

Radiant and Unfading

A Catholic Journey Through the Book of Wisdom

Session 2: The Plot Against the Righteous Man

Wisdom 2 • 90 minutes • Leader Edition

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants trace the inner logic of the ungodly, from despair about death, to grasping at pleasure, to worship of power, to hatred of the righteous man, and then discover for themselves that this chapter's plot speech is echoed at Calvary by the mockers at the foot of the cross.

Catholic Touchstone: From St. Cyprian and St. Augustine onward, the Church has read Wisdom 2:12-20 as a prophecy of the Passion of Christ. The Catechism teaches that Jesus' redemptive death happened in accordance with the Scriptures (CCC 601); tonight the group watches one of those Scriptures light up.

What You Need to Know

Tonight is the session your group will still be talking about at the end of the study, so prepare it with special care. Chapter 2 is built around a single dramatic speech: the ungodly talk without interruption from 2:1 to 2:20, and then the author answers them in his own voice in 2:21-24. The covenant party of 1:16 stands up and explains itself, and the author lets them talk at length, uninterrupted, the way a great novelist lets a villain be persuasive. Do not rush the speech. Its power is that every step feels almost reasonable.

Watch the logic unfold in four moves. Move one, despair: life is short and sorrowful, no one returns from death, we are born by mere chance and afterward it is as though we had never been (2:1-5). Move two, hedonism: therefore come, let us enjoy the good things that exist, let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither (2:6-9). Move three, power: since nothing means anything, let our might be our law of right, and let us oppress the righteous poor man, the widow, the aged (2:10-11). Move four, persecution: the righteous man is inconvenient to us, he reproaches us, his very existence is a judgment on our way of life, so let us test him with insult and torture and condemn him to a shameful death (2:12-20). The chapter is a genealogy of evil: despair becomes pleasure-seeking, pleasure-seeking becomes power, and power unmoored from the sacred learns to resent goodness. Your young adults will recognize this sequence; it is the operating system of a good deal of modern life, from ancient *carpe diem* to modern nihilism to the comment section. One guard for the room: the chain describes what this premise can justify, not what every unbeliever does. The Church teaches that the moral law is knowable by reason (CCC 1954-1960), and many who doubt the afterlife honor the weak; the genealogy indicts the premise, not the person.

Then comes the author's diagnosis (2:21-24): thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them. Sin is not only wrong; it damages the mind's ability to see. And the chapter closes by answering the question Session 1 opened. Where did death come from? God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world (2:23-24). These are the verses St. Athanasius quoted (On the Incarnation 4-5); CCC 413 cites 2:24. Thread 4 takes a great leap forward tonight.

Now the centerpiece. Read 2:12-20 slowly and you will hear it: the righteous man calls himself a child of the Lord, boasts that God is his father, so let us test him, for if the righteous man is God's son, God will help him and deliver him from the hand of his adversaries; let us condemn him to a shameful death. Generations later, on a hill outside Jerusalem, the chief priests and scribes mock a condemned man in almost these very terms: he trusts in God, let God deliver him now if he desires him, for he said, I am the Son of God (Mt 27:41-43). Your group will find that connection live, and you must not spoil it. Be honest in your own mind about the scholarship: Matthew's mockers are also echoing Psalm 22:8, and the session's steelman moment faces that squarely. The claim we make is careful and strong. The Fathers from the earliest centuries read Wisdom 2 as a prophecy of the Passion. And the cluster of details here, the righteous one who claims divine sonship, the test, the shameful death, the taunt that God will deliver him, goes well beyond the psalm. Whether by direct citation or by the wicked simply reenacting the oldest plot in the world, Calvary answers this chapter.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Roots. The hedonists' program of 2:6-9 echoes the slogan of Isaiah 22:13, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, Jerusalem's response to a death sentence; Wisdom dramatizes the outlook rather than quoting the line. The suffering righteous one who is tested and vindicated stands in the line of the servant of Isaiah 53, despised and rejected, and of Psalm 22, whose sufferer is mocked in words the Gospels quote. The oppression of the poor, the widow, and the aged (2:10) violates the covenant's oldest protections: the widow and the fatherless (Ex 22:22; Deut 24:17), the poor laborer (Deut 24:14-15), and the gray head that Israel was commanded to honor (Lev 19:32). And the devil's envy of 2:24 sends the reader back to Genesis 3. Wisdom does not use the word serpent, but it does trace death's entry to the devil, and the Church has long read the two passages together.

Fulfillment. **Matthew 27:39-43 is the session's discovery and needs no help. Alongside it: John 19:7, where the accusers say he has made himself the Son of God, which is strikingly close to the boast of Wisdom 2:13 and 16. St. Paul quotes Isaiah's slogan at 1 Corinthians 15:32 and answers it as Wisdom does, by denying the premise that death is the end: if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Wisdom holds out incorruption and the vindication of the righteous; Paul names the Resurrection of Christ as the fact that secures it. And Romans 1:21 repeats the diagnosis of 2:21, futile thinking and darkened minds.**

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *To Quirinus (Testimonies), 2.14 (3rd century)*

Compiling his handbook of Old Testament prophecies of Christ for new believers, St. Cyprian places the plot speech of Wisdom 2 among the Scriptures foretelling the Passion, alongside Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, in a testimony collection compiled for instruction. A generation before the great councils, Christians were already being taught to read this chapter at the foot of the cross.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *The City of God, Book 17.20 (5th century)*

Surveying the prophecies of Christ scattered through Israel's Scriptures, St. Augustine points to the wicked men of the Book of Wisdom who say, let us condemn him to a shameful death, and reads their whole speech as the Passion of Christ foretold (City of God 17.20). The irony that the fulfillers did not know they

were quoting anyone is our observation; his point is the prophecy itself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nyssa • *Great Catechism, ch. 8; compare On the Making of Man (4th century)*

St. Gregory teaches that man was created in the image of God and destined to share the divine life, and that mortality is not the original clothing of human nature but something added after the fall, a garment God permitted with healing in view (Great Catechism 8). His whole anthropology runs parallel to Wisdom 2:23, created for incorruption, in the image of God's eternity, and he insists that what was added can be removed: the image endures, and grace restores it. Note the precision: bodily immortality was a preternatural gift, never owed to human nature (CCC 376, 1008).

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 601. Jesus' redemptive death fulfilled the Scriptures; the divine plan of salvation through the death of the righteous one, the suffering Servant, was announced in advance in Israel's sacred books.

CCC 413. Returns tonight with new force: God did not make death; death entered the world through the devil's envy. The Catechism is citing Wisdom 2:24, the verse your group reaches at the chapter's end.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Thread 2, The Righteous Man on Trial. Tonight's discovery is this thread's first great payoff: the plot speech echoed at Calvary. But do not close the thread. The wicked pass their verdict tonight; chapter 5 will show the same men at the last judgment, watching their verdict reversed. Tease that: these men will speak once more before this book is done, and next time they will not be so confident.

Thread 4, Death's Genealogy. Major development: 2:23-24 answers where death came from. Created for incorruption, in the image of God's eternity; death entered by the devil's envy. Where death is going, for the righteous, is next session.

Thread 1, The Face of Wisdom. Quiet tonight, but note 2:13: the righteous man professes knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord. File it away; the figure of Wisdom and the figure of the righteous son are converging, slowly.

Thread 3, The Missing Book. Handle with care and delight. If the mockers at the cross echo this chapter, then a book absent from some Bibles is present at Calvary. Do not argue it tonight; the steelman moment will keep everyone honest. Simply let the group feel the weight, and remind them the full question is scheduled for Session 14. Collect last week's shelf-check findings when they come up.

Session Goals

1. Let the wicked speech be heard at full strength, and trace its four-move logic: despair, hedonism, power, persecution.

2. Lead the group to discover Matthew 27:39-43 as the echo of Wisdom 2:12-20, unprompted.
3. Face the Psalm 22 objection honestly in the steelman moment, and show why the Fathers' reading stands.
4. Land 2:23-24 as the answer to Session 1's open question about the origin of death.
5. Advance Threads 2 and 4; quietly mark Thread 1; feed Thread 3 without resolving it.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Welcome, opening prayer, and shelf-check debrief from last week's Live It, 10 minutes. Win questions, 10. Build on 2:1-9, 15. Build on 2:10-11, 5. The plot speech and the Calvary discovery, 25. Build on 2:21-24, 10. Steelman moment, 5. Send and Live It, 7. Closing prayer, 3.

If you are running long, cut in this order: first drop Question 5 (the rosebuds question folds into Question 4), then drop the second Dig Deeper (on 1 Corinthians 15:32). Do not cut the Calvary discovery, the 2:23-24 landing, or the steelman moment.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud, all respond Amen.

Father, your Son was mocked by men who did not know they were fulfilling your word. As we listen tonight to the reasoning of the wicked, keep our own hearts honest; show us where their logic hides in us. Lord Jesus, righteous one, Son of the Father, you endured the test and the shameful death for our sake; teach us to stand with you. Holy Spirit, give light to our minds, for you have told us that wickedness blinds. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

1. Have you ever been mocked, excluded, or quietly resented simply for trying to do the right thing? What did that feel like?
2. What is the most persuasive version you have ever heard of the philosophy, life is short, so grab what you can? Where do you hear it today?

Transition: Last week ended unfinished. The ungodly had made a covenant with death, and they were about to speak. Tonight the author does something bold: he hands them the microphone and lets them make their case at full length. Listen closely, because their speech is going somewhere none of them could have imagined.

Build: Wisdom 2:1-9

Have someone read Wisdom 2:1-9 aloud, with feeling. It is a speech; let it sound like one.

3. What do the ungodly believe about death in verses 1 to 5? List their claims. Which one is the foundation the rest stand on?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Life is short and sorrowful; there is no remedy for death; no one returns; we were born by mere chance; afterward it will be as though we had never existed; our name will be forgotten. The foundation is the claim that death is final and life is accidental. Everything else in the chapter, the pleasure, the power, the persecution, is built on that one plank. The author does not caricature them; this is a serious, recognizable worldview, then and now.

4. Given that foundation, is the conclusion of verses 6 to 9, come, let us enjoy the good things that exist, actually irrational? What is honest about it, and what is missing?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It is chillingly rational. If death is annihilation and life is chance, then pleasure now is a coherent response; St. Paul says exactly this at 1 Corinthians 15:32. What is missing is not logic but truth: the premise about death is false, as chapters 1 and 3 insist. The book is teaching a method: take the opposing view at its strongest, then test the premise rather than mocking the conclusion.

Leader: Let the group feel the strength of the argument before you answer it.

5. **Crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither (2:8). Why do they choose rosebuds, which wither so quickly? What does that image reveal about how they see life, and do you know anyone, or any feed on your phone, that lives at that speed?**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Everything is withering; enjoyment is a race against decay. The image is beautiful and desperate at once. There is a whole modern vocabulary for this, from you only live once to fear of missing out.

Leader: The tone to strike is compassion rather than scorn; this is what hope-starved people do, and half the room has felt the pull.

Build: Wisdom 2:10-11

Have someone read 2:10-11 aloud.

- 6. In verses 10 and 11 the speech turns dark: let us oppress the righteous poor man, the widow, the aged; let our might be our law of right. How does their pursuit of pleasure lead them to use power against the weak? Was that step inevitable?**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

If nothing is sacred, the weak are simply in the way, and might is the only law left standing. Unchecked, this reasoning has nowhere to stop; the step is the logic maturing. To be fair, plenty of unbelievers honor the weak; the question is what, on this premise alone, obliges anyone to. They target the poor man, the widow, and the aged first, the very people the covenant law placed under God's personal protection. (Ex 22:22 and Deut 24:17 for the widow and the fatherless; Deut 24:14-15 for the poor laborer; Lev 19:32 for the aged.) Long before Nietzsche made the will to power a philosophy, this author had written the genealogy of might-makes-right. Cultures that lose the first premise, that life is God's, eventually rediscover this verse the hard way.

Build: Wisdom 2:12-20, The Plot

Have your strongest reader read 2:12-20 aloud, slowly, as a conspiracy being whispered. Then let there be a beat of silence before Question 7.

- 7. Why do these men hate the righteous man? List every reason the speech gives. What has he actually done to them?**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He is inconvenient; he opposes their actions; he reproaches them for sins against the law; he professes knowledge of God; he calls himself a child of the Lord; the very sight of him is a burden; his life is unlike other men's; he boasts that God is his father. He has done nothing to them. His existence is the accusation. Goodness, simply by standing there, passes judgment on its opposite, and the wicked would rather destroy the mirror than face the reflection.

- 8. Live discovery. Read verses 17 to 20 once more: if the righteous man is God's son, God will help him and deliver him; let us test him with insult and torture; let us condemn him to a shameful death. Somewhere in the Gospels, a group of men stand in front of a condemned righteous man and taunt him in almost exactly these terms. Find the scene.**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Matthew 27:39-43, at the foot of the cross: the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock him, saying he trusts in God, let God deliver him now if he desires him, for he said, I am the Son of God. Well before Calvary, as

the Church has read this speech, the taunt was already on the page. Here is what the Fathers saw: from St. Cyprian and St. Augustine onward, the Church has read this speech as a prophecy of the Passion. There is a wound inside the discovery: the men fulfilling it were the custodians of the Scriptures.

Leader: Note the wound gently.

Leader: Read Wisdom 2:18 and Matthew 27:43 back to back and let the room sit in silence for a moment before you go on.

Build: Wisdom 2:21-24

Have someone read 2:21-24 aloud.

9. Verse 21 gives the author's diagnosis: thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them. What is this claiming about the relationship between how we live and what we can see?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Sin damages sight. The intellect is not a sealed instrument; a corrupt will slowly corrupts perception, so that the wicked end up sincerely unable to see what is in front of them. St. Paul repeats the diagnosis in Romans 1:21, futile thinking and darkened minds. The practical edge for us: some doubts are intellectual and deserve arguments, but some are moral and deserve a confession. Wisdom refuses to pretend the two never meet. That distinction is for examining ourselves, never for diagnosing someone else's doubt.

10. Verses 23 and 24 answer the question we left open in Session 1. Where did death come from, and what were we made for? To whom does the author trace death's entry, and how does that connect to the serpent of Eden?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity; through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. The question Session 1 left open is now partly answered: death is an intruder, and now we know the intruder's door, the devil's envy, met by our first parents' consent (Rom 5:12; CCC 397-400). Wisdom 2:24 attributes death's entry to the envy of the devil. It does not use the word serpent. But the Church has long read this verse together with Genesis 3, hearing here the Old Testament's clearest identification of the tempter behind that story as the devil. CCC 413 quotes this verse. One more thing: envy is the sin that cannot bear another's good. The devil envied; the wicked of this chapter envy the righteous man; Calvary is envy's masterpiece and its defeat.

A Question Worth Facing

Present this at full strength before answering.

A careful Protestant friend, shown tonight's discovery, replies: "Impressive, but look at Matthew 27:43 again: he trusts in God, let God deliver him. That is a quotation of Psalm 22:8, and Psalm 22 is in everyone's Bible. Matthew is a master of Old Testament citation, and the psalm explains the scene completely. You do not need this Greek book from Alexandria, and finding it here is wishful thinking."

Respond from the text: Grant the psalm gladly; Matthew certainly has Psalm 22 in view, and the crucified Lord prays its opening line. But lay the passages side by side and count what the psalm does not contain. Psalm 22 has the taunt, the insults, and the shameful death. Wisdom 2 adds four things. The righteous one calls himself a child of the Lord and boasts that God is his father. His sonship is deliberately put to the test. The

whole plot is told from inside the plotters' own heads. And his life merely being different is what condemned him. The psalm gives Calvary its soundtrack; Wisdom, as the Fathers read it, gives it the conspirators' minutes. The two are not rivals, and the Fathers cited both. And even on the friend's own terms, one fact remains for Session 14 to weigh. Many of the earliest Christian writers, reading their Scriptures in Greek, found the Passion foretold in this book and cited it without hesitation. What the Church later had to sort out was the shape of the canon, not whether this chapter pointed to the cross.

DIG DEEPER

The genealogy of might makes right. Notice the order of the speech: first despair about death, then pleasure, then power, then persecution. The author's claim is that the fourth step is hiding inside the first. Every century tests this thesis. When a culture concludes that life is accidental and death is final, protections for the weak, the unborn, the aged, the inconvenient, begin to look negotiable. Wisdom 2 is not just a prophecy; it is a test your group can apply to the evening news. Apply it to premises, not to people: reason still knows the moral law (CCC 1954-1960), and the point is what the premise, left to itself, can no longer defend.

DIG DEEPER

St. Paul quotes the slogan itself, Isaiah 22:13, the creed the party of Wisdom 2 lives by. At 1 Corinthians 15:32 he takes it up, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, and concedes its logic: if the dead are not raised, the hedonists are right. Paul does not answer despair with moralism. He answers it with a fact, the Resurrection, and that fact rests on the ground Wisdom has been preparing since 1:15: God did not make death, and righteousness is immortal. Faith's quarrel with the pleasure party has never been about whether joy matters; it is about whether the tomb is the end.

Send: Closing Questions

11. The righteous man's reproach was his life even more than his words (2:12). Ask yourself: Where is your life quietly inconvenient to the culture around you? Where should it be, and is not yet?
12. Verse 21 says wickedness blinds. Is there any place in your life where you have stopped being able to see clearly, and living differently, not arguing differently, might be the way back?

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly.** Read Wisdom 3 and 4 this week with a pencil. Mark every promise made to people the world counts as losers.
- **Pray the two texts together. Once this week, read Wisdom 2:12-20 and then Matthew 27:39-43, slowly, as one prayer. End at the foot of the cross and stay there a minute.**
- **Stand with someone inconvenient.** Find one concrete way to stand beside a person it costs something to defend: a mocked coworker, an ignored relative, someone whose goodness makes others uncomfortable.
- **Notice the reasoning. Catch yourself once this week reasoning like 2:1-9, life is short, so I might as well, and name the premise underneath it out loud.**

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, righteous one, Son of the Father, the wicked tested you with insult and torture and condemned you to a shameful death, and you answered with mercy. Give us the courage to live lives that are inconvenient to evil, the humility to know how much of the plotters' logic survives in us, and the hope of incorruption for which we were made. Father, into your hands we commend our spirits. Amen.

Memory Verse

┆ *“God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity.” (Wisdom 2:23)*

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 2, grouped by role.

Primary Text

- Wisdom 2:1-24 (read in movements: 2:1-9, 2:10-11, 2:12-20, 2:21-24)

Discovery Passage (found live by the group)

- Matthew 27:39-43 (the mockery at the cross; the session's key discovery)

Supporting References (leader's pocket)

- Isaiah 22:13 (the slogan, let us eat and drink, that Wisdom 2 echoes and Paul quotes)
- 1 Corinthians 15:32 (St. Paul quotes and answers the slogan)
- Exodus 22:22 and Deuteronomy 24:17 (covenant protection of the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner)
- Leviticus 19:32 (honor due the aged)
- Deuteronomy 24:14-15 (the poor and needy hired laborer)
- Isaiah 53 (the suffering servant, background to the righteous one)
- Psalm 22:7-8 (the mockery psalm; handled in the steelman moment)
- John 19:7 (he has made himself the Son of God)
- Romans 1:21 (futile thinking, darkened minds)
- Genesis 3 (the serpent; read together with Wisdom 2:24, which traces death's entry to the devil's envy)

Catechism

- CCC 601 (the Passion in accordance with the Scriptures)
- CCC 413 (quotes Wisdom 2:24)

Voices of the Church

- St. Cyprian of Carthage, To Quirinus (Testimonies), 2.14
- St. Augustine, The City of God, Book 17.20
- St. Gregory of Nyssa, Great Catechism, ch. 8; compare On the Making of Man

Memory Verse

- Wisdom 2:23