



RUTH

A NATIVITY STORY

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



2025 Advent Devotional.

New Community Church of Tacoma | ncctacoma.org

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Breath Prayers are taken from *Breath Prayer Guides* by Bill Gaultiere.



Introduction

Ruth is a nativity story.

When you hear the word *nativity*, you might think of a picture of a stable, a manger, and some cows and camels, or Charlie Brown's attempt at a Christmas play, or handmade Christmas cards depicting the famous Bethlehem scene.

But the word *nativity* comes from the Latin word *nativitas*, which simply means "birth" or "origin."

The little story of Ruth, set in Bethlehem (ever heard of it?), in the Old Testament, is a story of longing for a child and a story of the eventual arrival of one. But it's also a story that leads directly to another birth story, the birth story, about which angels would one day proclaim in Luke 2, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Ruth is also a story that thematically points to the Christmas story. Followers of Jesus have often celebrated Advent (the four Sundays before Christmas) by attaching the words Hope, Love, Joy and Peace to each week.

These four words connect beautifully to the four chapters in Ruth:

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| Hope | Chapter 1 begins in hardship and bitterness, but ends with a new hope. |
| Love | Chapter 2 is about sacrificial kindness, about an unexpected hospitable love, a love that expects nothing in return. |
| Joy | Chapter 3 is the turning point in the story, a “joy to the world” of our three main characters. |
| Peace | Chapter 4 is where things are made whole, put back together again into what in Hebrew is called <i>shalom</i> . And it also leaves us with a foreshadowing of the peace on earth that is to come. |



How To Use This Devotional

This devotional can be used with your CG, with friends or family, or on your own.

There is a set of questions for families with kids and questions for adults (perhaps the ones for kids might be just as helpful for the adults) and also a recommendation for a song or two that pair well with the chapter.

After each reading there is a breath prayer. A breath prayer is nothing mystical, nor is it a mindless repetition of phrases. A breath prayer is “simply a bodily expression for worshiping God and praying. Like raising our hands to the Lord as we sing a praise song or kneeling in prayer, breathing a prayer is an easy and practical way of using our bodies to stay focused and vibrant in our praying” (Bill Gaultiere).

Journey with Ruth to Bethlehem this Christmas season. May you experience unexpected hope, unconditional love, undeniable joy, and unexplainable peace by the grace of our good Lord, of Emmanuel, God with us.



Ruth 1 | Hope

Read Ruth chapter 1 out loud. If you are with friends or family, perhaps assign three readers: the narrator, Naomi, and Ruth.

Read the following out loud. If you have kids present, ask them to try to remember the names of the people and places.

Ruth begins with the line “In the days when the judges ruled.” This is Bible shorthand for saying “things were not great.” Remember how the book of Judges ends: “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). It was the worst of times. It was . . . the worst of times.

The meanings of the names of the places and people in the story reflect the bleakness of the situation.

There's a famine in *Bethlehem*. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” In other words, there was no bread in the house of bread.

Elimelech, the dad of the family, whose name means “My God is King,” ironically seems not to trust God as King. Because of this

famine, he leaves both his community and his place of worship and takes his family to a pagan land called Moab.

Moab means “who is your father?” or in the lingo of today “who’s your daddy!?” This name not only reflects back on the origin of Moab itself, but also becomes a tragically fitting description of what happened to Naomi’s family in Moab—dad dies in the land that he had hoped would rescue his family.

The sons of the family are *Mahlon* and *Chilion*. Their names basically mean “weakling” and “wasting.” It’s not hard to guess where this is going, is it? They also die, leaving two widows behind.

The matriarch, *Naomi*, whose name means “pleasant,” gives herself a nickname: “call me *mara*!” *Mara* means “bitter.” Her life has gone from pleasant to bitter.

Writer Fleming Rutledge has a haunting line in her book on Advent: “advent begins in the dark.” The Christmas season evokes Christmas lights and yuletide fires, but the truth about Christmas is that Jesus, the light of the world, was born into our world because things were bleak, because “the darkness was so great!” (Matt 6:23)



Advent begins in the dark and moves toward the light—but the season should not move too quickly or too glibly, lest we fail to acknowledge the depth of the darkness.

- Fleming Rutledge

Into this bleak situation steps Ruth. *Ruth* means “friend” or “companion.” She tells Naomi that she is sticking with her: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (1:16). Naomi doesn’t see it yet, but Ruth’s commitment to her is an echo of God’s commitment to her.

These two women head back to Bethlehem, “just as the barley harvest was beginning.” Oh! There is bread again in Bethlehem, the house of bread! Despite its dark beginning, chapter one ends with a glimmer of hope.

breath prayer

For an explanation of breath prayers, see How To Use This Devotional at the beginning of the guide.

Psalm 73:26

Lord Jesus Christ . . . Be the strength of my heart . . . And my portion forever . . .

You may simply pray this prayer in your own way or follow the directions below:

- Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, slowly breathing in and out.
- Take a deep breath in.
- As you breathe out slowly, whisper, “Lord Jesus Christ . . .”
- Breathe in as you whisper, “Be the strength of my heart . . .”
- Breathe out as you whisper, “And my portion forever . . .”

Repeat 2-3 times, letting distractions slip away by re-focusing on breathing your prayer.

questions for families

1. How do you think Ruth and Naomi felt on their journey back to Bethlehem?
2. Do you remember what *Bethlehem* means? (“house of bread” and there was no bread there).
3. There were many sad things in the story. What are some sad things around you—things you wish were different?
4. Do you remember what *Ruth* means? (“friend”)
5. Have you ever helped a friend or family member who was sad? What did you do?
6. Do you know of any opportunities for you to be like Ruth, a faithful friend, to someone this Christmas season?

questions for adults

1. In what areas of your life do you long for hope? What feels bitter, broken, or dark? Think personal, family, city, global.
2. In the first few verses of Ruth, God seems completely absent. When have you felt the absence of God in your life?
3. In many psalms, like Psalm 6, 13, 88, etc., the writers lament that things are not the way they are supposed to be, much like Naomi does in Ruth 1:21. What role does lament play in your life?
4. How does the line “Advent begins in the dark” reshape the way you think about Christmas?
5. In what ways have you experienced hope showing up slowly and quietly, like the beginning of barley harvest after a long famine?

song suggestions

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” by John Mason Neale

"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" by Charles Wesley

journal

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Ruth 2 | Love

Read Ruth chapter 2 out loud. If you are with friends or family, perhaps assign four readers: the narrator, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. If you have kids present, ask them to count the acts of love (call it a “Hesed Hunt” if you will.)

Read the following out loud.

When Ruth and Naomi arrive back in Bethlehem, they have nothing. No land, no husband, no retirement plan. They are two widows trying to make it in a man's world.

At the end of chapter one, Naomi exclaims, “I’ve come back empty!” (1:21). But Ruth is standing right beside her. The narrator is subtly pointing to Ruth: “No Naomi, you’re not empty. You have Ruth!”

God seems fairly silent in Ruth. But he is present.

Ruth too is present for Naomi. Upon arrival, Ruth isn’t one to sit around. She heads out to the fields. Notice that Naomi doesn’t.

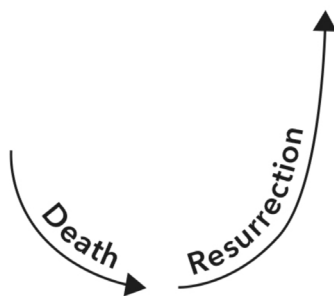
We don't know for sure how old Naomi was—perhaps in her 50s or 60s. She probably wasn't too old to work and could have been in the fields with her daughter-in-law. But Naomi's absence, whatever the reason, doesn't deter Ruth from serving Naomi. The story uses the word *hesed* to describe this one-way love. *Hesed* love is a love that sticks around, serves without conditions, and never gives up.

And as it “just so happens,” Ruth ends up in the field of Boaz, a man whose name means “in him is strength.” Boaz uses his strength, not to domineer over the less strong, but to serve. His first words to Ruth are words of tenderness and care: “my daughter.” He proceeds to offer her protection and provision. His words are stunning, because Ruth is at the very bottom of the social ladder. Ruth has no money, no husband, no résumé. And she's a foreigner. In social media terms, she's unverified with zero followers.

Boaz notices Ruth, not for her looks, but for her loyalty. He's heard how she left everything to care for Naomi. He shows her protection, dignity, and generosity. His love is not romantic (yet); it's *covenantal*.

Both Ruth and Boaz's love look a lot like God's divine Christmas love. Like Ruth, God left his home and moved into our neighborhood (John 1:14). The Christmas story, the gospel itself, is a story of *hesed* love; of love that moves toward the vulnerable, love that gives without calculating the return.

This *hesed*, gospel love follows a specific “shape” or “template.” Paul Miller, in his book on Ruth, *A Loving Life*, illustrates this template with what he calls the “J-Curve.” The gospel story and the story of Ruth both have this shape: down in a dying to self, up with resurrection hope:



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The crucible for love is suffering. Of course, we don't hunt for suffering...but we can't separate suffering from love. So our journey of love has a shape to it—like a J-curve. When we understand this framework, it resets our expectations for what life is like. In *hesed* love we enter into the dying-resurrection life of Jesus.

- Paul Miller

By the end of the day, Ruth has more grain than she could carry, and Naomi, once bitter, begins to sense embers of hope.

Love is the light that begins to push back the darkness. It moves down to raise another up.

As Christina Rossetti wrote in the 1800s:

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.*

breath prayer

For an explanation of breath prayers, see [How To Use This Devotional](#) at the beginning of the guide.

Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23

Immanuel... God is with us...

You may simply pray this prayer in your own way or follow the directions below:

- Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, slowly breathing in and out.
- As you breathe in slowly, whisper, “Immanuel . . .”
- Breathe in as you whisper, “God is with us . . .”

Repeat 2-3 times, letting distractions slip away by re-focusing on breathing your prayer.

questions for families

1. (Hesed Hunt Follow-Up) What act of love stood out to you most in this chapter? Who showed it, and how?
2. When is it hard to love someone without getting something back? How might that kind of love be like Jesus' love for us?
3. How did Naomi's heart start to change by the end of the story? Where have you seen God give hope in the middle of your sadness?
4. Who is someone in your life (a friend, a classmate at school, etc.) that God might be calling you to love and be kind to, even if you don't receive love or kindness in return?

questions for adults

1. Where in your life do you need to receive God's loyal, one-way love right now—perhaps in a place you feel “empty”?
2. God never directly speaks in Ruth 2, yet his presence fills the chapter. How have you experienced God's “hidden” but active presence in your own story?
3. Like Boaz, how can you use your strength or influence to serve someone who has less power or standing? What might “redeeming love” look like in practice this week?

song suggestions

“Love Came Down at Christmas” by Jars of Clay or Shawn Colvin

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” by John Mason Neale

journal

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Ruth 3 | Joy

Read Ruth chapter 3 out loud. If you are with friends or family, perhaps assign four readers: the narrator, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

If you have kids present, every time they hear the word “feet,” have them grab their feet.

Read the following out loud.

Ruth chapter three shows us that *rightly ordered loves* lead us to authentic *joy*. When our loves get disordered, they steal from us the joy we tried to take shortcuts to get to.

The four chapters of Ruth could be titled this way:

- Chapter 1 - Resilient Ruth
- Chapter 2 - Resourceful Ruth
- Chapter 3 - Risky Ruth
- Chapter 4 - Redeemed Ruth

In chapter three we encounter Ruth taking an incredible, seemingly inappropriate risk. It might seem like Ruth is being *risqué*, but she's not. She is, however, being *risky*. Ruth engages in a bold marriage proposal. Instead of asking Boaz out for a dinner at Panera Bethlehem for a barley bowl, Ruth skips the first date stuff and sneaks into Boaz's bedroom at night, asking him to cover her with his cloak, symbolically asking for permanent protection. She's essentially proposing—almost demanding—marriage on her first date!

Ruth's actions are perilous—they could easily have been perceived as inappropriate, ending all hope of anything becoming of her relationship with Boaz and risking her and Naomi's entire future.

However, Boaz sees Ruth's heart of loyalty and responds with integrity. *Their love story is actually rightly ordered*. The narrator makes it clear that this unmarried couple did not act as a married one that night, Ruth only "lodged" in Boaz's bedroom. Boaz is impressed by Ruth, and basically tells her that everyone in town knows she is a gem! Boaz continues to act patiently as he commits to pursuing marriage. Another man in town has first rights to Naomi's family and her land. Boaz does not manipulate the situation to make sure he gets what he wants. Instead, he acts patiently, with integrity, doing all that is in his power, but leaving what's beyond his power to God.

That night, Boaz could have said: "I must have Ruth now!" Or he could have tried to cut corners the next morning to secure her hand. But he doesn't. He chooses the slow, faithful way — the way of *hesed* love — trusting that joy pursued rightly will arrive in God's time.

Boaz's restraint shows that real joy is found not in grasping but in waiting, not in taking but in trusting. He leaves room for God to write the story.

Paul Miller says that “anytime self-will emerges—‘I must have this’—an idol lurks underneath.” An idol is manufactured when our loves get out of order. If we love what we want more than we love and trust God, the author of our story, we’re in for a world of regret.

But when our loves are rightly ordered, expect unadulterated joy! C.S. Lewis says that when our loves are in the correct order, we find joy not only in keeping God first, but also in all the lesser loves themselves:



When I have [learned] to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. In so far as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving toward the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.

- C.S. Lewis

This Christmas season, rejoice in the fact that God put you at the top of his love list and sent his Son to become a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus loves his bride, the church, so much that he didn’t take shortcuts with our redemption — he waited, he obeyed, he laid down his life at the right time (Galatians 4:4-5).

Just as Boaz acted with integrity to redeem Ruth, Jesus became our true Redeemer, doing everything rightly and fully so that we could be his. As Paul writes, “For the joy set before him, he endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2). Part of this joy was pursuing and rescuing you—his

beloved, redeemed bride. Like Boaz, Jesus did not grasp but gave; like Ruth, we are covered by his kindness and brought under his wings.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

breath prayer

For an explanation of breath prayers, see How To Use This Devotional at the beginning of the guide.

Matthew 2:10-11

King Jesus... My joy... I give you my heart...

You may simply pray this prayer in your own way or follow the directions below:

- Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, slowly breathing in and out.
- Breathe in, then breathe and whisper, "King Jesus . . ."
- Breathe in as you whisper, "My joy . . ."
- Breathe out as you whisper, "I give you my heart . . ."

Repeat 2-3 times, letting distractions slip away.

questions for families

1. Kids, when has it been hard for you to wait on something good?
2. Ruth asked Boaz to cover her with his cloak, kind of like how a mother bird would hide her chicks under her wings. How does Jesus cover and protect us today?
3. Why do you think Christmas is called a time of joy? What makes Jesus' birth good news for everyone?

questions for adults

1. What might it look like to “order your loves” rightly this Advent — in relationships, work, or desires — so that joy isn’t stolen by shortcuts?
2. Boaz refuses to manipulate the situation. Where in your life are you being invited to trust God’s timing instead of forcing an outcome?
3. Hebrews 12:2 says that “for the joy set before him, [Jesus] endured the cross.” Part of this joy was pursuing and rescuing *you*. How does that reality change the way you receive Jesus’ love this Christmas?

song suggestions

“Joy to the World” by Phil Wickham or Sufjan Stevens

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” by Charles Wesley

journal

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Ruth 4 | Peace

Read Ruth chapter 4 out loud. If you are with friends or family, perhaps assign these readers: the narrator, Boaz, the other closer kinsman (speaks in vv. 4, 6) and have all the women be the women of Bethlehem (vv. 14-15, 17).

If you have kids present, have them make a peace sign with their fingers every time the baby is mentioned.

Read the following out loud.

The last verse of the Christmas carol “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” speaks of the glorious peaceward trajectory of our weary world:

*For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.*

Though we might at times feel like things are spiraling out of control, the ultimate end of God's story will be "peace on earth." The Bible's word for this kind of peace is *shalom*, a word rich with meaning. It is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of wholeness, harmony, and right relationships. *Everything in its right place.*

After all the heartache and hunger, Ruth 4 gives us a glimpse of *shalom*. Boaz goes to the city gate and with great wisdom takes the steps necessary to become Naomi's redeemer, Ruth's husband, and to restore the family line. Naomi, the woman who once said, "Call me *bitter*," now holds a grandbaby on her knee named Obed. She was once empty, but now her arms are full of chunky baby rolls.

And tucked into this ordinary village birth is the quiet seed of a much greater baby yet to come. Ruth's child becomes the grandfather of David, and from David's line comes Jesus, the *Prince of Peace*!

In Ruth, we see a microcosm of the gospel story: A redeemer acts. The broken are restored. The barren become fruitful. Peace is restored.

The elders at the gate bless Boaz and Ruth, saying, "May your house be like the house of Perez" (Ruth 4:12) — but God's blessing exceeds their imagination. Perez too has a crazy story of wholeness coming after brokenness. Little do the elders know that not only is Perez a great-grandparent to the Messiah, but so are Boaz and Ruth. Through this faithful couple in front of them, God is writing a story that will one day bring true peace to the whole world.

At Christmas, we celebrate the God who brought peace out of chaos in Ruth's story and has done the same, in an even greater way, through Christ. Ephesians 2:14 says that "He himself is our peace."

Jesus, born in that same little Bethlehem, became our true Redeemer. He gives us the peace of being right with God, and then slowly he restores what was lost, repairs what was broken, and brings peace in spite of, and often through, our circumstances. Someday, forever, because of the work of Jesus, everything will once again be whole and in its right place.

So when the angels sing in Luke 2, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace," they are echoing the ending of Ruth. God's quiet redemption has gone cosmic. The angels are proclaiming cosmic Christmas *shalom*!.

We can sing with full confidence in Christ Jesus, our Redeemer:
Peace on the earth, goodwill to men!

breath prayer

For an explanation of breath prayers, see How To Use This Devotional at the beginning of the guide.

John 14:27

Shalom... Not of this world...

You may simply pray this prayer in your own way or follow the directions below:

- Take 2 to 3 deep breaths, slowly breathing in and out.
- Breathe in as you whisper, "Shalom . . ."
- Breathe out as you whisper, "Not of this world . . ."

Repeat 2-3 times, letting distractions slip away by re-focusing on breathing your prayer.

questions for families

1. Kids, how did God turn Naomi's sadness from the beginning of the story into joy and peace at the end?
2. Can you say *shalom*? The word *shalom* means peace, or everything is how it should be. Can you think of anything that is not how it should be that you wish God would fix? Should we pray for that?
3. Boaz rescued Naomi and Ruth by bringing peace into their lives and hope for the future. How is that like what Jesus did for us? Why is Jesus being born in Bethlehem really good news for the whole world?

questions for adults

1. Where have you seen God bring restoration or peace out of something that once felt empty or lost?
2. The Bible's *shalom* means more than quiet—it means wholeness. What might “everything in its right place” look like in your own soul or relationships? Where are you longing for *shalom*?
3. Boaz used his strength to make things right. How can you bring peace and wholeness into situations you influence?
4. Ruth's son leads to David, and David's line leads to Jesus—the Prince of Peace. How does this remind you that God's long plans are trustworthy, even when they unfold slowly? What do you feel, knowing you are invited into peace even as you wait on God's promises to come to fruition?

song suggestion

“It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” by Drew and Ellie Holcomb or
Shane and Shane

journal

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