

Christmas Devotional Ideas

Hello Salt Church family! Thank you for joining us for a special devotional this holiday season. We invite you to use this guide as a way to reflect on the trials you have encountered this past year, acknowledging God's faithfulness in those trials, and to look forward to a New year with potentially different challenges but the same God who walks beside us. Please feel the freedom to tweak or elaborate on certain parts as desired.

Devotional Instructions

This devotional, based on Daniel 3, has three parts, or "sections." Each section, we believe, will highlight an underlying truth that we can easily miss at first glance. In part, this devotional is based on the book *Faithful in the Fire* by JD Greear, which partly focuses on the story of the three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were cast into a furnace of blazing fire for their faith but were still FAITHFUL in the FIRE. As this devotional does involve reflection on past trials and anticipation for future provision, we encourage you to go through it with those who are likely most acquainted with the ups and downs of your life: your family. So, we encourage you to pull in your spouse, parents, children, and grandchildren. We hope this serves as a means to meditate on the faith that God is calling all of us to have as we reorient our eyes towards Him — the One Who we expect to walk ahead of us as we step into a New Year.

Devotional Instructions for the facilitator

Starting from the section below, you can read it as it is. We encourage you to ask all the participants to answer the questions. Occasionally lead out in answering them and also leave room for others to open up. Please encourage everyone to take turns in sections of prayer. There will be occasional **facilitator notes in red** which do not need to be read out loud but are just directions that will help you steer the devotional. Thank you for facilitating!

Our Faith as we step into a New Year

Scripture focus: Daniel 3 (main focus verses 17-18)

Let's start by worshiping our God in song. Feel free to find the following songs on Spotify or YouTube and sing along.

Suggestions:

- Here Again by Elevation Worship
- Who is like the Lord by Highlands Worship
- O Come to the Altar by Elevation Worship

Let's continue in prayer. Ask God to calm your thoughts and all the noise and chaos in your minds. Ask Him to bring you to your knees, to fill you with His Spirit, and to give you all you are eager to receive from Him.

Before we read through our passage today, let's give it a little color. We pick up our story from this passage at a point where the Hebrews are in exile in Babylon under a king who wants nothing to do with worshiping the LORD. Babylon is a place plagued by idolatry and challenges. But even in this grim and corrupt place, not all had turned from the true God. In our passage, we'll see three faithful Hebrew boys persevering through these challenges and, ultimately, face the greatest challenge of them all. Will they abandon the LORD to save their lives and live at peace or will they go to their deaths in faith-filled worship?

Let's read Daniel 3:1-23.

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue, ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to assemble the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces to attend the dedication of the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces assembled for the dedication of the statue the king had set up. Then they stood before the statue Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 A herald loudly proclaimed, "People of every nation and language, you are commanded: 5 When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall facedown and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 But whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire."

7 Therefore, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and every kind of music, people of every nation and language fell down and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever. 10 You as king have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music must fall down and worship the gold statue. 11 Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12 There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar asked them, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? 15 Now if you’re ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don’t worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. 17 If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. 18 But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.”

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, 20 and he commanded some of the best soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21 So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes, were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. 22 Since the king’s command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, demands the worship of his idol. Should anyone disobey, he has declared the penalty to be death. The easiest thing to do is submit without a fight, especially in light of such consequences. It appears there is no way out. But in a tremendous display of faith, the 3 young boys say something that most would consider foolish, and all would see as dangerous.

Let’s read the verses which will be our main focus: 17-18

“17 If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. 18 But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.”

We make little compromises in our daily life. Little things that probably don’t affect anything in the grand calculus of this universe. But what do we do when it comes to trials that threaten our financial security or family? Time and time again, we see people go into survival mode and make reckless and questionable choices. When we face trials that are crippling us and are forcing us to make choices that we have always believed that we will never make, what do we do? As a Christ

follower, do we compromise on who we are? Do we compromise on who God calls us to be? How can we stand up in faith and show COURAGE in the face of such trials? What does that courage look like?

In light of this passage, JD Greear said that Christian courage does three things. Christian courage —

- Believes that God can
- Expects that God will
- Trusts Him even if He doesn't

The Bible consistently points the Christ follower towards being courageous. God encouraged Joshua to *“Be strong and courageous”* (Joshua 1:6) as He called him to lead His people into the Promised Land, where they would be encountering new trials. And JD Greear, here points us to that very same courage. So let's break down each of them and answer a few questions.

We believe that God can

Read verse 17 and let's answer these two questions.

If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king.

- Something about the God they served made the Hebrew boys absolutely sure that their God could rescue them. What could it be?
- What about our God makes YOU believe that He can?

Leave room for open conversation, maybe even tangents but steer the conversation ultimately in this direction: Our God is the eternal Creator. He has made all things and He is always in control. He presents Himself as a Promise maker and Promise keeper. He is generous. He desires to make us like Him. He can because that's who He is.

We expect that God will

Let's focus between the verses. At the end of verse 17, if we waited and thought for long enough, we will come to a great realisation. The boys didn't know if God would save them. God did not give them any vision or confirmation. There was no dream or angel from the Lord or vision that made them confident of their rescue. Yet, they went all in and put their lives on the line. Do you wonder why?

The Hebrew boys expected that their God would because their God did in the past when they asked. Their lives were marked by God's faithfulness and if you went back to the chapters prior to this, you can see how God had come through for them in their trials. And the easiest parallel to make for us is to ask, "How has God come through for us?" Let us look back at this past year and ask God to remind us of the things that we prayed for and the ways He answered us.

- How has God answered you over the last year? What did you ask God for and how did He come through?

Encourage everyone to answer

As a Christ follower, our courage looks different than that of the world. Our God is strong and He is our strength. And that's the reason the psalmist calls the LORD, El Sali (The LORD is my strength). And we draw courage from this Strength by remembering how He stood strong with us in our trials. He came through for us in our past. He stood by our side giving us strength and courage in the past, so that we can not only win those battles but also recount those times to stand firm in the present.

Let's stop and pray. (Ask everyone to close their eyes and pray a prayer of Thanksgiving to the Lord. Thank Him for the way He came through for you in times that you didn't know what to do, in battles that made you feel defeated and in trials where you saw no way out. Then ask God to help you recount those times and enable you to stand faithfully and firmly through the trials of the present.)

Prayer prompts:

1. Thank Him for the way He came through for you over the last year.
2. Ask Him to help you remind yourself of His acts of faithfulness so that you can draw courage in your present trials.

We trust Him even if He doesn't

Let's read verse 18.

But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.

The courage we talked about in the last two sections already looks unbelievable. It stretches our imagination. But to cement the kind of courage they had, the Hebrew boys finally acknowledge something that they haven't yet. They bring up the case of a failed expectation. They acknowledge the scenario where God wouldn't rescue them. Their courage was marked by a trust

that went beyond their fear of death. An unprecedented courage that only belongs in the books of fantasy, was brought to life. A courage that trusts their God beyond the rescue. A courage that trusts their God beyond the uncertainty of life. And a courage that trusts their God beyond death. Let's stop and dwell on this for a few seconds.

- The Hebrew boys found peace in the uncertainty that their God might not show up in the way they were expecting Him to; even if it meant death. How is this possible?
- What prayers this year did God not answer the way you wanted Him to or has not chosen to grant at this time?

Encourage everyone to answer

Our trust in God is marked by the peace we have in the uncertainties. The kind of courage that we need to cultivate is one based on trust in God - trust that God knows what is best for us, even if He doesn't answer in the timing or manner we so eagerly desire.

Let's pray. *(Ask everyone to close their eyes and speak this over them and jump into prayer.)* Use this time of prayer to offer yourself to God. He wants all of you. The times you stood up and trusted and also the times you failed to trust Him. Bring them all to Him and ask Him to transform your thoughts. Even in the prayers that He has not answered the way you expected Him to, ask Him to give you COURAGE that helps you trust Him.

Let's finish the story and spend some time looking forward to what lies ahead for us. Let's see how the story ends. Read verse 24-30.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?"

"Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king.

25 He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called,

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!" So

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. 27 When the satraps, prefects,

governors, and the king's advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the

bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there

was no smell of fire on them. 28 Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Praise to the God of Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They

violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except

their own God. 29 Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who

says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this.” 30 Then the king rewarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

God came through. The Hebrew boys were rescued from the furnace of blazing fire. And He didn't just rescue them from afar. He was with them in the fire. In doing so, He showed them that they were not alone. And ultimately God glorified Himself. We see king Nebuchadnezzar exclaim *“Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him.”*

Our trust in times of trial and suffering, are a witness to who our God is. Even a king who was blinded by idolatry of self and challenged the might of the Living God (verse 15), ended up praising the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. That's who OUR God is. A God who rescues us from the fire, is with us in the fire and who will bring His purposes to completion by glorifying Himself. He parts the ocean when we think the only way out is through the enemy's forces. He uses a shepherd boy to save His people when the king is too terrified to face a giant. And He opens up the most miraculous way to bring about the salvation of His people by sending His Son to die on a cross to defeat sin and death. Not stopping at that, He gives them eternal life all to bring glory to His name. He always is with us in our trial.

We believe our God can because of who He is. We expect that our God will because of what He did. And we trust Him even if He doesn't because He has already met our greatest need in Christ and will in the end *work all things for the good of those who love Him* (Romans: 8:28, added emphasis).

In light of this, let's answer these last few questions and pray for each other.

Prayer prompts:

1. How can you grow more in believing that our God can?
2. What are you expecting God to do as we step into this New Year?
3. How is God currently calling you to trust Him?

Feel free to close out in worshiping the Lord with any of the following songs.

- Another in the Fire (Hillsong United)
- Same God (Elevation Worship)
- Bigger than I Thought (Passion)