



On your marks

If you've spent a lot of time recently concentrating on the happier stories and accounts in the Bible and feel that your teaching is getting somewhat triumphalist, you might want to redress the balance by thinking about what makes God sad and what makes us sad. It's only honest to acknowledge sadness within the Christian journey as well as the happy times and positive side of following Christ. This activity would go with many stories in which God is shown to be sad—for example, the Fall, Noah and the flood, Hosea, Lazarus' death, the Lost Son, the tenants in the vineyard, the rich young ruler, many of the healing stories, the crucifixion and many more.

Get set

You'll need coloured items as below, sheets of acetate cut into teardrop shapes and with a hole punched in the top, large enough to draw on – for younger children one per A4 sheet; for older children two to four per A4 sheet. (Many churches will have packs of acetates left over from the days of OHPs that need using up!) You'll also need pens to draw on the acetates, gold or silver thread, a large freestanding cross and newspapers for older groups (optional).

Go!

1. Ask children to think, as you tell today's story, of how a certain character in it might have been feeling at different points in the story.
2. Tell the story for today (see 'On your marks' for suggestions).
3. Ask about the feelings that they noticed or imagined during the story. Concentrate today on what made the character sad, upset or distressed.
4. Using either a colour cube (see the idea of Martyn's idea What colour are you?) or anything you can find with different colours on (paint colour charts, pieces of cloth, coloured bricks, crayons, and so on), talk about being sad: what colour do we 'feel' when we feel sad? Look through some newspapers from the last week. What has made us sad in the last week or so? What makes God sad? Are there any clues in the story you've just heard?
5. Although we may feel sad sometimes, God's plan is for everyone to be happy not sad—see Isaiah 61:1-3; Revelation 21:4. It can help to tell our friend Jesus when we are sad about something, and to know that he listens to us (see Psalm 116:1-2).
6. Take a teardrop and draw on it either something that you are sad about at the moment and that you want to tell Jesus or something you know makes God sad. Thread a hanging string through the teardrops.
7. Say that when Jesus was on the cross, he showed how much he cares about all the things that



make us sad and that make God sad. Although his death itself was very sad to us and to God, this was the only way to mend the world and bring God and people back together again to be happy together. Hang the teardrops over the arms of the cross, silently or saying a short prayer as you do so, or with some quiet music playing.

8. You could finish with a verse from the story you read today or by reading Psalm 116:1-6.