

SESSION 8: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session 8: Come to Me: Wisdom's Banquet

Passage: Sirach 24:1-34

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: The group opens the sealed guesses and discovers where Wisdom's portrait was always pointing: Sirach's personified Wisdom, God's created and communicated wisdom given to Israel in Torah and worship, points beyond itself and is fulfilled without remainder in Christ, the eternal and uncreated Wisdom and Word of the Father, who tabernacled among us and gives himself as the Bread of Life.

Catholic Touchstone: Christ the Wisdom and Word of God (CCC 240-241; John 1) and the Eucharist as the banquet in which Christ gives himself (CCC 1324, 1336).

What You Need to Know

Tonight is the summit of the study and the resolution of the sealed guess. Sirach 24 is Wisdom's own speech, delivered in the assembly of the Most High (24:2). Track her autobiography with the group: I came forth from the mouth of the Most High (24:3): she is God's Word, his breath, his utterance. She covered the earth like a mist (24:3; hear the mist of Genesis 2:6 and the creation scene of Genesis 1:2) and traversed heaven, the abyss, and every nation (24:4-6): she is present to all creation. Then the astonishing turn: the Creator of all things commands her, make your dwelling in Jacob (24:8), and the Greek verb behind it means to pitch one's tent, to tabernacle. She ministered before him in the holy tabernacle in Zion (24:10): Wisdom serves in Israel's liturgy. Created from the beginning, before the ages (24:9), she takes root in Jerusalem and flourishes like every glorious tree Ben Sira can name (24:12-17).

Then the invitation that resolves our study's central thread: Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce... Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more (24:19-21). Wisdom feeds people with herself. Ben Sira, writing before Christ, lands the identification available to him: all this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us (24:23): Wisdom is encountered in Torah. He is right, and he is standing at a door he cannot yet see through. The live discovery walks through it: John 1:1-14 (the Word was with God and was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt, literally tabernacled, among us): clause after clause of Wisdom's autobiography comes true in Jesus Christ. Then John 6:35: he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst: Jesus takes Wisdom's banquet invitation and transcends it. Wisdom's food left you hungry for more; Christ's gift of himself satisfies forever, and the Eucharist is that banquet spread on the Church's table until he comes.

Handle the sealed guesses with celebration, not grading. Open them together mid-session (the flow below marks where). Common guesses: God's wisdom as an attribute, the Holy Spirit, the Torah, Mary, Jesus. Honor the partial truth in each: Wisdom is God's own wisdom; the tradition has long applied Sirach 24 liturgically to Our Lady (who bore Wisdom in her womb, the truest human tabernacle); the Torah really was Wisdom's address in Israel (24:23). But a central and widespread reading, from the Fathers on, is Christological, and state it with the right verb: Sirach's personified Wisdom, in the book's own literal sense a poetic figure for the created wisdom God communicated to Israel in Torah and worship, points beyond itself and is fulfilled in the Son: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), the uncreated Wisdom who was with God before the ages, through whom all things were made, who tabernacled among us and feeds us with

himself. Teach fulfillment, not flat identity: the distinction protects both the text and the Creed. One precision to state carefully: when Sirach says Wisdom was created (24:9), Catholic interpreters, reading with Proverbs 8:22 (where the RSV2CE likewise says the Lord created Wisdom at the beginning of his work), take the language as the idiom of Wisdom poetry, not a denial of the Son's eternity: the Council of Nicaea settled against the Arians that the Son is begotten, not made, true God from true God. Personified Wisdom is a God-given sketch; the Incarnation is the portrait.

OT Roots and Fulfillment

Sirach 24 is built on Proverbs 8:22-31, where the Lord created Wisdom at the beginning of his work and she was daily his delight, rejoicing before him as he made the world, and on Genesis 1 (the mist over the earth) and Exodus 25-40 (the tabernacle where the glory dwelt). Its river imagery (the Pishon, Tigris, Euphrates, and Gihon of Sirach 24) replants Eden's four rivers (Genesis 2:10-14) in Jerusalem: where Wisdom dwells, Eden begins again. The Wisdom-Christology stream flows into the New Testament: John 1, Colossians 1:15-17 (in him all things were created), Hebrews 1:1-3, and 1 Corinthians 1:24.

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.

O Sacrum Convivium, with the study's application (paraphrased)

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 240-241:** Jesus is the eternal Son and Word: the Church's faith confesses the Word who was in the beginning with God, through whom all things were made.
- **CCC 1324:** The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.

- **CCC 1336:** This is a hard saying: the Eucharist has always been a stumbling block and a mystery of faith, dividing those who walk away from those who stay.

Thread Watch

- **RESOLVE (Who is Wisdom?):** the sealed guesses open tonight at the marked point in the flow. Celebrate every guess, honor the partial truths, and land the Church's Christological reading with John 1 and 1 Corinthians 1:24.
- **DEVELOP (Fear of the Lord):** 24:19-22 and the whole banquet scene show what fear of the Lord was always for: not distance but appetite: reverence that draws near to eat.

Session Goals

1. Trace Wisdom's autobiography in 24:1-17: from the mouth of the Most High, over all creation, tabernacled in Jacob, serving in Zion's liturgy.
2. Sit with the banquet invitation and its paradox: those who eat me will hunger for more (24:19-21).
3. Open the sealed guesses with joy and gather the candidates.
4. Discover John 1:1-14 fulfilling every clause, and John 6:35 transcending the banquet: the Bread of Life who satisfies forever.
5. Land the Eucharistic payoff: Wisdom's banquet is spread on the altar, and we are invited by name.

Time Note

90 minutes and the fullest session of the study. Pre-chosen cuts: Build question 2 (the trees of 24:12-17) can shrink to reading the verses with one appreciation question; the rivers Dig Deeper goes home unread. Do not trim the guess-opening or the John discoveries.

SESSION 8: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Session 8: Come to Me: Wisdom's Banquet

Opening Prayer

Come, Wisdom of the Most High, who order all things mightily and sweetly: come and teach us the way of prudence. Lord Jesus, Word and Wisdom of the Father, open our eyes tonight as you opened the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus, and be known to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

Win 1. What is a meal you will remember for the rest of your life, and what made it unforgettable: the food, or something else?

Win 2. Tonight we finally open the guesses you sealed in Session 1. Before we do: without revealing your guess, how confident are you, on a scale of one to ten?

Build: Into the Text

1. Read Sirach 24:1-7, Wisdom's own account of her origin and range. Where does she say she came from (24:3)? What did she do in 24:3b-6 (covering the earth like a mist, dwelling in the heights, circling heaven, ruling the waves, holding sway over every people)? What kind of being could truthfully say these things?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

She came forth from the mouth of the Most High: she is God's own utterance, his Word and breath, poetically personified. Her range is total: earth, heaven, abyss, sea, all nations. Notice how the picture strains its own frame: what comes forth from God's mouth, covers the earth like a mist at the beginning (hear the mist of Genesis 2:6 rising to water the earth, and the Spirit over the waters of Genesis 1:2), and holds sway over every people is no ordinary creature among creatures; the poem is reaching for God's own going-forth into the world. In its literal sense this is personification, Israel's way of speaking about the wisdom God gives; but the portrait keeps outgrowing that frame. Keep the tension taut: do not resolve it yet.

2. Read 24:8-12. What does the Creator command Wisdom to do, and what word does verse 8 use for her dwelling? Where exactly does she settle, and what does she do in 24:10? Why would the God whose Wisdom fills the cosmos give her a street address?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Make your dwelling in Jacob: and the verb means to pitch a tent, to tabernacle. She is established in Zion, in the beloved city, and she ministered before him in the holy tabernacle: Wisdom becomes a liturgical minister in Israel's sanctuary. The scandal of particularity: the universal Wisdom of God chooses one people, one city, one tent, because God's way of reaching everyone is to dwell somewhere: the election of Israel is the delivery route of universal blessing (Genesis 12:3). File the tabernacle image carefully: it is tonight's hinge.

3. Read the banquet invitation, 24:19-22, aloud, slowly. Who is invited, what is on the menu, and what is the strange promise of verse 21: those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more? How can food that satisfies also deepen hunger, and is that a defect?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Invited: you who desire me: appetite is the only admission ticket. The menu is Wisdom herself: her fruits, and then, nakedly, me. The paradox: the best things do not exhaust desire, they enlarge it: the more you know God, the more of him you want, and this is glory, not defect: an infinite good can only be enjoyed by an ever-expanding hunger. Every lesser appetite shrinks with feeding; this one grows. Hold the group here a moment: someone, two centuries later, will pick up this exact sentence and dare to outbid it.

OPEN THE SEALED GUESSES

4. The moment has come. Take out your Take-Home 1 sheets and, going around the circle, reveal your Session 1 guess: who or what is Wisdom in this book? Leader: chart the guesses, cheer the daring ones, and note what Ben Sira himself says in 24:23: all this is the book of the covenant... the law which Moses commanded us. Was Ben Sira wrong to identify Wisdom with the Torah?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Gather the guesses without grading: God's attribute of wisdom, the Torah, the Holy Spirit, Mary, Jesus: each holds real truth. Ben Sira's own answer (the Torah) was not wrong but penultimate: Wisdom really was encountered in the Law, Israel's covenant treasure: he identified the deepest place Wisdom had yet made her address. But his own chapter overflows the identification: the poem keeps saying more than a book can carry: this Wisdom comes forth from God's mouth, pitches a tent, ministers in the sanctuary, and says eat me. The personification strains toward a Person the author could not yet see. Now we go see it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

5. Turn to John 1:1-5 and 1:14. Read them aloud against Sirach 24. Clause by clause: where is came forth from the mouth of the Most High? Where is before the ages? Where is make your dwelling in Jacob, and what is the literal Greek of dwelt in John 1:14? Who is Wisdom?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the utterance from the mouth of the Most High, before the ages, and not a creature but God. All things were made through him: Wisdom's presence to all creation. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us: the Greek verb is *eskenosen*: he tabernacled, pitched his tent, among us: John reaches for the very image of Sirach 24:8. Here is the resolution, stated carefully because precision honors the text: in its own literal sense, Sirach 24 is a personification of the wisdom God created and communicated to Israel, above all in the Torah (Ben Sira says so himself, 24:23). But the whole Wisdom tradition was pointing beyond itself, and in the fullness of revelation it is fulfilled without remainder in Jesus Christ, the eternal and uncreated Wisdom and Word of the Father: Paul says it flatly: Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), and John's prologue speaks the Wisdom tradition's vocabulary. The sketch belongs to creation; the One it was sketching does not. Whoever guessed Jesus: stand and be applauded, and now you know precisely in what sense you were right. And honor the other guesses: Wisdom is God's own wisdom (yes, that is the literal sense); she was encountered in the Torah (yes, Ben Sira's own answer); and Mary is the truest human

tabernacle, who carried Wisdom made flesh beneath her heart, which is why the Church reads Sirach 24 on her feasts.

One precision, stated simply: Sirach 24:9 says Wisdom was created before the ages. The Church, at Nicaea, settled that the Son is begotten, not made: eternally from the Father, never non-existent. Wisdom poetry's created is the idiom of the sketch, not a datum about the Son's origin: the portrait corrects and completes the sketch, as portraits do.

LIVE DISCOVERY

6. One more door. Wisdom said: those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more (24:21). Find John 6:35 and read it. What does Jesus claim, how does it deliberately outbid Sirach 24:21, and where is this banquet served now? Read John 6:51-56 and answer as concretely as the text does.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. Jesus takes Wisdom's banquet sentence and transcends it: her food enlarged hunger; his gift of himself satisfies it, finally and forever. And he refuses to keep it a metaphor: the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh... he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (6:51, 56): language so concrete that disciples walked away (6:66), and he let them, asking the Twelve only, will you also go away? The banquet is served on the altar: the Eucharist, source and summit (CCC 1324), where Wisdom's eat me is fulfilled without remainder.

A resolution in the spirit of Aquinas' antiphon, worth giving the group: on earth the sacred banquet fills us with grace and enlarges our desire (we hunger for more, Sirach was right); in glory, desire and satisfaction will finally coincide (we shall never hunger, Jesus is right). Both verses are true; they are two mileposts on one road.

Close the discovery by connecting the whole study: the fear of the Lord that began our journey (Session 1) was never meant to keep us at a distance: it was appetite in training. Reverence brings us to the table.

Dig Deeper

DIG DEEPER: Eden's rivers replanted

Read the closing river verses of Sirach 24 at home: Wisdom overflows like the Pishon, Tigris, Euphrates, and Gihon: four of Eden's rivers (Genesis 2:10-14) now flowing from Jerusalem. Where Wisdom dwells, Eden begins again. John saw the finale: the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

DIG DEEPER: Why the Church reads Sirach 24 on Marian feasts

The liturgy has long placed Wisdom's speech on the feasts of Our Lady: not because Mary is the eternal Wisdom (she is a creature, the first and greatest of the redeemed), but because image after image lands on her secondarily and beautifully: the tabernacle in whom Wisdom dwelt, the garden where the shoot of Jesse grew, the mother who says of her Son, come, eat (John 2:5: do whatever he tells you). The Christological reading and the Marian reading are nested, not rivals.

Send: Taking It Out

Send 1. Wisdom's only admission ticket is desire: come to me, you who desire me. Sunday after Sunday, the same invitation stands at the altar. What is the honest state of your appetite for the Eucharist right now, and what feeds or starves it?

Send 2. Your sealed guess is open. Knowing now who Wisdom is, what would it mean to seek wisdom this year: not a technique, but him?

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.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Wisdom of the Father, Word from his mouth, who pitched your tent among us and spread your banquet on the altar: we came to you desiring, and you gave us yourself. Enlarge our hunger on earth until you satisfy it in glory, where those who come to you will hunger no more (John 6:35). Who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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.

SESSION 8: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Session 8: Come to Me: Wisdom's Banquet

Principal passages in order of use:

6. Sirach 24:1-7
7. Sirach 24:8-12
8. Sirach 24:19-22
9. Sirach 24:23
10. John 1:1-5, 14
11. 1 Corinthians 1:24 (within discussion)
12. John 6:35
13. John 6:51-56, 66-68
14. Proverbs 8:22-31 (leader reference)
15. Genesis 2:10-14 and Revelation 22:1 (take-home reading)
16. CCC 240-241, 1324, 1336 (leader reference)

Memory verse: Sirach 24:21, "Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more."