah to rebuild the walls around the city.



Then the People of God were no longer in exile. They could go home again. Do you know what happened? Not all of them went home. Now they knew God was in the strange and foreign land. Some stayed, because God was there, too.

## Godly Play **Parables**

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. A number of Godly Play lessons explore parables. Parables stimulate our sense of creativity. In parables, we enter with wonder to live the question.

Parables question our everyday view of life. They wake us up to see in life what we have not seen before. Parables question the status

quo, the order imposed by tradition, power or class. That is why Jesus' parables often got him into trouble, and why Christians ever since have sometimes redefined parables in ways that only comfort us rather than challenge us by disrupting our comfortable worldviews. We can sum up the startling quality of parables with a laugh: "Ha, ha!" Jesus' parables can make us laugh aloud as they turn our accepted worldviews upside down.

# The Prophets

**We have come a long way** in time and space since creation. The People of God have been led out of slavery, ruled their own country, were defeated, carried off into exile, and returned to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. God has been with them all the way—but they have not always been with God. The prophets' job was to show the people, the king, and the priests when they turned away from God.

The role of prophets changed over time. In ancient Israel, a judge was like a priest, a ruler and a prophet all in one person. After Samuel anointed Saul, kings began to rule. The priests led the people in worship. At that time, prophets arose to challenge the kings, the priests, and the people. After the exile there were no more independent kings, and the priests needed support to help the people keep their identity. The role of the prophets was absorbed into the role of the priest.

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustration on the back page and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today's Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawing. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about this picture?
- I wonder what this picture has to do with today's story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

her own creative response. Again, your role is not to correct or supplement what your child tells you, but simply to *listen* in a supportive way. You are supporting the formation of young—sometimes very young—theologians.

Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today's presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today's lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying "Amen."

## The Presentation

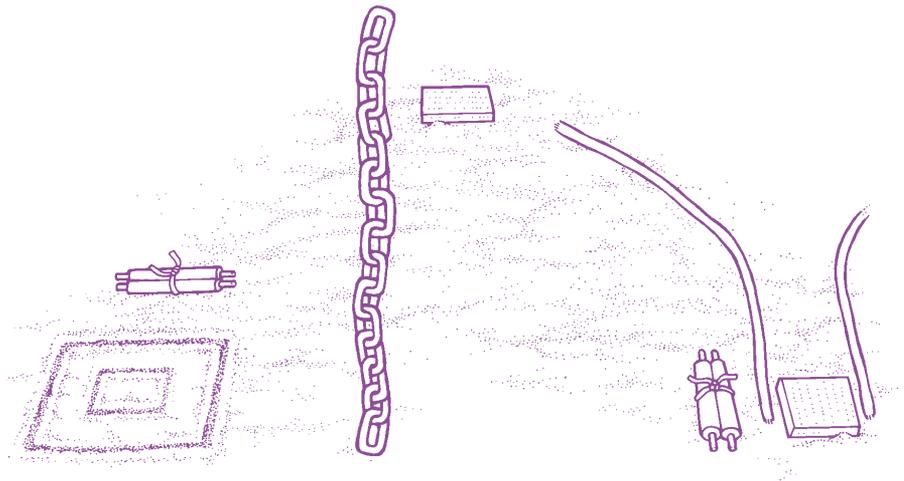
Sometimes the People of God forget who they are. They hide from God, and pretend that God isn't there. Sometimes they even worship other gods.

There are also people who come so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know what God wants them to say or do. These people are called *prophets*. They know the best way. Both men and women are prophets, so both boys and girls can grow up to be prophets.

Prophets spoke to the kings, to the people, and even to the priests. Sometimes, like with Elijah and Elisha, their words were either lost or never written down.

# Wondering

- **I wonder** what you like best about the prophets?
- **I wonder** what's most important about the prophets?
- **I wonder** if you know any prophets, or if any prophets know you?
- **I wonder** if the prophets in the Bible are all the prophets we need?



Others wrote down what God told them to say, or some of their friends wrote down their words.

Here are the words of the prophet Amos:

I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
To the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:21, 23-24).

Today there are still prophets. They speak to the rulers, to the priests and ministers and rabbis, and to the people, to tell them what God wants them to say and do. Prophets come from all kinds of places and are all kinds of people—just like you. So some of you may become prophets too.

## Godly Play Liturgical Actions

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. A few Godly Play lessons explore liturgical actions. Liturgical actions help integrate our sense of identity (given through Sacred Stories), of the creative process (given through parables), and of the unspoken presence of God (given through silence). In Liturgical Actions, we mark life, time, and space, so children can know the Holy. As in the great liturgical actions of the whole Church, Godly Play Liturgical Actions evoke a wholehearted aesthetic appreciation of “Ahh...”

Godly Play lessons are not the liturgy itself. Neither are Godly Play lessons simply talking *about* the liturgy. That kind of scholarly approach would not invite children to enter deeply into the offered experience. Instead, Godly Play Liturgical Action lessons present a kind of language-learning. Children can learn how liturgy works and have an appropriate place to practice the language and actions of liturgy, so they can enter more fully into the worship experience of their church.

# Jonah

**It was probably after the Exile**, when Judah was still under the rule of the Persians, that someone wrote an entertaining, thought-provoking story about the prophet Jonah, showing how Jonah, “the backward prophet,” does everything wrong, yet everything comes out right, except, perhaps, his own relationship with God. The story leaves us with many questions, and we are left to finish the story for ourselves. What happened to Jonah next?

## How to Use this Parent Page

With your child, begin by looking together at the illustrations below and listening as your child recalls—and in a sense *relives*—the experience of today’s Godly Play presentation. Invite your child to respond to the drawings. You might say, for example:

- I wonder what you can tell me about these pictures?
- I wonder what these pictures have to do with today’s story?

Just listen. This is *not* a time to quiz children on what they may or may not recall about the lesson, but to be quietly present as they share their own experience. This will be different for each child—one may retell much of the presentation, another recall a single moment that had meaning, and yet another talk about his or

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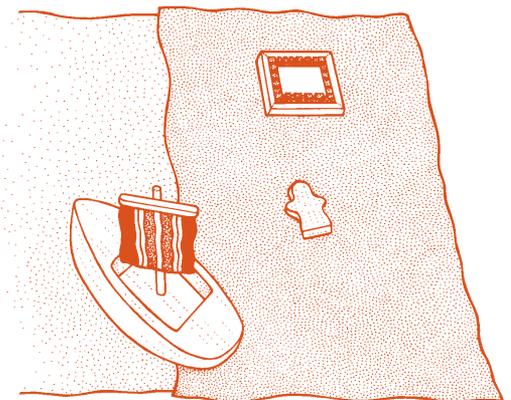
Then, if you wish, you can read with (or to) your child the condensed version of today’s presentation offered below. Whether you read the lesson or simply listen as your child shares what was received in today’s lesson, ask the Wondering questions printed in the left column. Remember, there are many right answers! Be open to what the presentation can mean to you and your child. God will teach you new meanings every day. Conclude by sitting quietly for a moment and then saying “Amen.”

## The Presentation

God told Jonah. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and tell them they are bad and they need to change and become good.”

Jonah turned and went the other way. He found a ship going as far from Nineveh as you could go.

A great storm broke out. The sailors were afraid, so they decided



# Wondering

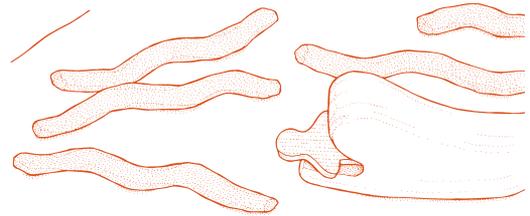
- **I wonder** what part of the story you like best?
- **I wonder** what part of the story is the most important part?
- **I wonder** where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?

to cast lots to see whom God was angry at. They wanted to throw that person overboard to get rid of him.

Now a prophet is someone who can speak for the One True God, but Jonah still did not speak. The sailors asked him who he was. He told them he worshiped God, the One who made the sea and dry land. The sailors were even more afraid. They knew that he was trying to flee from God.

The sea grew more troubled, so Jonah said, “Throw me in, and the storm will stop.” So they threw him in. All was quiet. The sea was calm.

As Jonah sank down in the water, a great fish swam up and swallowed him. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Jonah began to pray and the fish began to feel very strange. It grew sicker and sicker. Finally it swam to the shore and vomited out Jonah onto the dry land.



Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and tell the people there that they are bad and that they need to change and become good.” This time Jonah went to Nineveh. He cried out to the people of Nineveh that they were bad and that God commanded them to be good. God said that they would all be destroyed if they did not.

The people of Nineveh listened to God’s call. They turned and became good, so God did not destroy that great city. This disappointed Jonah. That was the opposite of how most prophets would feel. Jonah was a strange prophet. What did he do next?

## Godly Play Wondering

**In every Parent Page,** we offer information about Godly Play to help you understand both its methodology and purpose. The “wondering” included in most Godly Play lessons is a unique and powerful part of the Godly Play experience. That’s why we include “The Wondering” in *Godly Play at Home*.

You can use the wondering approach any time you read or tell Bible stories at home... or when you hear them yourself!

Here are key wondering questions, which you can adapt as appropriate for your family:

- I wonder what part of the story you like best?
- I wonder what part of the story is the most important part?
- I wonder where you are in the story? What part of the story is about you?
- I wonder if there is any part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need?
- I wonder what happened next?