

Radiant and Unfading

A Catholic Journey Through the Book of Wisdom

Session 1: God Did Not Make Death

Wisdom 1 • about 95 minutes • Leader Edition

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the Book of Wisdom opens with a thesis that reframes everything: God created the world for life, death is an intruder rather than a design feature, and every human heart is quietly choosing which side of that divide to court.

Catholic Touchstone: The Catechism quotes tonight's key verse and next week's word for word: CCC 413 cites Wisdom 1:13 and 2:24 to teach that God did not make death and that death entered the world through the devil's envy. The Church reads this book not as an appendix but as load-bearing Scripture.

What You Need to Know

Welcome to the last book written before the dawn. The Book of Wisdom is very likely the final Old Testament book composed, written in polished Greek, probably in Alexandria in Egypt, sometime in the last century or so before Christ. Be honest with your group about this from the first night. The book speaks in the voice of Solomon (compare 7:1-5 and 9:7-8) without ever naming him, a respected literary convention in Israel's wisdom tradition, the way a student of a great master writes in the master's school and under his banner. The Church has never defined the human author. What she has defined, at the Council of Trent, is that this book is inspired Scripture, breathed by the same Spirit as Genesis and the Gospels. Say that plainly and move on; the fuller story of how the canon came together is a promise we will keep in Session 14.

The audience matters enormously. Alexandria was the most sophisticated city of its age: a famous library, celebrated philosophers, gorgeous temples to gods who did not exist, and a large Jewish community tempted daily to quiet apostasy, to shaving off the edges of their faith so as to fit in. In other words, the first readers of this book lived where your young adults live. Wisdom was written for believers surrounded by a brilliant, seductive culture crowded with rival gods and philosophies. Let the group feel that kinship early; this book will read them as much as they read it.

Chapter 1 lays out the whole book in miniature. It opens with a command to “rulers of the earth” to love righteousness (1:1), warns that wisdom is a kindly spirit who will not live in a soul that welcomes deceit (1:4-6), declares that the Spirit of the Lord fills the world (1:7), and then delivers the thunderclap: God did not make death and does not delight in the death of the living (1:13). Creation is wholesome; there is no destructive poison in it (1:14). Righteousness is immortal (1:15). And yet the ungodly, by words and deeds, summon death, treat it as a friend, and make a covenant with it (1:16). That last verse is the cliffhanger; the covenant party gives its speech in chapter 2, next session.

Two Greek terms will serve you all study long. *Dikaiosynē* (righteousness) is the object of the book's opening command in Greek, the hinge of the whole exhortation. And notice the claim of 1:15 that righteousness is *athanatos*, deathless. Much of the earlier Old Testament speaks of the afterlife in shadows and hints. Wisdom, written on the very doorstep of the New Testament, opens that door wide, with a clarity rare in the Old

Testament. That is not an embarrassment about a late date; it is a lesson in how God unfolds revelation gradually, preparing his people for the Resurrection.

One question to be ready for: what about animal death before the fall, the dinosaurs question. Be clear on what the doctrine does and does not claim. CCC 413 and 1008 concern the death of human beings: bodily death entered the human story as the consequence of sin, and spiritual death through sin is the deeper catastrophe. The Church has never taught that animals were immortal before the fall; St. Thomas Aquinas held that the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, so that even in Eden some animals would have lived on others (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 96, a. 1). Wisdom 1 and 2 are about persons, made in the image of God for incorruption. If the question comes up, concede the fossils cheerfully and keep the claim precise: death was never God's plan for man.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Roots. Wisdom 1 is soaked in what came before. The wholesome creation of 1:14 is Genesis 1, where God sees everything he has made and calls it very good (Gen 1:31). The Spirit filling the world (1:7) recalls the Spirit moving over the waters (Gen 1:2) and the Psalmist's confession that there is nowhere the Spirit is not (Ps 139:7-10). The plea to choose life over the courtship of death restates Deuteronomy 30:19. And the astonishing claim that God takes no delight in death is a near echo of Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32, which your group will find live tonight. Wisdom as a personal figure who can be grieved and can flee stands in the tradition of Proverbs 8, where Wisdom cries out in the streets and was beside God at creation.

Fulfillment. Every thread here runs forward into the New Testament. St. Paul teaches that death entered the world through sin (Rom 5:12) and calls death the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26); neither claim makes sense unless death was never a feature of the design for man, which is exactly Wisdom's point. Jesus announces that he came that we might have life, and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10), and Revelation ends with the promise that death shall be no more (Rev 21:4). Keep these in your pocket; the discussion guide surfaces some of them, and the rest belong to later sessions.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Athanasius • On the Incarnation, 4-5 (4th century)

St. Athanasius teaches that God created man for incorruption, to share his own life, and that death entered the world through the devil's envy when man turned away. What makes this witness remarkable for our study is that he is not merely agreeing with the Book of Wisdom; he quotes Wisdom 2:23-24 as Scripture to make his case. The great defender of the divinity of Christ grounds a key premise of his account of why the Incarnation was necessary on verses your group will study next week.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *The City of God*, Book 13 (5th century)

St. Augustine devotes an entire book of *The City of God* to the question of death, and his teaching runs straight down Wisdom's line: death is not natural to man as God created him, but the penalty of sin. And yet, he adds, God so works that for the faithful, death, the punishment of sin, becomes the doorway into life, so that what entered as an enemy is turned to our good by grace. The intruder does not get the last word.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome • *Letter to the Corinthians, ch. 3 (c. AD 96)*

Writing to the church at Corinth while some of the Apostles' own converts were still alive, St. Clement, the fourth pope, laments that through envy and jealousy death entered the world. Scholars have long recognized this as an echo of Wisdom 2:24. Tuck that date away: within living memory of the apostles, the bishop of Rome is already drawing on this book's language. It will matter again in Session 14.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 413. Quotes Wisdom 1:13 and 2:24 directly: God did not make death, and death entered the world through the devil's envy. The Catechism places these verses within its teaching on the fall.

CCC 1008. Death is a consequence of sin. The Church's Magisterium teaches that bodily death entered history on account of man's sin; it is contrary to the plan of God the Creator; Scripture calls it the wages of sin (Rom 6:23, quoted at CCC 1006).

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Thread 1, The Face of Wisdom. Planted tonight in 1:6, where wisdom is called a kindly spirit who can be grieved and can flee. Wisdom is spoken of as someone, not something. On Take-Home 1 each participant writes a sealed guess: who or what is Wisdom? Do not tip your hand. The guesses are opened in Session 8. One caution: do not let anyone, including you, flatly declare that Wisdom is the Holy Spirit. The Church's tradition reads personified Wisdom as fulfilled above all in Christ, the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), while hearing real Trinitarian overtones in these texts. The unresolved mystery is doing its work; let it.

Thread 2, The Righteous Man on Trial. Planted in 1:16, where the ungodly make a covenant with death. Next session their covenant party gives its speech, and the group will make a discovery about that speech they will never forget. Say nothing tonight beyond the cliffhanger.

Thread 3, The Missing Book. Planted lightly tonight through honesty about the book's origin and through this week's Live It exercise. The full build-then-press treatment of the canon question is Session 14. Resist the urge to settle it early; sealed questions do more work than answered ones.

Thread 4, Death's Genealogy. If God did not make death, where did it come from, and where is it going? Tonight opens the file with 1:13. It develops at 2:24, is answered for the righteous in 3:1-9, and reaches its verdict in chapter 5.

Session Goals

1. Introduce the book with full honesty about its origin, language, and Solomonic persona, and with full confidence in its inspiration.
2. Lead the group to discover Wisdom 1:13-15 as the thesis of the entire book: God is on the side of life.

3. Guide a live discovery of Ezekiel 18:23, 32 so the group sees Wisdom standing inside Israel's own prophetic tradition.
4. Plant all four threads without resolving any of them.
5. Distribute Take-Home 1 and seal each participant's written guess about the identity of Wisdom.

Time Note (about 95 minutes)

Welcome and opening prayer, 10 minutes. Win questions, 10. Build on Wisdom 1:1-11, 26. Build on Wisdom 1:12-16 with the Ezekiel discovery, 25. The steelman moment, 10. Send questions and Live It This Week, 10. Closing prayer and Take-Home distribution with the sealed guess, 5.

If you are running long, cut in this order: first drop Question 5's second cross reference (Psalm 139), then drop the second Dig Deeper box (on the book's Greek style). Do not cut the Ezekiel discovery, the steelman moment, or the sealed guess; those three carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud, all respond Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Search our hearts and teach us, for you love the humble. As we open the Book of Wisdom for the first time, give us honest minds, teachable hearts, and the courage to love righteousness. God of the living, you did not make death and you do not delight in it; make us glad tonight to belong to your party, the party of life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

Open questions, no wrong answers. Let everyone speak once before moving on.

1. When you hear the word wisdom, who comes to mind, living or dead, famous or family? What is it about that person?
2. What is one thing you know now that you genuinely wish you had known at eighteen?

Transition: Tonight we open a book that claims wisdom is not first a set of lessons learned the hard way. It is something stranger and better than that. This book was written for believers living in a dazzling, skeptical city full of every pleasure and every philosophy, people whose world looked a lot like ours. It opens with a command, and then with a claim about God so bold the Catechism quotes it word for word.

Build: Wisdom 1:1-11

Have someone read Wisdom 1:1-11 aloud, slowly.

3. Verse 1 addresses “you rulers of the earth” and gives three commands. What are they, and who do you think this book is really for?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The commands: love righteousness, think of the Lord with uprightness, and seek him with sincerity of heart. The address is royal, but the readers this book was written for appear to have been ordinary Jewish believers in the Greek-speaking diaspora, people who ruled no thrones. The wisdom tradition trains kings because every person is ruling something: a household, a classroom, a friendship, a heart. Baptism makes this literal for Christians, a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). The book is for anyone with a kingdom, which is everyone in the room.

4. According to verses 4 and 5, what kind of soul can wisdom not live in? Verse 6 calls wisdom a kindly spirit, one who can be grieved and who flees from deceit. What does that language suggest about how the author is presenting Wisdom: as a skill, as a body of knowledge, or as something more like a person?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul or dwell in a body enslaved to sin. A skill does not care how you live; the way the text speaks, this does. From its first page the book personifies Wisdom strikingly, as someone rather than something, a kindly spirit who can be welcomed or grieved.

Leader: Do not resolve who or what this figure is. Mark the mystery and let the group feel it; they will write a sealed guess on tonight's Take-Home, and Scripture answers it in Session 8.

5. Verse 7 says the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world. Where have we met that idea at the very beginning of the Bible? Find it in the first lines of Genesis, and if time allows, in Psalm 139:7-10.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters, present at the very beginning, before the ordered world took shape. Psalm 139 answers the question where can I flee from your Spirit with a joyful nowhere. Wisdom is not simply borrowing Greek ideas here; its foundation is the Bible's opening page, Genesis and the Psalms, even as 1:7b borrows Alexandria's own cohesion language. There is no God-free zone in creation, no secular square inch. That conviction will power the whole book.

6. Verses 8 to 11 warn that justice misses nothing: no one who speaks unrighteousness escapes notice (v. 8), a jealous ear hears all things (v. 10), and no secret word is without result (v. 11). Verse 6 had just called wisdom a kindly spirit, yet one who will not excuse a blasphemer, because God is the witness of our inmost feelings. What do these verses say about words spoken in private? How might that apply to group chats, texts, and online comments?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

None of it is private. Verse 8 says that the one who utters unrighteous things will not escape notice. Verse 9 says that inquiry will be made into the counsels of the ungodly, and a report of his words will come to the Lord. Verse 10 says that a jealous ear hears all things. And verse 11 draws the conclusion for the mouth: beware of useless murmuring, keep your tongue from slander, for no secret word is without result. The same Spirit who fills the world (1:7) is the witness of inmost feelings (1:6); the kindly spirit and the jealous ear are one God. This is presence, not surveillance: nothing said in secret is said alone. For a generation that speaks constantly and privately, the verses are a mercy before they are a warning, because your words matter enough to be heard. Jesus says it plainly: on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word (Mt 12:36).

DIG DEEPER

Why train rulers? In the ancient world, wisdom literature was a royal curriculum, the formation of princes. Israel democratized it: Proverbs takes the curriculum of princes into the ordinary household. The New Testament finishes the thought, calling the baptized a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9) called to reign with Christ if we endure (2 Tim 2:12). Reading Wisdom is not overhearing advice meant for someone else. It is formation for the royal priesthood you were baptized into.

Build: Wisdom 1:12-16

Have someone read Wisdom 1:12-16 aloud. Ask the group to listen for the most surprising sentence.

7. Verse 13 makes one of the boldest claims in the Old Testament. What does it say God did not do? Be honest: does that square with the world you actually see?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. We live in a world saturated with death, and Scripture says God did not put it there. Death is an intruder in creation, not a feature of the design. The Catechism quotes this exact verse (CCC 413). Where death did come from is a question this book raises tonight and will not answer for several sessions.

Leader: Do not rush to Genesis 3 for them; let them raise it, and if they do, affirm it and promise the book itself will take us there.

8. Live discovery. Somewhere in the prophet Ezekiel, God says nearly this same thing about himself, twice in one chapter. Hunt for it in Ezekiel 18. First one to find it reads it aloud.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Ezekiel 18:32 states it flatly: “I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.” Earlier in the same chapter, 18:23 asks it as a question: does God have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? This is the discovery that matters tonight: Wisdom is not a foreign voice at the edge of the Bible. It stands squarely inside Israel's prophetic tradition and says again what the prophets had already said out loud. If anyone here carries an image of a God who is somehow pro-death, stern, eager to condemn, let Ezekiel and Wisdom answer it together. God is, unapologetically, the God of the living.

Leader: Have both verses read aloud from the group's own Bibles; the prophet says it twice, once as a question and once as a declaration.

9. Verse 14 insists that what God made is wholesome: he created all things that they might exist, and there is no destructive poison in them. What does that claim about physical creation rule out? What does it make possible?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It rules out every spirituality that treats matter, the body, or the physical world as the enemy. That instinct, that matter is somehow beneath God, was already in the air in Alexandria, later hardened into gnosticism, and is still in the air now. And it makes sacraments possible: a God who made matter good is a God who can save you through water, oil, bread, and wine, and who can take flesh himself. Catholicism is not an escape from the physical world; it is the physical world's rescue.

Leader: Translation note: the middle clause of 1:14 reads 'the generative forces of the world are wholesome' in the RSV2CE and 'the creatures of the world are wholesome' in the NABRE. Read it as it stands in the group's Bibles; the claim is the same either way.

10. Verse 15 is four words in English: “For righteousness is immortal.” What does that sentence begin to reveal about life after death, and why is it striking to find it in the Old Testament?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The door of immortality, of life that death cannot end. Much of the earlier Old Testament speaks of the afterlife in shadows, a dim Sheol, hints and hopes. Wisdom, written on the very threshold of the New Testament, says plainly that righteousness itself is deathless. Set beside the rest of the book, where God creates man for incorruption (2:23) and the souls of the righteous are held in the hand of God (3:1-9), this line points toward the immortality of the righteous themselves. This is how revelation works, gradually, the way dawn works. God prepared his people step by step for the Resurrection. This becomes the whole subject of Session 3.

11. Verse 16: how do the ungodly relate to death? What is chilling about the covenant language, considering death a friend and making a pact with him?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They summoned him by their words and deeds, considered him a friend and pined away, made a covenant with him, and are fit to belong to his party. Covenant is the Bible's most sacred word, the word for marriage and for God's bond with Israel, and here it is spent on death. Sin is never neutral drift; it is a courtship, and courtships end in covenants. The verse ends unresolved: those who made the covenant are about to stand up and give its speech. That speech is chapter 2, next week, and it contains a surprise this group will be talking about for the rest of the study.

A Question Worth Facing

Present this at full strength. Do not weaken it, and do not fully answer it tonight.

Imagine a thoughtful Protestant friend sitting in tonight. She says: "This is beautiful, but you know I do not accept this book as Scripture. And notice why. You are finding a clear doctrine of immortality here, but the Old Testament is famously reserved about the afterlife. This book was written late, in Greek, not Hebrew, outside the Holy Land, and the Jewish community itself ultimately did not keep it in their Bible. Jerome, your own great translator, had doubts. My Bible does not have it because the Reformers went back to the Hebrew canon, the Bible Jesus' own people kept. Is it not possible you are building doctrine on a book that never belonged?"

Give it a moment. Then respond only this far: that is a serious question and it deserves a serious answer, not a bumper sticker. This study will give it a full session of its own at the end. But drop two facts into the room tonight and leave them there. First, this book was already being heard in Rome: around AD 96, St. Clement of Rome, the fourth pope, echoes Wisdom 2:24 in a letter to the church at Corinth. Second, when the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, they most often quote the Greek Scriptures, the same Greek Bible tradition in which this book circulated. Whether those facts settle the question is exactly what Session 14 will weigh. For now we do what this book's first readers did: we read it, and we let it prove itself.

Leader note: the deferral is pedagogical, not defensive. Watch faces. If someone seems genuinely unsettled rather than intrigued, add one more fact without opening the debate. The local councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) included this book in their canon lists, the same lists that name the New Testament books we still use. Those councils did not invent a canon; they recognized and handed on the books the Church had already been reading. Then re-seal the question for Session 14 with a smile.

DIG DEEPER

Why would God inspire a book in Greek? Because Greek was the language of the culture his people needed to reach and resist. Wisdom meets Alexandria's philosophy in Alexandria's tongue and out-argues it. There is a missionary lesson here: the Church has never needed to hide from the language, art, or learning of an age. She baptizes it. A book of the Bible written in the vocabulary of the surrounding culture is not a compromise; it is a beachhead.

Send: Closing Questions

12. Verse 16 says covenants with death begin as friendships. Where in your life might you be quietly befriending something deadly, a habit, a resentment, a despair, while telling yourself it is harmless?
13. If God truly did not make death and delights in the living, what would change this week if you believed that about how he sees you, specifically you, on your worst day?

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly.** Read Wisdom 1 and 2 once this week, unhurried, with a pencil. Mark every line where death or life appears.
- **Pray with one verse.** Once this week, sit with Ezekiel 18:32 for five quiet minutes: “so turn, and live.” Let God say the second half to you personally.
- **Choose life once, concretely.** Make one deliberate move onto the side of life: reconcile with someone, encourage someone, visit someone lonely, or finally drop a habit’s smallest link.
- **Check your shelf.** Find any Bibles in your home or on your phone and check the table of contents: is the Book of Wisdom there? Bring your findings next week. No conclusions yet, just evidence.

Closing Prayer

Father of mercies, God of the living, you created all things that they might exist, and you delight in life. Guard us this week from every quiet covenant with death, and teach us to love righteousness. Lord Jesus, be our companion in these pages. Holy Spirit, make our souls a place you are glad to dwell. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.” (**Wisdom 1:13**)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 1, grouped by role.

Primary Text

- Wisdom 1:1-16 (read aloud complete, in two movements: 1:1-11 and 1:12-16)

Discovery Passages (found live by the group)

- Genesis 1:2 (the Spirit over the waters)
- Psalm 139:7-10 (optional second cross reference; first cut if long)
- Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32 (God takes no pleasure in death; the session's key discovery)

Supporting References (leader's pocket)

- Genesis 1:31 (creation very good)
- Deuteronomy 30:19 (choose life)
- Proverbs 8 (Wisdom personified, background to Thread 1)
- 1 Peter 2:9 (a royal priesthood)
- Romans 5:12 (death through sin)
- 1 Corinthians 15:26 (death the last enemy)
- John 10:10 (life abundantly)
- Revelation 21:4 (death shall be no more)
- 2 Timothy 2:12 (if we endure, we shall reign with him; Dig Deeper 1)

Catechism

- CCC 413 (quotes Wisdom 1:13 and 2:24)
- CCC 1006 and 1008 (death as consequence of sin; the wages of sin)

Voices of the Church

- St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation 4-5 (quotes Wisdom 2:23-24)
- St. Augustine, The City of God, Book 13
- St. Clement of Rome, Letter to the Corinthians, ch. 3 (c. AD 96)

Memory Verse

- Wisdom 1:13