



Listening to the Voice of God

Listening to the Voice of the Congregation

Listening to the Voice of the Leadership



Welcome to L3 Discernment

This part of our discernment tunes our spirits to listen to the Spirit by word and prayer. By

- » Imagining what it looks like for God's sacred family (the church) living its faith before the world
- » Focusing on a rhythm of Pray/Listen/Connect
- » Forming a central part of our discernment process
- » Revealing that steps toward being a dynamic church are rooted in prayer and empowered by God's Spirit

The L3 guide covers 4 days. We encourage you to use this guide as best fits your congregation's life.

*For more information please email [Church Leadership Center](mailto:larry@ChurchLeadershipCenter.org) or call/text 616.540.1444.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 2.7



L3 Basics

Pray|Reflect|Connect

This prayer guide follows a threefold pattern for each of the seven churches:

- Pray: **On day one**, there is a short meditation with prayer ideas. Along with this are thoughts to carry with you through the day keeping you aware of ways God may be speaking to you.
- Reflect: **Each following day** there is an opportunity to write down insights from the prior day followed with the meditation and ways to stay aware of God's presence during the day.
- Connect: **The last discernment** is done by the entire group at our gathering. The desire is to hear as a community what the Spirit is saying to your congregation.

A Very Important First Step

We often have in mind what we think is best for the congregation. Our perspective on our congregation can keep us from seeing:

- other perspectives
- other possibilities
- a bigger vision
- different ways of doing things

The goal in this season of prayer is to be as open as possible to Word and Spirit so we practice something called "holy indifference." We seek to be indifferent to anything but God's heart and will as we hear it in Word and prayer.

One way to do this is to write down those things about which you are already sure. Things like:

- what's important for our congregation
- the direction we need to go
- the best way to our future
- what needs to happen in a particular program
- who needs to do the work

Keep this paper close by when you pray. Promise God that you will listen to his voice and put aside your own perspective during this time of prayerful discernment.

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Day One

Imagine

Being a Picture:

God's sacred family (the church) brings God glory by being a picture to the world of how a community lives the ways of God's shalom*.

Text: Ephesians 3:9-10

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ephesians 3:10-11 NIV11)

Meditation

Paul's words in Ephesians continue to catch us off guard. He says something so unexpected and stunning that we cannot imagine it to be true. Paul tells the church that when God wants to show the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms what he is doing in the world, they should look at the church. The church is the picture of his work, vision, and direction for the world.

In Ephesians, God's picture shows all things united in Christ (Ephesians 1.9-10). Paul illustrates this picture by the life of God's new people, where two people come together to form a new community. (See Ephesians 2).

God's call to his church is always to display his work to the world in the way they do life together. This work is displayed in unity of purpose, living the "one another" passages of the New Testament, working through differences, creating just systems and structures (see Acts 6), and more.

Imagine being God's sacred family that brings him glory by being a picture to the world of how a community lives the ways of God's shalom.

*Shalom is a rich biblical world woven into the scriptures. In our Bibles, it is often translated as "peace." However, it is so much more than how western people think of peace. Shalom is the Father's restoration of all things through Christ to the glory of God and for the good of the world. Shalom is the way things are supposed to be.

Prayer Ideas

- open our ears to hear the Spirit
- let us hear your pleasure in what we do
- let us hear your imagination for our being a picture before the world
- give us a holy imagination

Daily Reflections

(keeping our eyes, heart, and spirit open during the day)

- How did you reflect on being a picture of God's sacred family during the day?
- Where did you experience being supported by the congregation in your day?
- Were there moments when God gave you insight into how your congregation could pursue being a picture of living God's way before the world?

Holy Indifference

What is your normal response to the idea of shalom? How can you suspend that response to build a holy imagination?

- Note: For more on shalom, see the last page of this prayer guide.

A Fresh Future

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Day Two

Imagine

Being a Foretaste:

God's sacred family (the church) brings God glory by giving the world a taste of God's shalom of which Mary sings (Luke 1.46-56), Jesus declares (Luke 4.16-19; Matthew 5-7, Matthew 25), and the Scriptures display (Isaiah 9, 11, 60, 61, Revelation 4-5, 21-22).

Text: Luke 4.16-19

"[Jesus] went to Nazareth... and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue... He stood up to read...: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:16-19 NIV11)

Meditation

Jesus comes to his hometown and speaks the word of Isaiah but not before others have spoken in the book of Luke.

There have already been three strong voices in Luke's gospel that have sounded a particular chord. Mary declares in her Magnificat that God will bring down the mighty from their thrones and lift up the humble, that he would send the rich away empty but fill the hungry with good things. John the Baptist's dad, Zechariah, declares that God will redeem his people and save them from the hands of their enemies and all who hate them. At the birth of Jesus, the angelic army's words declare, "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace among men on whom his favor rests." This heavenly host looking at the world, its brokenness, and its desperate state, declare God is coming into the world to war against all that has gone wrong.

Then Jesus comes to his hometown. He speaks a very popular, hopeful passage. Speaks the passage--sort of. Jesus cuts Isaiah 61 short, ignoring a part about God's vengeance. Then he adds words from Isaiah 58 about releasing the oppressed. Isaiah 58 is the great passage that speaks of the kind of fast God wants, where the hungry are fed, the captives are released, and the chains of injustice are broken.

Jesus declares what the kingdom will be like. In the declaration, he calls his followers to join him in giving the world a taste of God's shalom wherever they are.

Reflect

What were a couple of things that caught your attention since you prayed yesterday?

How has God or how might God deepen your desire for your congregation to be a picture to the world of God's shalom?

Prayer Ideas

- open our ears to hear the Spirit
- let us hear your pleasure in what we do
- let us hear your imagination for giving a foretaste of shalom to the world
- give us a holy imagination

Daily Reflections

(keeping our eyes, heart, and spirit open during the day)

- How did you reflect on being a foretaste during the day?
- Where did you experience a foretaste of God's shalom today?
- Were there moments when God gave you insight into how your congregation could be a foretaste?

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Day Three

Imagine

Being a Scout:

God's sacred family (the church) discovers where God displays his glory and shalom and joins him.

Text: Luke 2

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. (Luke 2:8-15 NIV)

Meditation

God is at work bringing the great turning point of the ages. A savior is born who is the Messiah, the Lord—but no one notices. No one notices until the heavenly hosts fill the sky, telling the good news to the shepherds. The shepherds seeing and hearing about God at work can't sit still; they must go and see what God is doing. They must see how God brings peace (shalom) into the world. When they know what God is doing, their response is to give God praise and glory and to tell others.

The reality is that God is always going before us. God is at work. He sets the table, prepares the land, works in people's hearts, and more. Part of our faith life is discovering where God is at work. We then discern the gifts, skills, and passions of our congregation to know when to join him in that work. Sometimes that work will stretch us. Sometimes that work will call forth a new love. Sometimes that work will be so hard that we find no choice but to rest entirely on God.

But whatever that work is, when we see God at work and join him there, we return from that work, giving God praise and glory and telling others what God has done.

Reflect

What were a couple of things that caught your attention since you prayed yesterday?

How has God or how might God deepen your desire for your congregation to be a foretaste to the world of God's shalom?

Prayer Ideas

- open our ears to hear the Spirit
- let us hear your pleasure in what we do
- let us hear your imagination for being scouts in the world
- give us a holy imagination

Daily Reflections

(keeping our eyes, heart, and spirit open during the day)

- How did you reflect on being a scout seeing where God is at work?
- When have you experienced your church acting as scouts?
- Were there moments when God gave you insight into how your congregation could be scouts in the world?

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Day Four

Imagine

Being an Ambassador:

God's sacred family (the church) serves as God's representatives in every area of life, bringing glory to him, bringing shalom, and declaring to all "be reconciled to God" (Habakkuk 2.14, Colossians 1.15-20, 2 Corinthians. 4.6, 5 and 1 Corinthians 10.31, 15.58).

Text: 2 Corinthians 5.16-20

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (Corinthians 2) " NIV11 20-5:16)

Meditation

Paul presents us with this amazing calling, namely being ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is "an official envoy, especially a diplomatic agent of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign as the resident representative of his or her own government or sovereign or appointed for a special diplomatic assignment."

We are ambassadors for his story in word and in deed becoming a public demonstration of the gospel:

- We are messengers of the gospel in our daily lives
- We model godly character everywhere we go
- We mold the culture of our workplace and neighborhood
- We minister grace and love
- We are a spokesperson for truth and justice
- We do good work*

We recognize that all of our life is to be a testimony to God's grace and his desire to reclaim the lost as his people and the world as his kingdom.

*adapted from Imagine Church by Neil Hudson

Reflect

What were a couple of things that caught your attention since you prayed yesterday?

How has God or how might God deepen your desire for your congregation to be a scout in the world of God's shalom?

Prayer Ideas

- open our ears to hear the Spirit
- let us hear your pleasure in what we do
- let us hear your imagination for being ambassadors in every area of life
- give us a holy imagination

Daily Reflections

(keeping our eyes, heart, and spirit open during the day)

- How did you reflect on being an ambassador?
- When have you experienced your church acting as ambassadors?
- Were there moments when God gave you insight into how your congregation could be ambassadors?

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Reflect

What were a couple of things that caught your attention since you prayed yesterday?

How has God or how might God deepen your desire for your congregation to be a scout in the world of God's shalom?

Group Reflection

The final part of our prayerful reflection is group reflection. We will do this when we gather for our time together.

A Bit More on Shalom

We cannot overemphasize the richness of shalom. Shalom touches every nook and cranny of God's creation. Shalom touches every part of life and every part of the life of the individual. Here is a more encompassing picture of shalom.

Shalom is about God restoring the cosmos and the ruin of our fall.

- Shalom is God reconciling all things back to himself through Jesus. Shalom is a restored relationship between God and humankind.
- As God brings his restoration, he calls his people to participate in this restoration. The result is healing the rift between nations and beating our swords into plowshares. We see leaders and countries that end oppression and that lift up the poor. We see the repair of broken systems worldwide, and we live together in the beloved community.
- Shalom is unmistakably beautiful. (E.g., Isaiah 9, 11, and 25)
- As God works, shalom brings human flourishing, a flourishing creation, holiness, and justice.
- Shalom speaks to relational wholeness in families, between genders, in and between congregations, denominations, and ethnic groups.
- Shalom is more than the absence of conflict or having individual inner calm. Shalom is about having a restored relationship with our Creator through Jesus the Messiah and knowing the joy of being deeply loved by God,
- God's shalom calls each of us individually and together as a community to find our place in this vision of shalom.