

Take-Home for Session 1: All Wisdom Comes from the Lord

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- We met Jesus Ben Sira, a scribe teaching in Jerusalem around 200 to 175 BC, and his grandson, who translated the book into Greek in Egypt after 132 BC and left us the only translator's preface in the Bible.
- All wisdom comes from the Lord (1:1). It is a gift given to those who love and obey him, not a trophy for the clever.
- The fear of the Lord is wisdom's beginning, root, fullness, and crown, and Ben Sira pairs it with gladness, joy, and long life. It matures, by grace, into the loving reverence of a child for a good father: awe that draws near rather than terror that flees.
- The book left us with open questions we will carry forward, including one you have sealed in the box below.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine opens his *Confessions* with the insight that frames this whole study: God has made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in him. The search for wisdom is finally a search for God, and it begins when we stop pretending we are its source.

Confessions, Book I, 1 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas distinguishes servile fear, which dreads punishment, from filial fear, which dreads being separated from the Father we love. Even imperfect fear, he teaches, can begin a soul's movement toward wisdom, and filial fear belongs to wisdom's flowering: fear matures alongside love rather than shrinking as love grows.

Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 19 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Francis de Sales

Francis insisted that the pursuit of wisdom and devotion is not reserved for monks and priests. Every state of life, the soldier, the tradesman, the married person, can and must seek holiness where it stands. Ben Sira, teaching ordinary learners the way of wisdom in daily life, breathes the same conviction.

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Each day this week, before you open your phone in the morning, pray one sentence: Lord, give me the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom.

- Write your sealed My Guess answer on the Take-Home sheet and bring it back every week without showing anyone.
- Read the Prologue and Sirach 1 once more on your own, slowly, and underline every word connected to joy or gladness. Count them.

Scripture Memory Verse

"To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; she is created with the faithful in the womb." (**Sirach 1:14**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 2 (it is short, 18 verses). Read it twice.

Catechism References

CCC 105-108; CCC 120; CCC 1831

MY GUESS (sealed until Session 8)

Who or what do you think Wisdom really is in this book? Write your answer below, show no one, and bring this sheet back every week.

Take-Home for Session 2: Prepare Yourself for Temptation

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Ben Sira's honest recruiting pitch: if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation (2:1). Trial is the normal companion of discipleship, not a sign of God's absence.
- Gold is tested in fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation (2:5). Fire refines gold; trials received in faith purify rather than destroy.
- Three anchors for the tested: wait for his mercy, trust in him, hope for good things (2:7-9), backed by history's cross-examination: who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame? (2:10).
- We discovered Jesus living the pattern: baptized and declared beloved Son, then led straight into the wilderness to be tempted (Matthew 3:16-4:1). The Master walked the road first.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Anthony of the Desert

The father of monks, according to the sayings handed down from the Egyptian desert, taught that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven untested, and that we should expect temptation to our last breath. His sayings echo the realism of Sirach 2:1: temptation is the job description of anyone serious about God.

Traditional sayings of the Desert Fathers associated with St. Anthony (Apophthegmata Patrum tradition, paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Teresa of Ávila

Teresa, who endured decades of dryness and opposition, counseled her sisters that patience obtains everything, that God does not change, and that whoever has God lacks nothing. Her famous bookmark prayer is Sirach 2:6 (trust in him, and he will help you) lived out over a lifetime.

The bookmark prayer found in her breviary, traditionally attributed to St. Teresa (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: Thomas à Kempis

The Imitation of Christ teaches that no one is so perfect as to be beyond temptation, and that trials are useful because they humble, purify, and instruct us. Fire tests iron, he writes, and temptation tests the just man. The thought is Sirach 2:5 handed on across some sixteen centuries.

The Imitation of Christ, Book I, ch. 13 (traditionally attributed to Thomas à Kempis, paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Memorize the memory verse cold. It is the title of our whole study; you will use it for the rest of your life.
- Take the trial you named in the Send question and write one prayer at the top of a journal page: Lord, use this furnace to refine me. Under it, each day this week, write one line about what God might be burning off.

- Pray the last petitions of the Our Father slowly each night (lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil), remembering that the Greek of Sirach 2:1 uses peirasmós, the same word family as this petition.

Scripture Memory Verse

"My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation." (**Sirach 2:1**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 3:1-16 and 3:17-31, and notice which two very different topics the chapter joins.

Catechism References

CCC 2846-2849; CCC 164-165

Take-Home for Session 3: Honor, Humility, and the Fire That Water Quenches

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Honoring father and mother sits at the hinge of the Ten Commandments, and Scripture attaches astonishing weight to it: atonement, treasure, answered prayer, long life (3:3-6), and a special summons to patience with a parent whose mind fails in old age (3:12-16).
- Humility is accurate self-knowledge before God, not self-hatred: the greater you are, the more you must humble yourself, and the humble are loved (3:17-18).
- We searched Scripture's whole witness on almsgiving atones for sin (3:30), with 1 Peter 4:8, Daniel 4:27, Luke 11:41, and Matthew 25, and found the Catholic order: Christ alone objectively atones; grace forgives through repentance and the sacraments; and almsgiving born of grace applies the fruits of the Cross as charity, satisfaction, and penance, like a branch bearing the vine's fruit (John 15:5).
- The closed hand and the hard heart are one disease; honor, humility, and mercy are one cure.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyprian of Carthage

Writing around AD 253, Cyprian composed an entire treatise on works and almsgiving in which he directly quotes Sirach 3:30, teaching that as water extinguishes fire, so almsgiving extinguishes sin. For Cyprian, baptism washes away past sins once, and Spirit-prompted mercy keeps the baptized clean thereafter, all of it Christ's gift.

On Works and Almsgiving, 2 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom

Chrysostom told his people they could see an altar lying in the streets: the poor man himself, an altar built of the very members of Christ, on which sacrifice may be offered at every hour. He treated generosity to the poor as inseparable from worthy worship at the Church's altar.

Homily 20 on Second Corinthians (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Peter Chrysologus

Chrysologus preached that faith stands on three companions that give life to one another: prayer, fasting, and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains what it asks, and mercy receives it; whoever prays, he taught, should fast, and whoever fasts should show mercy, so that our own petitions are heard as we hear the petitions of the poor.

Sermon 43 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Do the act of honor you named in the Send question. Do not let the week end without it.
- Give one real act of almsgiving this week, quietly (Matthew 6:3), scaled to actually cost you something.
- Pray the memory verse before bed each night, and each time ask: whose fire did my water touch today?

Scripture Memory Verse

"Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin." (**Sirach 3:30**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 5:9-6:1 and all of Sirach 28.

Catechism References

CCC 2214-2220; CCC 1434; CCC 2447

Take-Home for Session 4: The Tongue, the Spark, and the Sins We Hold

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- The double-tongued person, saying different things to different audiences, ends in disgrace because trust cannot fasten to a person with no fixed weight (5:9-6:1).
- Ben Sira's ethic of hearing: bury reports rather than broadcast them, presume innocence, and go directly to the person (19:6-17); Jesus likewise commands direct, private correction when a brother sins against you (Matthew 18:15).
- The discovery: the Our Father teaches the very principle of Sirach 28:2, and Jesus underlines that petition alone (Matthew 6:12, 14-15), and dramatizes it in the unforgiving servant, whose forgiven debt dwarfs the one he refuses to release.
- A spark glows when you blow on it (28:12), and James says the tongue sets whole forests ablaze (James 3:5-6): so build a door and a bolt for your mouth and make scales for your words (28:24-26). Forgiveness is a grace-empowered decision of the will, not a feeling, and deep wounds may need time and help.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine had a warning carved into his dining table: whoever loves to gnaw at the life of the absent should know this table is closed to him. His biographer St. Possidius records that he enforced the rule even on visiting bishops. For the Doctor of Grace, the reputation of the absent was sacred ground, guarded at the very place where talk flows easiest.

St. Possidius, Life of St. Augustine, 22 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Philip Neri

A story handed down about the Apostle of Rome tells of a penitent given an unusual penance for gossip: pluck a chicken while walking through town, then go back and collect every feather. The scattered feathers, impossible to regather, were the point. Whether or not every detail is historical, the Church has retold it for centuries because it is exactly true to life.

Traditional story of St. Philip Neri (as handed down)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Francis de Sales

The gentle Doctor devotes chapters of the Introduction to the Devout Life to speech: never speak evil of another without true charitable necessity, he counsels, for detraction is a kind of murder committed against a neighbor's honor, and the tongue that slanders kills three souls with one blow. His remedy is deliberate, habitual kindness of speech.

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, ch. 29 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Pray the Our Father slowly once a day, pausing at forgive us our trespasses as we forgive, and name the person silently in the pause.
- Fast completely this week from one specific speech habit you identified (a chat thread, a topic, a person you talk about). Notice what the silence surfaces.
- If you heard a damaging report about someone recently, apply 19:13-17: go to the person kindly, or bury it for good. And if it involves abuse, crime, or danger to anyone, take it promptly to the appropriate authorities instead (19:8).

Scripture Memory Verse

"Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." (**Sirach 28:2**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 6:5-17. Make a private list of your three closest friends and hold it next to the passage.

Catechism References

CCC 2477-2479; CCC 2838-2845

Take-Home for Session 5: A Faithful Friend Is a Sturdy Shelter

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Ben Sira's circles: warm peace with many, tested trust with few, one-in-a-thousand advisers (6:6-7). Slow trust is how deep trust becomes possible.
- Counterfeit friends love your assets, not you, and vanish in the day of trouble (6:8-13): trouble is friendship's testing fire, the same furnace logic as 2:5.
- A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter, a treasure, an elixir of life, and those who fear the Lord will find him, because character aimed at God converges with character aimed at God (6:14-17). Jonathan proved it at the cost of a throne.
- Jesus fulfills the whole teaching: no longer servants but friends, and greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13-15).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Aelred of Rievaulx

The twelfth-century Cistercian wrote the Church's classic treatise on the subject, *Spiritual Friendship*, teaching that true friendship must begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ. He dared to gloss St. John: he who abides in friendship abides in God, and God in him, because genuine friendship is a school of charity and a foretaste of heaven.

Spiritual Friendship, Books I and III (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas defines charity itself as a certain friendship of man with God, grounded in God sharing his own happiness with us (q. 23, a. 1), and ranks charity the most excellent of the virtues (a. 6). If charity is friendship with God, then human friendships lived in grace become, so to speak, apprenticeships in it: which is why the saints treat friendship as serious spiritual business rather than social garnish.

Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 23, aa. 1 and 6 (paraphrased, with application)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Bosco

The great friend of the young told his boys, in his famous Letter from Rome, that it is not enough to love the young: they must know that they are loved. His Preventive System, built on reason, religion, and loving-kindness, formed saints in a family atmosphere of holy friendship: a companion, in his school, was someone who helped you toward heaven.

Letter from Rome, 10 May 1884, and the Preventive System writings (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Do one act of day-of-trouble friendship this week: show up, uninvited if necessary, for a friend who is in the battle.
- Write a short note (paper, not text, if you can) to one faithful friend naming specifically what their friendship has been to you: shelter, treasure, or medicine.
- Pray for your three closest friends by name each day this week, and ask the Lord to direct your friendship aright.

Scripture Memory Verse

"A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure." (**Sirach 6:14**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 4:1-10 and Sirach 31:1-11, in that order.

Catechism References

CCC 2347; CCC 1829

Take-Home for Session 6: Stretch Out Your Hand to the Poor

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- If the wronged poor man cries out even in bitterness, his Creator will hear his prayer (4:1-6): God stands guard over the defenseless in advance; mercy to orphans and widows makes a person like a son of the Most High (4:10), because children resemble their Father.
- Store up almsgiving in your treasury (29:12): alms are deposits, not losses, and Jesus locates the vault: treasure in heaven that does not fail (Luke 12:33-34), warning that the heart follows the treasure wherever it goes.
- Wealth is a test few pass (31:5-11): blessed is the rich man who is found blameless and does not go after gold. Money is a servant that campaigns to be a master; almsgiving demotes it.
- With every gift show a cheerful face (Sirach 35:9), and God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7), because giving is family resemblance, not taxation, and joy is proof the heart has begun to move where the treasure went.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Basil the Great

Preaching on the rich fool's barns, Basil delivered lines the Church has never forgotten: the bread you hold back belongs to the hungry, the cloak in your closet to the naked, the shoes rotting in your possession to the barefoot, the silver you have buried to the needy. For Basil, failing to give from surplus is not merely a lack of generosity but a kind of theft from the poor.

Homily on Luke 12:18, I Will Tear Down My Barns (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom

Chrysostom told his people not to honor Christ in the church with silks while neglecting him shivering and naked outside in the poor. The Christ of the altar and the Christ of the beggar are the same Christ, he preached, and the second is the test of whether we have recognized the first.

Homily 50 on Matthew (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Teresa of Calcutta

The saint of the gutters of Calcutta said she saw Jesus in every suffering person, in his distressing disguise, and taught her sisters that in serving the poorest of the poor they were touching the body of Christ, doing it, as he said, to me. Her whole life was Matthew 25 taken literally.

Her letters, collected in Come Be My Light (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Make one deposit in the treasury this week that is large enough to feel: money, or hours, given to someone who cannot repay you.
- Give without seeking notice (Matthew 6:3-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Read Matthew 25:31-46 once, slowly, and pray: Lord, show me where you have been in my week wearing your distressing disguise.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from all affliction." (**Sirach 29:12**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 15:11-20 twice, and bring your questions.

Catechism References

CCC 2443-2447; CCC 2448

Take-Home for Session 7: He Left Us in the Hand of Our Own Counsel

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- The oldest excuse (because of the Lord I left the right way) is forbidden: God hates sin, causes no one's sin, and commanded no one to be ungodly (15:11-13, 20).
- The centerpiece: God created man and left him in the hand of his own counsel; fire and water, life and death are set before us, and whichever we choose will be given (15:14-17); Moses' Deuteronomy 30 summons restated, and the verse the Catechism itself quotes to ground human freedom (CCC 1730).
- We held Scripture's full witness together and found the Catholic both-and: grace absolutely precedes and enables (Orange, 529; CCC 2001-2002), and grace heals freedom rather than replacing it: work out your salvation, FOR God is at work in you (Philippians 2:12-13). The knock is his; grace awakens and strengthens our hand; the response is truly ours: and his voice gives even the dead the power to come forth.
- God's all-seeing knowledge and our real freedom stand side by side without embarrassment (15:18-20; CCC 600): hold both, stand down neither, worship where they meet.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Justin Martyr

Writing to the Roman emperor around AD 155, Justin insisted that unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions. He saw free will as the necessary ground of all praise, blame, and judgment, and taught that God, foreknowing all, coerces no one.

First Apology, chs. 43-44 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus taught that God made man free from the beginning, possessing his own power to obey God willingly and not by compulsion, because God is persuasion, not coercion, and there is no virtue in an obedience that could not have been withheld. Love, to be love, must be free.

Against Heresies, Book IV, ch. 37 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo

The Doctor of Grace, who fought Pelagius fiercely, nonetheless wrote an entire treatise on grace and free will against those who so defend grace as to deny freedom. His mature formula holds both: he who created you without you will not justify you without you (Sermon 169). Grace begins, accompanies, and completes every good work, and the will grace heals truly wills: our consent is grace's gift and genuinely our own act.

On Grace and Free Will; Sermon 169 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Memorize the memory verse and pray it each morning as a declaration over the day's choices: If you will, you can keep the commandments.
- Identify your one recurring fire, the choice you keep stretching toward, and put one concrete obstacle between your hand and it this week (an app deleted, a route changed, an accountability text).
- Read CCC 1730-1742 (ten minutes) and mark the sentence that most surprises you; bring it next week.

Scripture Memory Verse

"If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice." (**Sirach 15:15**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 24 twice, and bring your sealed My Guess sheet from Session 1.

Catechism References

CCC 1730 and 1705; CCC 1734-1737; CCC 2001-2002

Take-Home for Session 8: Come to Me: Wisdom's Banquet

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Wisdom's autobiography: she came forth from the mouth of the Most High, was present to all creation before the ages, and at God's command pitched her tent in Jacob and ministered in Zion's sanctuary (24:3-12).
- Her banquet: come to me, you who desire me, and the holy paradox: those who eat me will hunger for more (24:19-21): an infinite good enlarges the appetite it feeds.
- The guesses opened, and the Gospel answered: in the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14), John's verb, *eskenosen*, meaning pitched his tent. In Sirach's poetic presentation, Wisdom is the created wisdom God gave Israel, at home above all in the Torah (24:9, 23), and this figure points beyond itself and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the eternal and uncreated Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24): the sketch belongs to creation; the One it sketches is begotten, not made (Nicaea).
- Jesus outbids the banquet: I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger (John 6:35), and serves it concretely in his flesh and blood (John 6:51-56): the Eucharist is Wisdom's table, and reverence was always appetite in training.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Athanasius

The great defender of Nicaea taught that the Wisdom through whom God made all things is not a creature but the eternal Son himself, the Father's own radiance and Word. When Scripture's Wisdom poetry uses the language of creation, Athanasius read it of the Son's incarnate mission and of Wisdom's imprint in creatures, never of the Son's origin, for there was never a moment when the Father was without his Wisdom.

Discourses Against the Arians, Book II (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Ambrose of Milan

In his mystagogical instruction of the newly baptized, Ambrose read Wisdom's banquet (Wisdom has built her house, mixed her wine, set her table) of the sacraments of the altar, where Christ feeds his people with his own Body and Blood.

On the Mysteries and On the Sacraments, mystagogical catecheses (paraphrased and synthesized)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas

The Church sings Aquinas' words at Benediction to this day: O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. The antiphon holds the banquet's two truths together, grace received now and glory still pledged: which is why, on earth, those who eat him hunger for more, until desire and satisfaction meet in heaven.

Live It This Week

- Attend one weekday Mass this week if you possibly can, and receive (or make a spiritual communion) with Sirach 24:19-21 prayed beforehand: Come to me, you who desire me.
- Spend fifteen minutes before the Blessed Sacrament (or in quiet if no chapel is near) simply repeating the memory verse and letting the hunger it names surface.
- Reread Sirach 24 once at home with John 1 open beside it, and mark every clause that now reads differently.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more." (**Sirach 24:21**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 34:18-26 and 35:1-17.

Catechism References

CCC 240-241; CCC 1324; CCC 1336

Take-Home for Session 9: The Prayer of the Humble Pierces the Clouds

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Worship funded by injustice is abomination: offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is like killing a son before his father's eyes, because the bread of the needy is their very life (34:18-22).
- Obedience and mercy are themselves liturgy: he who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering (35:1-2): our almsgiving thread ended at the altar, where it was always headed.
- God takes no bribes and shows no partiality, which is exactly why the wronged, the orphan, and the widow always have his ear: the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds (35:12-17).
- Jesus teaches the whole doctrine: be reconciled before you offer (Matthew 5:23-24), and the tax collector's seven words from the lowest place went home justified (Luke 18:9-14): the Mass forms these same dispositions in its penitential rite and exchange of peace, and Matthew's command may also require reconciliation before we ever arrive.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Damascene

The last of the Greek Fathers gave the Church her classic definition, enshrined in the Catechism: prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God, or the requesting of good things from God. Sirach's image gives the definition wings: what is raised in humility pierces the clouds.

On the Orthodox Faith (as cited in CCC 2559, paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyprian of Carthage

Commenting on the Lord's Prayer, Cyprian taught that God hears not the voice but the heart, and does not need to be reminded by our shouting: the quiet, humble, disciplined prayer, he taught, is the one with entry to God's ears: God hears the heart, not the voice.

On the Lord's Prayer, 4-6 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thérèse of Lisieux

The Little Flower described prayer as a surge of the heart, a simple look turned toward heaven, a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy: words the Catechism placed at the head of its whole section on prayer. Her little way is Sirach 35:17 lived: nothing pierces higher than what rises from the lowest place.

Story of a Soul, manuscript C (as cited in CCC 2558, paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Before Sunday, do the Matthew 5:24 errand where possible and prudent: the apology, the text, the conversation you have been deferring. (Making peace with a neighbor does not replace Confession: anyone conscious of grave sin should seek the sacrament before Communion, CCC 1385.)
- Pray the tax collector's prayer (God, be merciful to me a sinner) ten times slowly each day this week, from the lowest interior place you can find.
- Arrive at Mass five minutes early and pray the Confiteor in advance, meaning every word, so the liturgy's front door does its work on you.

Scripture Memory Verse

"The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and he will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord." (**Sirach 35:17**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 38:1-23. Bring an honest opinion: how do faith, doctors, and medicine fit together?

Catechism References

CCC 2559; CCC 2558; CCC 2096-2097

Take-Home for Session 10: Honor the Physician

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- The chain of gift: God created the physician, healing comes from the Most High, medicines come from the earth, and a sensible man will not despise them (38:1-8): faith and medicine are not rivals but one providence.
- The protocol: when sick, pray first, examine your heart, offer worship, and give the physician his place, for the Lord created him (38:9-12): the pious error and the secular error both refuted in four verses.
- Grief: weep bitterly and mourn truly, then be consoled, for the dead is at rest (38:16-23); our place is with the living, completed by Paul: we grieve, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Jesus wept: hope changes what the tears believe.
- The craftsmen maintain the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade (38:31-34): and Christ, whom the Church confesses as eternal Wisdom (Session 8), lived his long hidden years known in Nazareth simply as the carpenter (Mark 6:3) and took the physician's image for his mission (Matthew 9:12-13). Ordinary work, offered, ascends.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Basil the Great

Asked whether using medicine is consistent with piety, Basil answered that the medical art was given by God as a model of the healing of the soul, and that to reject its benefits out of pretended trust is obstinacy, while to place all hope in it and forget God is to dishonor the Giver of every remedy. Each herb was made for our aid, he taught, and gratitude refers every healing back to the Giver.

The Long Rules, Question 55 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Paul II

In his letter on the meaning of suffering, John Paul taught that Christ did not explain suffering away but transformed it from within by his Passion, so that every sufferer can complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (Colossians 1:24): not because the Cross lacks power, but because Christ leaves room for our share in his redeeming love. Suffering, joined to him, becomes fruitful.

Salvifici Doloris, 19-26 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Josemaría Escrivá

The founder of Opus Dei preached that ordinary work, done with human competence and supernatural love, is the hinge of holiness for the laity: God waits for us every day in the laboratory, the operating theater, the workshop, the field. Sanctify your work, he urged: sanctify yourself in it, and sanctify others through it.

Conversations, with the homily Passionately Loving the World (paraphrased and synthesized from his preaching)

Live It This Week

- Offer one full workday this week explicitly: Morning Offering at the start, competence as worship during, and a one-line prayer of presentation at the end: Lord, this shift is yours.
- If you have been postponing a medical, dental, or counseling appointment, book it this week: Sirach 38:12 is now your verse.
- Pray by name for one person who is sick and one person who is grieving, each day this week, and send one of them a message that proves someone remembers.

Scripture Memory Verse

"My son, when you are sick do not be negligent, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you." (**Sirach 38:9**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 44:1-15. Then skim the famous names in chapters 44-49 and pick one ancestor whose story you half-remember.

Catechism References

CCC 1500-1505; CCC 1509-1510; CCC 2427-2428

Take-Home for Session 11: Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Ben Sira faces oblivion honestly: even among the great, some have perished as though they had not lived (44:9): the world's memory is a sieve, and our culture's terror of being forgotten is ancient.
- The turn: but these were men of mercy, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten... their name lives to all generations, because the covenant assembly proclaims their praise (44:10, 14-15), and behind it stands the God who does not forget (Isaiah 49:15): mercy, not marble, is how a name survives.
- The roll's twin: Hebrews 11 rehearses the same names by faith, and Hebrews 12:1 promotes the remembered dead to a great cloud of witnesses surrounding the living; and Jesus adds that God is not God of the dead, but of the living (Mark 12:27).
- The communion of saints in three steps: death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38-39), and so cannot dissolve the communion of his one Body (CCC 955-959); heavenly worship presents the prayers of the saints before God (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4), and the Church confesses the saints' unceasing intercession (CCC 956); so the Church honors, imitates, and asks the prayers of the saints, worshiping God alone, through the one mediator (CCC 956-957).

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Preaching on All Saints, Bernard asked why we honor the saints, since they need nothing from us: our praise adds nothing to them. His answer: the memory of the saints stirs in us a longing to be with them and to be like them, so that honoring them is really a mercy shown to us: their remembered lives kindle ours.

Sermon 2 for the Feast of All Saints (paraphrased, as read in the Liturgy of the Hours)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: The early Church at Smyrna

After St. Polycarp was martyred around AD 155, his church wrote an account explaining that they gathered his bones, more precious than jewels, and would celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom each year: worshiping Christ alone, they said, while loving the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord. It is the communion of saints in its infancy, within living memory of the apostolic age.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, 17-18 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Near death, Thérèse promised that her heaven would be spent doing good on earth, letting fall a shower of roses. The Church later canonized her, and devotion to her intercession spans the world: her promise is the communion of saints spoken in the first person.

Her Last Conversations (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Choose your witness for the year: one saint whose life you will read and whose intercession you will ask weekly. Write the name on your take-home sheet tonight.
- Do one act of family memory this week: call the oldest living member of your family and ask for one story about a faithful ancestor you never met. Write it down.
- Pray Hebrews 12:1-2 each morning before your feet hit the floor: surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... looking to Jesus.

Scripture Memory Verse

"Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations." (**Sirach 44:1**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 50:1-24 and 51:1-12. Last session next week: bring your Bible, your take-home sheets, and every question you have saved up about why this book is in your Bible.

Catechism References

CCC 946-948; CCC 956-957; CCC 961-962

Take-Home for Session 12: Simon the High Priest and the Song of Thanksgiving

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Ben Sira's Temple liturgy: Simon the high priest coming forth from the sanctuary like the morning star and the sun, the trumpets, the people on their faces, and the raised-hands blessing of the Lord (50:1-21): creation itself gathered to its point in worship.
- Simon was the silhouette; Christ is the portrait: the High Priest who is one, sinless, and permanent, who entered heaven itself with his own blood once for all, and who will appear a second time to those eagerly waiting (Hebrews 4, 7, 9): at every Mass we stand in Ben Sira's crowd (CCC 1090, 1544-1545).
- The fear of the Lord, planted as wisdom's beginning in 1:14 and root in 1:20, resolves as a song of thanksgiving (51:1-12) and an open school door (51:23): reverence became gratitude, and the commissioning is ours.
- The canon question, answered with receipts: the Greek scriptural tradition of the early Church in which the deuterocanon was received and handed on, the early Church's wide use (the resonances of James 1:19 with Sirach 5:11 and Hebrews 11 with Sirach 44, and the nickname Ecclesiasticus), the witness of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) in communion with Rome, reaffirmed at Florence and defined at Trent, and the decisive point: the same Spirit-guided Church discernment that certifies the New Testament's 27 books certifies the Old Testament's 46. God inspired the authors; the Church received, preserved, and discerned: and she has read Ben Sira to her children since the early centuries.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Ignatius of Antioch

Writing on his road to martyrdom around AD 107, Ignatius urged the churches: be careful to observe one Eucharist, for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup for union with his blood, one altar, as there is one bishop with the priests and deacons. The gathered, ordered, altar-centered worship Ben Sira loved continues, transfigured, in the Church's one Eucharist.

Letter to the Philadelphians, 4 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Chrysostom

In his treatise on the priesthood, Chrysostom trembled at what Simon's successors under grace now handle: when you see the Lord sacrificed and lying on the altar, and the priest bending over the sacrifice and praying, do you still think you are among men and standing on earth? The priest at the altar, he taught, stands amid realities Simon's trumpets only foreshadowed.

On the Priesthood, Book III, 4 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Vianney

The patron of parish priests taught his village that the priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus: when

you see a priest, he said, think of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the priest continues the work of redemption on earth, above all at the altar. The raised-hands blessing Israel knew from Aaron and Simon (Numbers 6:24-26 with Leviticus 9:22; Sirach 50:20) finds its fulfillment in Christ and echoes in the priest's blessing at every Mass.

From his catechetical instructions, as given in the Office of Readings for his memorial, August 4 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- At Mass this week, watch for Sirach 50: the priest coming forth, the congregation's posture, the raised-hands blessing: and receive the blessing the way 50:21 describes: deliberately, on the inside if not on your knees.
- Pray Sirach 51:1-12 once this week as your own thanksgiving psalm, inserting your own rescues by name where Ben Sira names his.
- Answer the commissioning concretely: invite the person you named to whatever you do next: this study handed on, a Bible study, or simply Mass and brunch. Lodge in my school is now your line.

Scripture Memory Verse

"I will give thanks to you, O Lord and King, and will praise you as God my Savior. I give thanks to your name."
(Sirach 51:1)

Before Next Session

The study is complete. Keep the take-home sheets together: they are now a small handbook of everything we found. And keep the school open: draw near to me, you who are untaught (51:23).

Catechism References

CCC 1544-1545, 1548; CCC 1090; CCC 120