

Radiant and Unfading

A Catholic Journey Through the Book of Wisdom

Session 6: Kings, Seek Wisdom

Wisdom 6 • 90 minutes • Leader Edition

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that all authority is a stewardship given from the Lord and audited by him, and that Wisdom herself, radiant and unfading, is not hiding: she is easily discerned by those who love her, and she is already out seeking the seekers.

Catholic Touchstone: The Catechism teaches that authority derives from God (CCC 1899) and that in prayer, the living God tirelessly calls each person first (CCC 2567). Both halves of tonight's chapter, the audit of the powerful and the eagerness of Wisdom, are Catholic doctrine in seed form.

What You Need to Know

Part I ended in a courtroom; Part II opens in a classroom. The author turns from describing the two destinies to addressing his readers directly: listen therefore, O kings, and understand; learn, O judges of the ends of the earth (6:1). The therefore matters: because the reversal of chapter 5 is real, how you rule now is the most urgent question in your life. The first half of the chapter (6:1-11) is an audit notice to the powerful. Your dominion was given you from the Lord, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans (6:3). Authority is not owned but lent, and the terms are stated with terrifying evenhandedness: the lowliest man may be pardoned in mercy, but mighty men will be mightily tested (6:6), for the Lord of all will not stand in awe of any one, nor show deference to greatness (6:7). Remember Session 1: everyone in your group rules something. This audit has their name on it.

Then, at 6:12, the tone changes so suddenly it feels like sunrise, and your study's title appears: Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. Name the moment for your group; they have been reading under this verse's banner for six weeks. Now watch what the passage does to every anxious picture of seeking God. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her (6:13). He who rises early to seek her finds her sitting at his gates (6:14), already there, earlier than the earliest riser. And the astonishing 6:16: she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought. The seeker turns out to be the sought. This is the doctrine the Catechism states about prayer itself: God calls man first; our seeking is always a response (CCC 2567). If anyone in your group has pictured God as hard to find, reluctant, or hiding, tonight's text is written to them.

The chapter's third movement (6:17-20) is a Greek rhetorical staircase called a *sorites*, each rung locking into the next: the beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction; concern for instruction is love of her; love of her is the keeping of her laws; heed to her laws is assurance of immortality; and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom. Walk the staircase slowly with your group and point at the bottom rung: desire. The bottom rung of everything this book promises is wanting it sincerely. Tonight's steelman moment will test the staircase's middle rung, keeping her laws, against the Protestant concern about works-righteousness; prepare it well, because the answer is one of the most useful your group will ever carry. The chapter closes with the Solomon persona stepping forward (6:22-25): I will tell you what

wisdom is and how she came to be; I will hide no secrets from you. And note his aside: he will not travel in the company of sickly envy, the disease of 2:24. Wisdom's family trait is generosity; envy is the other party's crest.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Roots. The summons to kings restates Psalm 2:10-11, now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. The audit of shepherds who fed themselves is Ezekiel 34. Wisdom in the streets, calling, seeking, available, is Proverbs 1:20-21 and Proverbs 8:1-17, where she says, I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me, the verse Wisdom 6:12 is unfolding. The staircase's link between love and obedience is Deuteronomy's heartbeat: love the LORD your God and keep his commandments, the short form of Deuteronomy's long conditional (Deut 11:1; cf. 30:16).

Fulfillment. Jesus before Pilate states to power's face the truth Wisdom 6:3 teaches: you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above (Jn 19:11), tonight's first discovery. The audit principle, every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required (Lk 12:48), is the second. St. Paul teaches that there is no authority except from God (Rom 13:1), and instructs prayer for kings and all in high positions (1 Tim 2:1-2). The seeking Wisdom who meets people in their paths walks through the Gospels in person: the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10), and seek, and you will find (Mt 7:7) is spoken by the one who was seeking first. And the staircase's middle rung is Jesus' own sentence: if you love me, you will keep my commandments (Jn 14:15).

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux • On Consideration, Books I-II (esp. I.2-4 and II.3 on occupations, II.6 on stewardship), to Pope Eugene III (c. 1148-1153)

When his former monk became pope, St. Bernard wrote him a book of blunt counsel: do not let administration, litigation, and the endless demands of office consume the interior life a shepherd owes his people. Ecclesiastical authority, Bernard insisted, exists for the good of those entrusted to it, not for domination or self-exaltation, and its holder will one day render an account. If that is true of the highest office, and Bernard said it to a pope, then it is true of every lesser one, down to the smallest authority any of us carries.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • Confessions X.27.38 (c. 397-401)

Late have I loved you, beauty ever ancient, ever new (the familiar composite English rendering of Confessions X.27.38). Augustine's famous confession is Wisdom 6:16 in autobiography: you were within me, but I was outside, and there I searched for you. All the years he thought he was seeking, he was being sought; God was calling, shouting, breaking through his deafness. The prodigal professor discovered what tonight's chapter teaches: the road home has someone already on it, coming the other way.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Anselm of Canterbury • Proslogion, chapter 1 (11th century)

St. Anselm opens his great work with a prayer, not an argument: Lord, teach me to seek you, and show yourself to the seeker, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me how. His motto, I believe in order to understand, puts desire and trust close to where Wisdom 6:17 puts them: his bottom rung is faith seeking understanding, Wisdom's is the most sincere desire for instruction. For Anselm, even the desire to seek God is already God's gift moving in us.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1899. The authority required by the moral order derives from God. Every human authority, from empires to households, holds a delegated and accountable trust (CCC 2197-2234, esp. 2234).

Accountable, and therefore limited: an unjust command does not bind simply because someone in authority gives it (CCC 1902-1903, 2242).

CCC 2567. God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face, but the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to the mysterious encounter of prayer. In prayer, God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Thread 1, The Face of Wisdom. Major development; handle with discipline, because the reveal is two sessions away. Tonight Wisdom is radiant (light again), she hastens, she sits at gates, she goes about seeking, she meets people in every thought. The personification is now unmistakably personal and unmistakably active. If participants start guessing aloud, smile and remind them their guesses are sealed; do not confirm or deny anything. Next session the Solomon persona describes how he found her; the session after that, the guesses open.

Thread 3, The Missing Book. Quiet tonight. If the works-righteousness steelman raises canon suspicion, answer the doctrine tonight (the discussion guide equips you) and park the canon question for Session 14 as usual.

Threads 2 and 4. Resolved last session. If tonight's audit language brings the courtroom back to mind, welcome the callback: chapter 6's therefore stands on chapter 5's verdict.

Session Goals

1. Land the audit: all authority is lent from God, and more given means more required.
2. Lead the group to discover John 19:11 and Luke 12:48 as the audit's New Testament voice.
3. Name the title verse and let 6:12-16 dismantle the picture of a hiding, reluctant God.
4. Walk the sorites staircase and point at the bottom rung: sincere desire.
5. Answer the works-righteousness steelman from the text without polemic, and advance Thread 1 without tipping it.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Welcome and opening prayer, 8 minutes. Win questions, 10. Build on 6:1-11 with both discoveries, 25. Build on 6:12-16, 18. Build on the staircase, 6:17-20, 10. Steelman moment, 8. Build on 6:21-25 and the Part II tease, 4. Send and Live It, 5. Closing prayer, 2.

If you are running long, cut in this order: first make Luke 12:48 a stated reference instead of a second hunt, then drop the second Dig Deeper (on envy and generosity). Do not cut the John 19:11 discovery, the title verse moment, or the staircase.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud, all respond Amen.

Father, every authority we hold is on loan from you, and every search we make for you began in your searching for us. Your Wisdom, radiant and unfading, is easily found by those who love her: give us tonight the most sincere desire, which is the first step, and meet us in our thoughts, as you have promised. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

1. Have you ever been handed authority you did not feel ready for, a job, a team, a classroom, a younger sibling? What did the weight of it feel like on day one?
2. Think of the best boss, coach, or leader you have ever had. What made their authority feel different from the bad ones?

Transition: Part I of this book ended in a courtroom, with the verdict of every life read aloud. Tonight the author turns from the verdict to us, and his first word is therefore. Because that courtroom is real, he says, let us talk about how you are ruling whatever you rule. And then, halfway through the chapter, he will say the two words this whole study is named after.

Build: Wisdom 6:1-11, Authority Given from Above

Have someone read 6:1-11 aloud.

3. Verse 3: your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High. Live discovery: Jesus says almost exactly this, to the man holding Rome's power of life and death in Jerusalem, at the worst possible moment to say it. Find the scene; look in John's trial narrative, chapter 19.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

John 19:11, Jesus to Pilate: you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above. Bound, scourged, and on trial for his life, Jesus calmly states to the Roman governor the truth Wisdom 6:3 teaches: your authority is a loan, and I know the lender. The scene proves the doctrine has teeth: power's origin from God does not flatter power; it holds it accountable. St. Paul states it as principle at Romans 13:1, there is no authority except from God.

4. Verses 5 to 8 set out the terms: the lowliest man may be pardoned in mercy, but mighty men will be mightily tested. What principle about responsibility do these verses teach? Second discovery: Jesus states the same principle as a proverb containing the word required. Find it in Luke 12.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke 12:48: every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required. The Lord and the sage agree: judgment is proportioned to trust. This should sober everyone and terrify no one; notice the mercy built into 6:6 for the lowly, and notice that the mighty are not condemned for being mighty but examined for how they spent it. One question, gently: by global and historical standards, is there anyone here to whom much has not been given?

5. Verse 7: the Lord of all will not stand in awe of any one, nor show deference to greatness. Where do you see deference to greatness distorting judgment in our world? What does it mean that God is the one judge who is unimpressed?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Everywhere: celebrity excused, wealth flattered, power feared. God's unimpressibility is terrible news for status and wonderful news for justice: he made both small and great, and he takes thought for all alike (6:7). The same fact that holds the mighty accountable shelters the small. No one in the room is invisible to him, and no one is untouchable.

Build: Wisdom 6:12-16, Radiant and Unfading

Have someone read 6:12-16 aloud, then tell the group plainly: you have just heard the verse this study is named for.

6. Verse 12: **Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She is easily discerned by those who love her. What does that word, easily, tell you about God's willingness to be found?**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It says that God wants to be found, and that the one condition is love. Most of us expect seeking God to be like mountaineering, rare air and elite finders; the text says easily, and makes it depend on one thing: love. The passage's own verbs are loving, seeking, desiring, rising early. The difficulty is usually not God's obscurity but our desire. She is radiant, light does not hide, and unfading, she will not have dimmed by the time you get around to looking. The gate is low and the gate is love. The hidden God (Isa 45:15) and dryness in prayer (CCC 2731) are real experiences of the faithful. 6:12's easily is a promise about God's willingness, not a correction of anyone's desert season.

Leader: Guard this as you share it; someone in the room may be in a dry season.

7. Verses 13 to 16: she hastens to make herself known; the early riser finds her already sitting at his gates; she goes about seeking those worthy of her and meets them in every thought. In this passage, who is seeking whom? What does that do to the story you tell about your own search for God?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Even before we begin seeking God, he is already seeking us and drawing us toward himself. Rise before dawn to hunt for her and she is on your porch; set out on your path and she is walking it toward you; retreat into your own thoughts and she meets you there too. This is the Catechism's teaching on prayer in narrative form: God calls man first; our first step is always a response (CCC 2567). Every conversion story in the room, including the slow quiet ones, is really the story of having been found. St. Augustine said it for all of us: you were within me, but I was outside; late have I loved you.

Build: Wisdom 6:17-20, Step by Step

Have someone read 6:17-20 aloud.

8. Verses 17 to 20 build step by step, each verse leading into the next. Trace the sequence as a group. Where does it begin, what does that first step cost, and where does it lead?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Desire for instruction, then concern for instruction which is love of her, then love which keeps her laws, then heed to her laws which assures immortality, then immortality which brings one near to God, and so, the author concludes, the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom. The first step is desire, sincere wanting, the lowest bar in the spiritual life and the one nothing can replace. What it costs is the honest admission that you want it: nothing else, and nothing less. The last step is a kingdom, which closes the loop on 6:1: the kings being audited are offered a better throne. Everyone in the room can take the first step tonight.

A Question Worth Facing

Present this at full strength before answering.

A Protestant friend reads the sequence and frowns: “There it is. Keeping of her laws is assurance of immortality. That is salvation by law-keeping, works-righteousness, the exact thing the Gospel abolishes: for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9). Honestly, a ladder you climb to a kingdom is the opposite of grace, and it is one more reason this book never belonged in the Bible.”

Respond from the text: First agree with the doctrine at stake: salvation is grace from top to bottom, and no Catholic may boast of climbing anywhere; the Church condemns Pelagianism outright, and she teaches that the grace of initial justification is unmerited, owed to no one, and impossible to earn (CCC 2010). Now reread the sequence, because the friend has skipped the first two steps and verse 16. It does not begin with law-keeping; it begins with desire and love, and the law-keeping step is defined as what love does: love of her is the keeping of her laws. Who else talks that way? Jesus: if you love me, you will keep my commandments (Jn 14:15). St. John: this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3). St. Paul himself, in the very next verse after Ephesians 2:9: we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10), and elsewhere, faith working through love (Gal 5:6). And verses 13 to 16 settle the grace question before it is asked. Every verb of initiative in them is hers: she hastens to make herself known, she is already sitting at the gate before the early riser arrives, she goes about seeking, she meets them in every thought. That is the Catechism's point about prayer stated as story: God calls man first, and our own first step is always a response (CCC 2567). Do not let the friend stumble over the word worthy in verse 16; it is not a wage paid before she will come. She is already out seeking when she finds it, and what she finds is the love and desire of verses 12 and 17, which the whole book says she herself awakens. Grace moves first; the steps are climbed hand in hand with the one who came down it looking for you. Obedience here is not the price of love; it is love's shape.

Build: Wisdom 6:21-25, The Teacher Steps Forward

Have someone read 6:21-25 aloud.

9. In verses 21 to 25 the royal speaker turns personal: I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be; I will hide no secrets from you. He also refuses to travel with sickly envy. Where have we met envy before in this book, and why is generosity the opposite of it here?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Envy was the devil's door at 2:24: through the devil's envy death entered the world. Envy hoards and begrudges; wisdom, the speaker insists, is not diminished by being shared, so hiding her would be siding with the enemy. A multitude of wise men is the salvation of the world (6:24). There is a family resemblance: God's friends give wisdom away; death's party keeps score. Next session this royal teacher

tells his own story, and it begins somewhere no king ever admits to beginning.

DIG DEEPER

Praying for the powerful. Because authority is God's loan, the Church prays for those holding it, whether or not she voted for them: I urge that supplications be made for kings and all who are in high positions (1 Tim 2:1-2), traditionally understood to have been written under Nero. Intercession is not endorsement; it is taking Wisdom 6 seriously. The Christian response to power is neither flattery nor rage but accountability and prayer.

DIG DEEPER

The two spirits of this book. Track the contrast the author is quietly building: envy versus generosity. The devil's envy admits death (2:24); the wicked lie in wait for the righteous man because his life reproaches them and the very sight of him is a burden (2:12-16); the teacher refuses envy's company and hides no secrets (6:23); and wisdom herself hastens, appears, meets, gives. You can tell whose party a spirit belongs to by whether it hoards or hands over. It is a test worth applying to our own hearts.

Send: Closing Questions

- 10. Where do you have real responsibility for other people right now, at work, at home, in a friendship, in the parish? Choose one. What would faithful, accountable leadership look like there this week?**
- 11.** The first step is sincere desire. On a completely honest scale, how much do you want wisdom, and what is currently outbidding that desire for your attention?

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly. Read Wisdom 7:1-21 with a pencil. A king is about to tell you where he actually came from; mark everything that surprises you.**
- **Rise early once.** She is found sitting at the gates of the one who rises to seek her (6:14). One morning this week, give God the first fifteen minutes of the day, before the phone. See who is already at the gate.
- **Take stock as a steward. List the areas where you hold authority,** then write one concrete act of right ruling for each: an apology owed, a standard raised, a person served instead of used.
- **Pray for someone in power.** Once this week, pray by name for an authority over you, a boss, a bishop, a governor, especially one you would not have chosen. Much has been given them; ask mercy on their judgment.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, Most High, every crown is on loan from you, and you are the one judge unimpressed by greatness. Make us faithful stewards of the small kingdoms you have handed us. Your Wisdom, radiant and unfading, has been seeking us down every path and meeting us in every thought; give us the sincere desire that finds her easily, and lead us step by step from desire to love, from love to obedience, from obedience to immortality, and home to the kingdom. Amen.

Memory Verse

“Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her.” **(Wisdom 6:12)**

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 6, grouped by role.

Primary Text

- Wisdom 6:1-25 (read in movements: 6:1-11, 6:12-16, 6:17-20, 6:21-25)

Discovery Passages (found live by the group)

- John 19:11 (power given from above; the session's key discovery)
- Luke 12:48 (to whom much is given; second discovery, or stated reference if time is short)

Supporting References (leader's pocket)

- Psalm 2:10-11 (be wise, O kings)
- Ezekiel 34 (the judgment of the shepherds)
- Proverbs 1:20-21 and 8:1-17 (Wisdom calling in the streets; those who seek me find me)
- Deuteronomy 11:1 and 30:16 (love the LORD and keep his commandments)
- Romans 13:1 (no authority except from God)
- 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (prayer for kings; Dig Deeper 1)
- Luke 19:10 (the Son of man came to seek)
- Matthew 7:7 (seek, and you will find)

Wisdom 2:24 (the devil's envy; the speaker's foil at 6:23)

Wisdom 2:12-16 (the wicked and the righteous man; tonight's callbacks)

Wisdom 7:1-21 (next week's reading; Live It This Week)

- John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 5:6 (the steelman's answer, in place)

Catechism

- CCC 1899 (authority derives from God)
- CCC 2567 (God calls man first)

Voices of the Church

- St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On Consideration (De Consideratione) I.2-4, II.3, II.6, to Pope Eugene III
- St. Augustine, Confessions X.27.38
- St. Anselm of Canterbury, Proslogion, chapter 1

Memory Verse

- Wisdom 6:12