Devotional Accountability:

How effectively were you able to pull some practical applications out of the devotional passages? Were you able to apply anything to your life this past week?

STUDYING NARRATIVE PASSAGES

Every story is in the Bible for a reason; there is some truth or principle God desires to convey to us about how to live in relationship with him. Unfortunately however, it is easy to read a story, enjoy it, and be intrigued by it, but make no application to our own lives. This study will encourage you to slow down and consider the truths embedded in the story. They are so important that God had these stories included in scripture for all time. Some stories may require deeper digging than others to gain insight, but all stories in the Bible are important for you.

The Fiery Furnace
Daniel 3:1-30 (NIV)

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down
and worship the image I made, very good. **But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace.** Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. **If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.** But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

19 **Then** Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. **So** these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 **The king's command was so urgent and** the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 **and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.**

24 **Then** King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, O king."

25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

**So** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

28 **Then** Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. **Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.**"

30 **Then** the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

**PRIORITY OF CONTEXT**

**What do you know about the context of this story that will help you understand all that is going on?**

**Who is Nebuchadnezzar?** (Daniel 1:1-2; 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36)

Nebuchadnezzar has become king of Babylon and has carried a ruthless campaign to expand his territorial rule. He is an incredibly effective and tactical ruler who inspires fear in those around him, and during his reign, his empire becomes the most powerful on earth at the time.
Where does this story take place? (Daniel 3:1)
The present story takes place in Babylon, on the plain of Dura.

Who are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and why are they in Babylon?
(Daniel 1:3-7; 1:19-20; 2:49)
These men were among the young nobility from Israel that Nebuchadnezzar had transported back to Babylon to serve in the king’s court. During their time there, God blessed them and promoted them to be provincial administrators over the province of Babylon. Though they were taken away as captives, they now serve Nebuchadnezzar faithfully in the duties assigned to them and they have proven themselves to be wise and effective in their positions.

What do you think is Nebuchadnezzar’s intent for having all people worship the golden obelisk?
Nebuchadnezzar has expanded his kingdom, enveloping people from many nations. Nebuchadnezzar’s strategy for unifying his nation was to create one culture from the many he conquered. When he conquered Israel, he brought the best of the nobility to Babylon to help strengthen his kingdom. In the process of doing so, he gave them Babylonian names, he expected them to learn the language, learn the culture, embrace the food, and now embrace the new religion. By rallying everyone around one object of worship, he hoped to prevent tension between varying beliefs and bring everyone under one spiritual umbrella. If he can get everyone worshipping the same image, it would be much easier to maintain peace and control in his empire.

This is in contrast to the Roman Empire which allowed nations to keep their own cultures, language and religions as a means to maintain peace. This was permitted as long as they ultimately submitted to Rome’s authority and paid their taxes.

Why would the Israelites refuse to worship the golden image?
Their faith was in the Living God who commanded them to not worship any other god, image, or idol. 
(Exodus 20:3-5)

HELPFUL WORDS
Read through the passage again on your own and underline all the small words that you think help shape the flow of the story.

Teacher note: Some sample words are underlined in your passage. These are not all the helpful small words and different people will see different words carrying varying impact. Simply encourage them to find words that they believe help make the passage clearer in its structure.

This passage contains many words such as: but, if, then, so, therefore, etc.
These words are extremely helpful as they separate a two contrasting or related ideas. Spend some time discussing what comes before and after each of these words to understand what Daniel is trying to communicate.

FLOW OF THE STORY
As a group, outline the flow of the story with its sub-points.
Teachers: Write the BOLDED outline for all to see as they share their ideas. The sub-points merely give greater understanding of the main point. They may choose to define their main points differently and that is great. The idea here is to think through the flow of the story.

- **King Nebuchadnezzar sets up a statue of gold to be worshipped by all officials**
  - Gold Statue: 60 cubits high x 6 cubits wide (for more in-depth research study the Babylonian numbering system to see the value of “6”).
  - Set on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.
  - Leaders: Satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all other officials.
  - Everyone is to bow down and worship when they hear the sound of the instruments (horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and all kinds of music).
  - Consequence for not bowing down and worshipping: thrown into a fiery furnace.
  - When the time came all people of every nation and language bowed down and worshipped.

- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down and worship the image**
  - Astrologers denounced these men to King Nebuchadnezzar
  - They accuse them of:
    - paying no attention to the king.
    - Not serving the king’s god.
    - Not worshipping the image of gold Nebuchadnezzar erected.

- **Nebuchadnezzar confronts and threatens the men**
  - Confronts them to discover the truth of the situation.
  - Re-establishes the expectations of worshipping the image.
  - Clarifies the consequence for disobedience – the furnace
  - Questions the power of any God to intervene against his power.  
    (Reminiscent of Pharaoh and Moses, Exodus 5:2)

- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respectfully stand firm in their obedience to God**
  - We do not need to defend ourselves in this matter.
  - God is able to save us from the fire; God will rescue us from your hand.
  - Even if God does not rescue us, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold.

- **Nebuchadnezzar sends them to the furnace**
  - His attitude toward them changed
  - Ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter
Commanded strongest soldiers to bind the Israelites with their robes, trousers, turbans, etc.
- Command urgently carried out, soldiers themselves killed by the flames.
- Israelites fell into the fire securely tied.

**God rescues the men**
- King watches and leaps to his feet when he sees four men walking in the fire, unbound, unharmed.
- Clarifies the number of men thrown into the fire.
- Fourth man looks like the son of the gods.
- Nebuchadnezzar calls the servants of the Most High God from the fire.
- All administrators crowd around them.
- Witness no harm done, no hair singed, no smell of fire on them.

**Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation**
- Praise be to God who rescued his servants.
- They were willing to defy the king and give up their lives for their God.
- Decree that no one speak anything against the God of the Jews.
- Consequence for doing so: cut to pieces and houses destroyed.
- Promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in province of Babylon.

**KEY IDEAS and What are some key statements in the flow of this story?**

15 But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

28 Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

**FINDING THE PRINCIPLES**

Most of us are not going to find ourselves in a situation where we have to either bow down to a 90 foot image of gold or be thrown into a fiery furnace. To make the story meaningful, we need to find the principles at work that transcend all time and relate to us in our present lives.
Look at the main events of the story and try to consider what principle is at work. Summarize the principle in the space provided.

The principles listed here are merely examples to help spur thinking. Your students may come up with better principles. The only goal is that the principles flow from the narrative and relate to each other to create one over-riding message.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Nebuchadnezzar sets up a statue of gold to be worshipped by all officials.</td>
<td>There are times when we will be pressured by our culture, or individuals, to do what we know is wrong.</td>
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<td>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down and worship the image</td>
<td>We need to make a decision as to how we will respond.</td>
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<td>Nebuchadnezzar furiously confronts the men and threatens them</td>
<td>When we take a stand for what is right, we can expect increased pressure to submit.</td>
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<td>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respectfully stand firm in their obedience to God</td>
<td>Godly people stand firm in their faith even if it will cost them their lives.</td>
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<td>Nebuchadnezzar furiously sends them to the furnace</td>
<td>We cannot expect people to respect the stand that we take.</td>
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<td>God rescues the men</td>
<td>God will provide for his people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation</td>
<td>God will glorify his name</td>
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THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE STORY

In one sentence, write out what you believe to be the main message of the story. Once this is done, have everyone share their main message sentence.

Example: When pressure comes to deny God, stand firm in your faith, and he will glorify his name through you.

APPLICATION

What ways can you see the above principle being practical for our life circumstances? Life application must be very specific. Often people will simply restate a principle and call it application. For instance, working from the above passage, one might be tempted to say, “When temptation comes I will choose to stand firm.” That is merely rephrasing the principle, but doesn’t give any practical application whatsoever. Practical application most effectively occurs when we can immediately apply it to our lives.

Example: At work, my boss is telling me to adjust the books in such a way I know is wrong. He says that if I don’t do it I will be fired. I will choose to do what is right and risk being fired.

Can you share with the group any current situations where this principle can be applied? Or, can you see how this would have applied to a past situation?

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
James 1:22 (NIV)

For your devotional times, read a story provided or one of your own choosing. Spend one day determining the context and the flow of the story. Spend the next day considering the principles at work and how they can relate to your life in practical ways.

The following devotionals are additional ones you can use to help you see the bigger picture of a story.
PASSAGE 1

David and Mephibosheth
2 Samuel 9:1-13 (NIV)

THE MESSAGE

Some context passages you might want to read:
- David and Jonathan are deeply, close friends (1 Samuel 19-20)
- Saul, king of Israel, and his son Jonathan are killed in battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 31)
- Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth, is crippled when the nurse fled and fell with him after Jonathan’s death. (2 Samuel 4)
- David becomes king in the south, over Judah (2 Samuel 2)
- War continues between David in the south and Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, in the north (2 Samuel 3)
- David has peace with the nations around him (2 Samuel 7)

What is the flow of the story?

What are the tensions in this story?

Which person in the story do you most relate to and why?

What does God want to say to you through this story about your walk with him?
### PASSAGE 2

**David Anointed King**  
*1 Samuel 16:1-13*

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<td>Can you relate to Samuel’s initial bias?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How often might you miss what God is doing because you look at the external appearances?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howe can you apply this story to your life?</td>
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PASSAGE 3

Ananias and Sapphira
Acts 5:1-11

THE MESSAGE

What is the context?

What is the tension in the story?

How does the story flow?

How does the tension resolve?

What is the main principle that God wants you to understand from this passage?

With which character do you identify?