

FAMILY HERITAGE



Aim: To examine the spiritual heritage we've received and are passing on to the next generation

Every now and again we read in the newspapers about an old lady who's died and left her fortune to her cat! Perhaps you've been left something interesting in a relative's will – some jewellery, money or an embarrassing record collection. But we don't just leave material possessions when we die, do we? Whether we're rich or poor, we all leave a legacy – the influence we've had on people, the way our values and character have challenged them. What kind of legacy are you leaving?

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'

Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Ruth 4:13-17

TO SET THE SCENE

Imagine you're being featured on the *This is Your Life* programme. The famous red book is about to be opened in front of all your family and friends. What three things do you hope will be emphasised? Choose one character trait, one personal/family achievement and one work/ministry achievement. Share your ideas with the group. You may also want to think about what information you hope won't be disclosed!

READ RUTH 4:11-22

- 1 Why were Rachel, Leah and Perez important figures in Israel's heritage?
- 2 How has Naomi's heritage changed throughout the course of the book?
- 3 Explain how Boaz and Ruth's family heritage had wider implications for the nation of Israel.
- 4 What blessings did the townsfolk pray for Ruth, Boaz and Obed?



5 Look at Paul's prayers to see what we can pray for others:

- ▶ Ephesians 1:15-23
- ▶ Ephesians 3:14-21
- ▶ Philippians 1:3-11
- ▶ Colossians 1:3-14

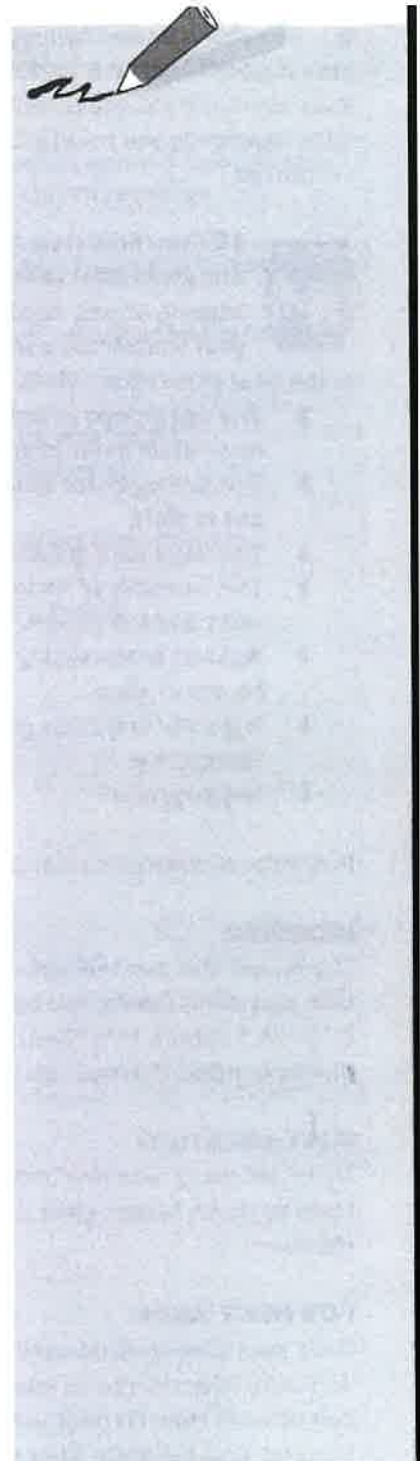
- 6 How do you feel about the fact that God's activity in your family may have wider implications?
 - ▶ How does this help you view your struggles and suffering?
 - ▶ How does this help you view the blessing and prosperity he's given you?



7 Many of us have had difficult family backgrounds that we wouldn't wish to pass on as a heritage to our children. Ruth and Boaz's decisions changed the course of their family history. How can we change the course of ours?



8 Think about your family heritage. What spiritual legacy do you want to pass on to your children? What practical measures can you put in place to make that happen?



9 Whether we have natural children or not, it is always possible to be a spiritual parent. Do you have someone you could mentor in the Christian faith? Someone you could pray a blessing on and encourage?



10 The church is a family. But it is only ever one generation away from extinction. What aspects do you need to work on so that your church has a spiritual legacy to pass on to the next generation? Think about:

- ▶ The age groups or sections of the church that need more input to grow spiritually
- ▶ The strategies for evangelism that need to be put in place
- ▶ The need for a greater emphasis on prayer
- ▶ The necessity of improving communication skills and techniques
- ▶ Aspects of leadership training that need to be put in place
- ▶ A greater emphasis given to teaching and discipleship
- ▶ Anything else?

Pray for your own particular church family.

WORSHIP

Thank God that our heritage and our future are in his hands. Praise him that we are now part of his family. You could meditate on these verses: John 1:12–13, Romans 8:16–17, 1 John 3:1–3. Then, in twos, pray a blessing on each other and on each other's families. Perhaps use Paul's prayers as a starting point.

FURTHER STUDY

There are many excellent books on prayer. For example *How to Pray for Lost Loved Ones* by Dutch Sheets gives some fresh ideas about praying for non-Christian family members.

FOR NEXT WEEK

Trace your own spiritual family tree. Who was your spiritual father or mother, who was most instrumental in leading you to Christ? Can you find out who their spiritual parent was? How far back in the family tree can you go? Thank God that he had his hand on your salvation since the beginning of time.

ACTIVITY PAGE

Christian families need a lot of prayer. Try setting up a special group, prayer triplets or incorporating more prayer for families in your regular church meetings.

Pray through issues that are relevant to your own particular church and community situation. Here are some topics to help you get started:

- ▶ Wisdom to know how to live and share the gospel with unbelieving family members
- ▶ Single parent families in the church
- ▶ Parenting Classes, Tots and Toys groups etc run by your church
- ▶ The families of those heavily involved in church leadership
- ▶ Wisdom for the various stages of parenting
- ▶ Christian young people facing peer pressure at school and university

If you need more resources you could contact Care for the Family.

