

engage

Put your guard up — this issue of **engage** is hard-hitting. We'll see Jesus offending people; God punishing rebellious kings; Paul straight-talking; and we'll discover how to fight for the faith. Also, we'll meet the Dark Destroyer who found the light and we'll learn all about our spiritual enemies.

*** DAILY READINGS** Each day's page throws you into the Bible, to get you handling, questioning and exploring God's message to you — encouraging you to act on it and talk to God more in prayer.

THIS ISSUE: Meet Jesus, the King of controversy in **Matthew**; watch as Israel and Judah destroy themselves in **2 Kings**; learn life lessons from Paul in **2 Corinthians**; and fight for the faith with **Jude**.

*** TAKE IT FURTHER** If you're hungry for more at the end of an **engage** page, turn to the **Take it further** section to dig deeper.

*** REAL LIVES** True stories, revealing God at work in people's lives. This time — **we meet the brutal boxer who found Jesus**.

*** TRICKY** tackles those mind-bendingly tricky questions that confuse us all, as well as questions our friends bombard us with. This time we ask: **Can we really trust the Bible?**



*** ESSENTIAL** Articles on the basics we really need to know about God, the Bible and Christianity. This issue, we look at what the Bible says about **spiritual enemies**.

*** STUFF** Articles on stuff relevant to the lives of young Christians. This issue: **we give advice on talking to non-Christian relatives**.

*** TOOLBOX** is full of tools to help you understand the Bible. This issue we look at different **Bible translations**.

All of us who work on engage are passionate to see the Bible at work in people's lives. Do you want God's word to have an impact on your life? Then open your Bible, and start on the first engage study right now...

HOW TO USE **engage**

- 1 Set a time you can read the Bible every day
- 2 Find a place where you can be quiet and think
- 3 Grab your Bible, pen and a notebook
- 4 Ask God to help you understand what you read
- 5 Read the day's verses with **engage**, taking time to think about it
- 6 Pray about what you've read

BIBLE STUFF

We use the NIV Bible version, so you might find it's the best one to use with **engage**. If the notes say "**Read Matthew 15 v 1-9**", look up Matthew in the contents page at the front of your Bible. It'll tell you which page Matthew starts on. Find chapter 15 of Matthew, and then verse 1 of chapter 15 (the verse numbers are the tiny ones). Then start reading. Simple.

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Matthew

King of controversy

Many people picture Jesus as a laidback, gentle hippy. Always preaching love and tolerance. Always being nice. Never being controversial or offensive. But that's not the Jesus Matthew tells us about.

As we immerse ourselves in Matthew's story, we'll meet a Jesus who regularly clashes with religious authorities, offends "holy" people and points out hypocrisy. We'll meet a Jesus who goes against what society expects — he meets with and accepts those who "respectable" people shunned and avoided.

We'll meet a Jesus who fought demons. We'll meet a Jesus who said unpopular and controversial things about religion, divorce, heaven and hell.

We'll meet a Jesus who didn't come to be warm and fuzzy all the time. We'll meet a Jesus who said shocking things and made people feel uncomfortable; who people



hated because His words were hard to swallow. We'll meet a Jesus who came to die.

As Matthew takes us into the intimate life story of Christ, we won't meet a wishy-washy do-gooder. We'll meet the all-powerful, Satan-slaying Son of God. This is someone we must take very seriously. Because, if you let Him, Jesus will change your life.



1

Blind faith

The Pharisees thought they were the true leaders of God's people. They thought they were God's favourites. But Jesus was about to show them up for who they really were. The controversy kicks off immediately.

👁️ Read Matthew 15 v 1–9

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What accusation was made? (v2)*
- ▶ *How did Jesus respond? (v3)*
- ▶ *How were these men being hypocritical? (v4–6)*
- ▶ *What was true about their religion and teaching? (v8–9)*

Jesus pointed out how the Pharisees made up ridiculous rules that actually stopped people from serving God and honouring their parents! He showed up their “religion” for the sham it was — they were all talk and their hearts were not devoted to God (v8).

👁️ Read verses 10–20

- ▶ *What were the disciples worried about? (v12)*
- ▶ *How did Jesus describe the Pharisees? (v14)*

- ▶ *What did Jesus say makes people unclean? (v18–20)*

The Pharisees were focusing on man-made rules. But they weren't concerned about their hearts, their thoughts or their words — the important stuff. These supposedly holy leaders were like the blind trying to lead the blind, and the result would be spiritual disaster.

THINK IT OVER

- ▶ *In what ways do you concentrate on keeping rules or appearing good rather than dealing with your evil thoughts?*
- ▶ *What specific stuff do you need God's help to deal with?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Talk to God about these things. Thank Jesus for coming into the world to deal with the problem of our hearts.

➔ TAKE IT FURTHER

Grab some more on page 107.



2

Gone to the dogs

More controversy today. A woman comes up to Jesus, begging him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. What do you think Jesus' response will be?

Read Matthew 15 v 21–28

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *Where was this woman from? (v22)*
- ▶ *What was surprising about Jesus' response? (v23)*
- ▶ *And the disciples' response? (v23)*
- ▶ *Why wouldn't Jesus heal her daughter? (v24)*
- ▶ *What do you think v26 means?*
- ▶ *And what was the woman's brilliant answer? (v27)*
- ▶ *What was the happy ending to this controversial story? (v28)*

Jesus was now in a Gentile (non-Jewish) area. The Jews were God's chosen people. So when this Gentile woman asked Jesus for help, His answer was simple — I came for the Jews, not Gentiles. It wouldn't be fair to put other people ("dogs") before God's chosen ones. But the woman seemed to know Jesus' mission was far wider reaching than to just the tiny Jewish nation.

The message of Jesus is for everyone. All types of people from every kind of background can get to know God through Jesus. His death made it possible for anyone to be part of God's chosen people.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▶ *If Jesus' message is for everyone, what does that mean for you?*
- ▶ *And what does that mean for the people you see regularly?*
- ▶ *If Jesus' message is for everyone, what does that mean Christians should do?*
- ▶ *What will YOU do, exactly?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Thank God for the people who told you about Jesus. Now talk to God about your answers to the above four questions.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The message of Jesus is for everyone.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

The great commission — page 107.



3

Sign language

Today's story sounds very familiar. Jesus had recently fed over 5000 Jewish people with a few loaves and fish. This time, He does the same thing for Gentiles.

Read Matthew 15 v 29–39

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What did Jesus do on the mountainside? (v30)*
- ▶ *How did these Gentiles react? (v31)*
- ▶ *What did this show about Jesus? (v32)*

These non-Jews saw Jesus' miracles and were amazed. They even praised the God of Israel! Unheard of! As we saw yesterday, Jesus' message is for everyone. He has compassion (v32) for everyone.

Read Matthew 16 v 1–4

- ▶ *What did the Jewish leaders demand? (v1)*
- ▶ *How did Jesus ridicule their request? (v2–3)*
- ▶ *How did He describe them? (v4)*
- ▶ *What sign would He give them?*

The Pharisees were the ultra-religious group who made up loads of extra rules to live by. The Sadducees were

another Jewish group, who said there was no life after death. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies — opposed to each other's teaching — yet they were united in hating Jesus.

Jesus had done so many incredible things already — seeing one more miracle would not have caused these stubborn men to accept Jesus. They were out to get Him. But Jesus saw through their demands. The only sign they would see would be Jesus dying and rising again 3 days later. If you're not sure why that's called the sign of Jonah, go to *Take it further*.

PRAY ABOUT IT

These men were seen as holy and religious yet they rejected Jesus. Instead, Jesus would save many outsiders. Thank God that Jesus came for outsiders like us. Pray that you won't assume you're good enough for God.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Follow the signs to page 107.



4

Stale bread

The disciples had seen Jesus feed thousands of people with just a tiny amount of bread (and fish). Twice. And they'd seen the Pharisees and Sadducees fail to believe Jesus. But the disciples still missed the point...

Read Matthew 16 v 5–7

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What mistake had the disciples made? (v5)*
- ▶ *What did Jesus warn them? (v6)*
- ▶ *But what were they more worried about? (v7)*

It's like a sitcom joke. These 12 guys had just witnessed two incredible food miracles, with basketfuls of bread left over. And what do they do? Leave their packed lunch at home! So Jesus takes this opportunity to warn them about false teaching. But the disciples miss the point. Again.

Read verses 8–12

- ▶ *Why didn't they need to worry about having no food? (v8–10)*
- ▶ *What should they be more concerned about? (v11–12)*

Yeast is used in baking bread, to

help dough rise. You add a little bit of yeast and it spreads through the whole batch of dough. In the same way, wrong teaching, from religious leaders who refused to recognise Jesus' identity, was getting everywhere. See how Jesus sadly had to describe the disciples (v8).

THINK IT OVER

- ▶ *In what areas of life do you need to trust Jesus more?*
- ▶ *Do you believe everything you're taught about Christianity and spirituality?*
- ▶ *How can you check that what you're being taught is true?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to help you trust in Him to provide for your needs. And pray that you won't fall for false teaching that leads you away from God.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Spot false teachers on page 107.



5

Jesus jigsaw

Since the beginning of his book, Matthew has been building up a picture of who Jesus is. Like a jigsaw — slotting the different parts of the picture together. But the disciples couldn't put the picture together. Until now.

Read Matthew 16 v 13–17

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What was the public opinion about Jesus ("the Son of Man")? (v13–14)*
- ▶ *What did Peter realise? (v16)*
- ▶ *What did Jesus think of this answer? (v17)*

Peter realised that Jesus was both God and human in one person. God's chosen Messiah was in town: the Rescuer and Ruler who God had promised would come. This is the one the Old Testament had pointed to; the one everyone was waiting for!

Read verses 18–20

- ▶ *What did Jesus say about Peter and about the church? (v18)*
- ▶ *What surprising thing did Jesus say to His disciples? (v20)*

Verse 18 means Jesus will build His church on the apostles' (Peter and co) true teaching about Jesus. And the church will never be destroyed by the

devil! (For more on confusing v19, go to *Take it further.*)

Peter finally realised who Jesus is but Jesus told His disciples not to tell anyone. The Jews expected the Christ to be a mighty warrior who'd free them from the Romans. Imagine what would have happened if word got out that the Christ was here! But Jesus wasn't that kind of Messiah. The disciples had to learn why Jesus had come before they could start talking about Him. That comes tomorrow.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Tell Jesus your own reply to v15. Don't just repeat the "right" words, tell Him everything. Ask Him to help you understand.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Verse 19 explained on page 108.



6

Cross words

Peter must have been feeling great — he'd finally realised that Jesus is God's Son, the Christ. And Jesus gave Peter a great job. But there was loads Peter still hadn't grasped about Jesus. Vital stuff.

Read Matthew 16 v 21–23

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What had Jesus come to do? (v21)*
- ▶ *What do you think of Peter's reaction?*
- ▶ *What did Jesus think of it? (v23)*

Earlier, the devil had tried to tempt Jesus to abandon His mission. This mission required Jesus to die for sinners like us. It's understandable that Peter didn't want his friend and master to suffer and die. But Peter wasn't seeing the big picture. Jesus came to die on the cross. It was essential and would be glorious.

Read verses 24–28

- ▶ *What does Jesus expect of His disciples? (v24–25)*
- ▶ *Why is it vital to make the right decision about believing and following Jesus? (v27)*

Back then, if you saw someone carrying a cross, you knew they were heading towards their death. "Denying yourself" means exactly that: giving up the right to live. Being prepared to live for Jesus, whatever the cost. Even if that means suffering or death.

There's no other way to follow Jesus. He went to the cross and He expects us to give everything for Him. It's the route to life, true life.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Maybe it's time to ask God's forgiveness, and to help you realise who Jesus really is. And to get back to making Jesus everything you live for. Talk to God about it right now.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

A little bit more on page 108.



7

Mountain tension

Chapter 16 was a rollercoaster for the disciples. A real high point was realising who Jesus is. A downer when they learned what He'd come to do. The the twist of what it would mean to follow Him. Now for more thrills and spills.

Read Matthew 17 v 1–8

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▷ *What amazing thing did Peter, James and John witness? (v2)*
- ▷ *Who else was present? (v3)*
- ▷ *What did God the Father say about Jesus? (v5)*
- ▷ *And what must Jesus' followers do? (v5)*

Jesus was “transfigured”: His whole appearance changed (v2). Ever looked directly at the sun? That’s how Jesus was — dazzlingly pure, glorious, unique. And then they heard God’s voice, confirming that Jesus really was His Son. So they should listen to Him. And so should we.

Read verses 9–13

- ▷ *What did Jewish law experts claim? (v10)*

- ▷ *What was Jesus' answer to this? (v11–13)*

The Jews believed (from Malachi 4 v 5) that Elijah would return before the arrival of God Himself. Jesus says that John the Baptist was the “Elijah” who prepared the way for Jesus. Most of the people didn’t realise his importance, just as they rejected Jesus and would kill Him (v12).

GET ON WITH IT

- ▷ *How can you make sure you don't make the same mistake and ignore Jesus?*
- ▷ *How will you make sure you listen to His words?*
- ▷ *Which of His commands do you need to take more seriously?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Talk to God about your answers.

TAKE IT FURTHER

More mountain tension on page 108.



8

Demon disarray

Peter, James and John are walking down the mountain with Jesus, having just seen something amazing. But they're soon brought back to earth with a thump.

Read Matthew 17 v 14–18

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What was the double problem?*
v15:
v16:
- ▶ *What was Jesus' reaction to His disciples' inability to heal the boy?*
- ▶ *Was it a problem for Jesus? (v18)*

Watch out when life is going well. A high spiritual experience is often followed by a crashing low. Here, Jesus came down the mountain to see His disciples in a mess.

Read verses 19–21

- ▶ *Why couldn't they drive out the demon?*
- ▶ *What can real faith in God achieve?*

The disciples should have trusted Jesus' power and authority. Even a little faith can move obstacles that

seem immovable. God can do great things through us if we trust Him to.

Read verses 22–23

- ▶ *What did Jesus tell His disciples again?*
- ▶ *How did they react?*

It's incredibly sad that Jesus was betrayed and had to suffer and die. But we don't need to be grief-filled like the disciples. We know that Jesus died to rescue us and He was raised back to life (v22) and rules in heaven!

PRAY ABOUT IT

Say sorry to God for times you've shown no faith in Him. Ask Him to increase your faith and trust in Him so you can serve Him better. And thank Him for Jesus' death and resurrection.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Real faith can move mountains.

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Faith the facts on page 108.



9

Fishy funds

Ever heard people complain about paying taxes? Maybe you pay them yourself and you notice the huge chunk they take out of your wages. At least that's something Jesus, God's Son, doesn't need to bother with. Well, actually...

Read Matthew 17 v 24–26

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What did the tax collectors quiz Peter about? (v24)*
- ▶ *What's the answer to Jesus' strange question? (v25–26)*
- ▶ *Any idea what point Jesus was making?*

Of course kings don't collect taxes from their own sons. That would be crazy. Jewish people had to pay temple tax. The money was used to look after God's temple. Jesus was God's Son, so it was ridiculous to ask Him to pay taxes for His Father's temple. But most people didn't believe Jesus was God's Son.

Read verse 27

- ▶ *How did Jesus get the money to pay the tax?*
- ▶ *Why did Jesus pay the tax?*

The money that Jesus paid would go to the temple and to the Jewish leaders who would eventually torture and kill Him. Jesus was contributing towards His own death. But He knew He had to die as part of His Father's perfect plans. And He paid the taxes so as not to offend anyone. Sometimes we have to give up our rights if it helps God's work.

THINK IT OVER

- ▶ *Do you sulk or put up a fight when it comes to paying money you owe?*
- ▶ *Or what about doing chores?*
- ▶ *How does your attitude affect how others view your faith?*

PRAY ABOUT IT

Ask God to help you make wise decisions and not cause unnecessary trouble or offence. And thank Him for Jesus' great wisdom and power.

TAKE IT FURTHER

No *Take it further* section today.