

engage

The Bible is home to some truly awesome stories. In issue 12 of **engage** we look at two of them — Ruth's heartwarming love story, and the titanic royal struggle between Saul and David. We also see what the Bible says about life after death, living God's way and facing pressure as a Christian.

*** 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: Get all mushy with *Ruth*; tackle a big equation in *Titus*; search for the perfect king in *1 Samuel*; locate God's great city with *Isaiah*; and take the pressure in *Acts*.

*** 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.

*** ESSENTIAL** Articles on the basics we really need to know about God, the Bible and Christianity. This issue, we ask the question: *What's this grace thing all about?*

*** TRICKY** tackles those mind-bendingly tricky questions that confuse us all, as well as stuff our friends bombard us with. This time: *Is there really life after death?*

*** REAL LIVES** True stories, revealing God at work in people's lives. This time — *we see a life going nowhere turned around.*

*** STUFF** Articles on stuff relevant to the lives of young Christians. This issue: *What the Bible says about abortion.*

*** TOOLBOX** is full of tools to help you understand the Bible. This issue we see *how the Bible's words can affect the way we feel.*

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 "**Ruth 1 v 14–18**", look up Ruth in the contents page at the front of your Bible. It'll tell you which page the book starts on. Find chapter 1 of Ruth, and then verse 14 of chapter 1 (the verse numbers are the tiny ones). Then start reading. Simple.

In this issue...

DAILY READINGS

Ruth: God's big love story

Titus: Getting it right

1 Samuel: Long live the king

Isaiah: God's perfect city

Acts: Under pressure

ARTICLES

TRICKY

Is there life after death? **12**

STUFF

Abortion **26**

ESSENTIAL

Amazing grace **40**

REAL LIVES

A changed life **58**

TOOLBOX

Tone and feel **78**

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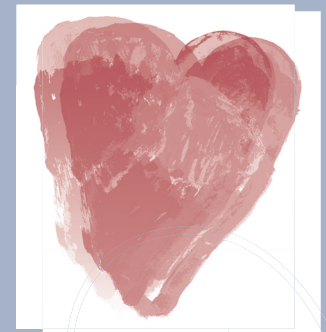
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Ruth

God's big love story

Imagine your life edited into a 90-minute movie. In which section of the rental store might you find it? Comedy? Romance? Thriller? The chances are, the true story of your everyday life wouldn't break records at the box office. Real life isn't often like the movies. You can't edit out the dull bits and the plot is hard to follow.



That's why it's great to know there's another bigger story being told. God is steering the world through its dramas to a glorious climax. However entertaining our lives turn out to be, what matters is that we fully take up our part in His story.

The story of Ruth wouldn't be out of place on the big screen. It's got it all — tragedy, romance, drama — and even a happy ending. (Why not read it through like a novel before starting the studies?) But God's big story is also in view. The events described are more than just random happenings to ordinary people. Heaven's King is

directing the details of their days. Over the next 8 studies, follow Ruth's story carefully, keeping these key questions in mind:

- How do her experiences and choices compare with mine?
- How has God stepped directly into the chapters of my life?
- Am I living my life like Ruth, to play my part in His plot?

Although God has a plan, there is a sense in which your life remains unwritten. The choices you haven't yet made will shape the story ahead. Let Ruth inspire you to face every episode with faith.



1

Who do you think you are?

Imagine life as a refugee. Imagine rolling into a town with no home or mates. Imagine just trying to survive where you don't know the language or customs. Imagine yourself in Naomi's shoes.

Read Ruth 1 v 1–5**ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

- ▶ *Why did they leave Bethlehem in the first place?*
- ▶ *Why was Moab a weird place to run to? (see Judges 3 v 14)*

In their 10 years away, Naomi's family had been hit by multiple tragedies. As if losing her husband wasn't enough, her two sons were taken too. Whatever is to come in her story, it's clear Naomi's past is no picnic.

Read Ruth 1 v 6–13

- ▶ *Where does the conversation in v8–13 take place? (v7)*
- ▶ *What are Naomi's hopes for her daughters-in-law? (v8–9)*
- ▶ *How does she view their prospects if they follow her?*

In many ways, Naomi talks sense. Two foreign widows couldn't expect to get the pick of the available Jewish boys. But there's a hint that her logic has been coloured by her tragic past: Why stick with me? God's against me. (v11, 13)

PRAY ABOUT IT

Have tough times affected your confidence in God? Tell Him about your lowest moments. Then thank Him that circumstances don't change His death-defying love (John 3 v 16).

THE BOTTOM LINE

Even in your lowest moments, don't forget God's great love for you.

TAKE IT FURTHER

For more, turn to page 110.



2

Clinging on

“It just didn't work out.” That's a common verdict on a failed romance. But is that it? Does love just sometimes run out of gas whether we like it or not, or can we keep it moving?

Read Ruth 1 v 14–18**ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN**

- ▶ *What pulls Orpah back to Moab (according to Naomi)? (v15)*
- ▶ *In contrast, what parts of Naomi's future does Ruth promise to share? (v16–17)*
- ▶ *What part of Ruth's character convinces Naomi to stop persuading? (v18)*

THINK IT THROUGH

Because life is unpredictable, the idea of being totally committed to anyone or anything for life can seem extreme. But Ruth, not thinking of herself, and knowing her responsibility to God, holds nothing back.

- ▶ *Do you show that type of determination in your love?*

Read verses 19–22

- ▶ *What kind of welcome do they receive in Bethlehem?*

- ▶ *Naomi means “pleasant”. What words in her speech mean the opposite?*

- ▶ *What hope is hinted at in v22?*

Naomi's friends barely recognise her. Her 10-year ordeal has clearly left its mark. If Naomi is still clinging to the Lord, it's only by her fingernails. But the author wants us to know, it's not over yet.

GET ON WITH IT

- ▶ *Who do you know who's running on empty?*
- ▶ *How might you encourage them today to cling to the God who is always good?*

THE BOTTOM LINE

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him (Psalm 103 v 11).

TAKE IT FURTHER

Cling on and go to page 110.

3 Don't just sit there!

“It’s Not Fair!” It’s easy to feel that God does exciting things for others but never for you. Is it possible we need a change to our attitudes and actions?

Read Ruth 2 v 1–13

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- *What attitude does Ruth hope to find among the harvesters? (v2)*
- *In what ways does Boaz demonstrate just that attitude?*
- *What does Boaz expect God to do and why? (v11, 12)*

THINK IT THROUGH

Ruth’s mopping up plan is not as cheeky as it seems on the surface. God’s law commanded harvesters to be “deliberately careless” — leaving leftovers for poor foreigners. Even in simply receiving what she’s entitled to, Ruth is experiencing the simple benefits of her choice to make Naomi’s God her God (1 v 16).

Read Ruth 2 v 14–16

- *In what way has Boaz exceeded Naomi’s expectations and rights? (v14)*
- *How does Boaz add to God’s basic allowance? (v15–16)*

Ruth’s optimistic outlook and humble hard work are a far cry from Naomi’s self pity of chapter 1. As a result she starts to experience “over-the-top” favour, showing that God doesn’t limit His care for the poor to just survival necessities. It also seems that Boaz is starting to take a shine to Ruth. (Try reading verses 8 and 14 over a romantic movie soundtrack.) God is blessing Ruth by meeting more than her dietary requirements!

GET ON WITH IT

What do you really need? Tell God about it today! Now follow Ruth’s simple action plan, showing you trust God to provide.

1. Think about others too. Who can you work alongside who has the same need? (v2)
2. Be bold but humble. Who can you ask respectfully to help you? (v7)
3. Work hard. What effort can you put in towards your target? (v7)

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Get up and go to page 110.

4 Hold on to hope

What a difference a day makes. What might be different by this time tomorrow? The truth is, whatever you have planned, you really don’t know what’s just around the corner. Are you ready for the unexpected?

Read Ruth 2 v 17–19

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- *Boaz was already impressed by Ruth’s commitment. Which actions show she’s determined and faithful? (v17–18)*
- *What makes Naomi so keen to ask questions about her day?*

THINK IT THROUGH

An ephah was a container big enough to climb into — not bad for one day’s leftovers! But given what we know about God, should we be surprised when he gives more than the bare minimum?

- *How has He gone over the top for you?*

Read Ruth 2 v 19–23

- *Naomi’s excitement explodes when she finds out who’s helping Ruth. What is her view of Boaz’s character?*

- *How does he show the extra-generosity of God? (v21)*
- *What does this offer mean for the two widows?*

Between the ends of chapters 1 and 2 everything has changed. Bitter Naomi can now see a brighter future. It reminds us that with our loving and powerful God there is always hope. If you’re in a hole, today could be the day things turn around.

PRAY ABOUT IT

Is there anything good you’ve given up hoping for? A friend or family member who rejects Jesus? An unfair situation that seems ignored? Bring it back to your Father today, and ask Him for the perseverance that keeps hope alive. (Colossians 1 v 11)

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Hold on for some more — page 111.

5

Comfort vs commitment

How far would you put yourself out for your family? Do someone else's chores? Spend your savings on a gift for them? Marry someone for their benefit???

Read Ruth 3 v 1–9

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *What is Naomi's hope for Ruth? (v1)*
- ▶ *Why do you think Ruth goes along with the scheme?*
- ▶ *Although strange to us, Ruth's request was a clear signal to Boaz. What did it mean? (See Ezekiel 16 v 8 for a clue.)*

Put yourself in ancient Israel. You're male and your married brother dies before having kids of his own. The law says you ought to marry his widow — become her "kinsman redeemer". To us, it might sound unfair, but God wanted His people to imitate His amazing covenant love. Commitment was to matter more than convenience.

Read Ruth 3 v 9–18

- ▶ *What kindness had Ruth already shown? (2 v 11)*
- ▶ *What was her image among the town's men? (3 v 11)*

- ▶ *What freedom did she give up for her family?*

Right back at the start of our story, Ruth refused to opt for an easy life in her homeland. At every stage she has been more concerned with loyalty to Naomi than clinging to her rights. And now that she practically has her pick of eligible men, again she chooses what's best for her family.

Jesus surrendered His freedom in praying "not my will, but yours be done." He calls us to the same attitude. The anguish He felt at Gethsemane reminds us that this is far from easy.

GET ON WITH IT

We are called to put commitment before comfort. In what way might following Christ this week mean giving up time, money, popularity?

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Don't get comfortable, turn to p111.

6

New-look love

What's the most romantic thing imaginable? A candlelit dinner for two? Serenading your loved one by moonlight? An exotic holiday on paradise island? Get ready for a new-look love.

Read Ruth 4 v 1–6

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

- ▶ *Who witnessed Boaz's meeting?*
- ▶ *What was the relative's response to the offer of land? (v4)*
- ▶ *Why did he not want a wife? (v6)*

As we've already seen, Ruth was an attractive proposition! And the relative was not reluctant to buy the land. So why was the idea of marriage a deal breaker? Well, when you sign up as a "kinsman redeemer", your main role is to give the dead man an heir. That means you buy the land, but once you have a son, he gets everything you've paid for. For Ruth's relative, this deal would take a huge chunk away from the inheritance due to his own kids. But Boaz is ready to pay.

Read Ruth 4 v 7–10

- ▶ *What does the custom of removing a sandal signify?*

- ▶ *How would you describe the mood of Boaz's summary speech?*

Becoming a kinsman redeemer costs. Yet Boaz seems to celebrate the deal. His speech says: Ruth is mine and I don't care who knows it!

PRAY ABOUT IT

The Bible's model for a husband's love is the self-giving love of Jesus. Not flowers and chocolates, but the commitment of the cross. Is that the kind of marriage you're aiming for? Ask God to develop in you a love that shows something of His passion.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for sin (1 John 4 v 10).

→ TAKE IT FURTHER

Loving it? Turn to page 111.