

Introduction

For Christians, following Jesus is sometimes compared to setting out on a journey or embarking on a race through life. Athletes have to be really determined – to face the problems and difficulties as they train and prepare. But what keeps them going? They really want to win and they need to keep their eyes on the prize. But they need to have the right attitude of mind regardless of the result. The following idea picks up on the theme of determination through the story of blind Bartimaeus, which can be found in Mark 10:46 – 52.

Preparation

The first Christians saw their lives as a race with challenges and targets to aim for. St Paul wrote: *...I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead* (Philippians 3:13, CEV). Everybody's life involves some struggle. Here's a way to explore a Bible story about being determined and not letting anyone stop you from achieving your aim. It's about someone who can't see; and it's about not taking 'no' for an answer.

Development

1. Not being able to see can be frightening and disorientating. You might like to introduce the topic of blindness by asking if anyone has ever visited a cave, or perhaps have been out on holiday after dark, where there are no street lights. How did it feel?

Ask the class to close their eyes for a moment. What can they hear? For blind people, hearing (and touch) become their new way to 'see' the world. With their eyes kept closed, perform some simple action – like moving a book from one desk to another or rearranging something in the classroom. Can they hear what has happened?

2. Ask three children to sit in the middle of a space in the classroom. They should close their eyes. They are going to experience the Bible story from the point of view of a man called Bartimaeus. Ask everyone else to start moving about and making noises. Ask 'Bartimaeus' how it feels not to know what is going on?
3. Now ask a group of about five children to be the crowd in the Bible story. They had come to see Jesus. He was a big attraction, especially after the miracles he had done. As far as they are concerned, a blind beggar on the street is just a nuisance. Invite them to express angry feelings against Bartimaeus: 'Go away'; 'We don't want the likes of you in our town'; 'You're in the way'; 'You're blocking the street'; 'Go home'. Ask them to repeat phrases like this, louder and louder, as they circle around Bartimaeus.

Pause the action: How does Bartimaeus feel now?

4. Now ask another group of seven children to be Jesus' disciples. They should start saying out loud together: 'Jesus is coming'; 'Make way for Jesus'.



Now get the two groups (the crowd and the disciples) to circle around the three playing Bartimaeus moving in opposite directions, all shouting their lines louder and louder. It will be quite a noise!

5. Pause the action. Ask Bartimaeus what he has heard and eventually fix on the fact that Jesus is coming. He has healed people. He does amazing things. Bartimaeus decides he wants to meet Jesus. The three in the middle playing Bartimaeus should start shouting: 'Jesus'... 'Son of David'... 'Help me'.

The other two groups should recommence their shouting too, moving in circles. Get some of the disciples to tell Bartimaeus to shut up. But Bartimaeus responds by shouting even louder and not giving up!

6. Halt the action and the noise and make a way through the circles for Jesus to meet Bartimaeus. He has heard Bartimaeus and asks him what he wants him to do.

Explain that Jesus does heal him and the crowd are stunned!

End the drama on a group tableau of amazement!

7. Now explore the story further from the inside by 'hot seating' characters in the story.
8. Further development: All this wouldn't have happened if Bartimaeus had given up. He was determined. He wasn't going to let other people push him away from something good - something he knew could make a difference to his life.

Disabled athletes face a lot more barriers like that every day. The biggest barrier they face is the way other people limit them, by saying 'No you can't do that - you're blind, you're in a wheelchair'. Determination - that makes all the difference. The whole world might seem to be against you, but Jesus once said: *...But take heart! I have overcome the world.* (John 16:33, NIV 1984).