

Radiant and Unfading

A Catholic Journey Through the Book of Wisdom

Session 7: I Preferred Her to Thrones

Wisdom 7:1-21 • 90 minutes • Leader Edition

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the wisest king in Israel's memory began exactly where they did, a cry in the delivery room, and got wisdom the one way it is gotten: he prayed for it, preferred it to everything, and found that everything else came along with it.

Catholic Touchstone: The closing movement of tonight's reading, on the God-given knowledge of the natural world, grounds the Church's serene teaching that there can be no real discrepancy between faith and genuinely scientific research (CCC 159) and that such study deepens admiration for the Creator (CCC 283). The sage credits the whole syllabus to wisdom herself, whom the very next verse names the fashioner of all things (7:22), and the study draws the consequence: studying creation is reading her handiwork.

What You Need to Know

The royal teacher promised to hide nothing, and he keeps the promise in the most disarming way possible: he starts in the delivery room. I also am mortal, like all men, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; when I was born, I began to breathe the common air; my first sound was a cry, like that of all; I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all mankind one entrance into life, and a common departure (7:1-6, abridged). No ancient king talked like this. Ancient royal self-presentation typically reached for omens, divine parentage, portents; this king begins with the cry and the swaddling bands every person in your group also began with. The rhetorical payoff is enormous: if the wisest man alive entered by the common door, then wisdom does not come with anyone's birth certificate. Whatever he has, he got some other way, and the way is verse 7.

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me (7:7). That is the whole method, and your group will discover the famous night behind it: Gibeon, 1 Kings 3, where God appears to the young king in a dream and says ask what I shall give you, and Solomon asks for an understanding mind, and God, delighted that he asked for neither long life nor riches nor his enemies' lives, gives wisdom and throws in the riches and honor unasked. Wisdom 7 is that story retold in the first person, and 7:11 is its moral: all good things came to me along with her. Jesus will compress the same economy into one sentence your group can also find: seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Mt 6:33).

Between those two discoveries stands the great preference passage (7:8-10), and it should be read like a ladder of renunciations: I preferred her to scepters and thrones; wealth as nothing beside her; gold is a little sand in her sight, silver counted as clay; loved more than health and beauty; and then the summit, I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases. Mark that last line privately: the speaker would trade the sun for her, because she outshines it. Thread 1 is one week from resolution, and the light imagery is now almost speaking its own name. Say nothing; let the sentence do its quiet work. Two more notes. First, 7:13-14: he learned without guile and imparts without grudging, for wisdom is an unfailing treasure, and those who get

it obtain friendship with God. Wisdom's endgame is not information but friendship, the same destination as 3:9. Second, the syllabus of 7:15-21: God gave him unerring knowledge of the structure of the world, the elements, the seasons and solstices, the constellations, the natures of animals, the powers of spirits, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots. The sage's curriculum is what we would call cosmology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, botany, and pharmacology, and he credits it all to wisdom, whom he will name in the next breath as the fashioner of all things (7:22), the first line of next session's text. It is as close as Scripture comes to a charter for studying nature, and tonight's Catechism connection makes the Church's teaching explicit. Finally, prepare the steelman with care: tonight a thoughtful objector asks how a book written in Solomon's voice, centuries after Solomon, can be honest, let alone inspired. Your group deserves the grown-up answer, and it will strengthen rather than shake them.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Roots. The chapter is an extended meditation on 1 Kings 3:5-14, Gibeon, tonight's first discovery, with its parallel in 2 Chronicles 1. The preference for wisdom over gold restates Proverbs 8:10-11 and 3:13-15, wisdom better than jewels, and Job 28's mine shaft that finds everything except her. The first-formed child of earth is Adam of Genesis 2:7; dust remembering it is dust is Genesis 3:19. Solomon's God-given natural knowledge recalls 1 Kings 4:29-34, where he speaks of trees, beasts, birds, reptiles, and fish, and the kings of the earth come to listen.

Fulfillment. Matthew 6:33 is the second discovery: seek first, and all these things as well. St. James democratizes Gibeon for the whole Church: if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching (Jas 1:5). The king wrapped in swaddling cloths points forward to the King who chose the same entrance, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (Lk 2:7, 12), where the common birth becomes the sign itself. And the merchant who sells everything for one pearl (Mt 13:45-46) is the preference passage told as a parable.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis of Assisi • *The renunciation before the bishop of Assisi (c. 1206)*

Brought before the bishop by his father over cloth sold from the family stock to rebuild a church (restitution was the grievance), the young Francis, in front of the bishop and the town, stripped off the fine clothes his father's wealth had bought and laid them at his feet. As Celano records the declaration: until now I have called you father on earth; now, Our Father who art in heaven. The early accounts, Thomas of Celano's First Life (ch. 6, §15), the Legend of the Three Companions, and St. Bonaventure's Major Legend (II.4), all record the scene as the hinge of his life. It is Wisdom 7:8 performed in public: scepters, wealth, and inheritance on the pavement, and the better portion chosen in front of witnesses.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thomas Aquinas • *The "straw" episode of December 1273, as Reginald of Piperno reported it and Bartholomew of Capua testified at the Naples canonization inquiry (1319)*

The greatest theological mind of the Middle Ages was remembered by the early tradition as a man of prayer before study, convinced that study begins on its knees, Wisdom 7:7 as a habit. And the canonization testimony of Bartholomew of Capua (Naples, 1319), preserving what his companion Reginald reported, tells the end of the story: near the close of his life, after a profound experience in prayer, he stopped writing altogether, saying that compared with what he had now seen, all he had written seemed like straw.

The man who knew the most held it the most lightly: gold, next to her, is a little sand.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Albert the Great • *Doctor of the Church, patron of the natural sciences (13th century)*

Aquinas's own teacher wrote pioneering studies of minerals, plants, and animals, among them *De mineralibus*, *De vegetabilibus et plantis*, and *De animalibus*, and he pressed his students to investigate nature by looking at nature itself rather than by repeating what earlier authorities had said. No single sentence is quoted here; what the tradition remembers is a whole working life in which the study of creatures and reverence for the Creator who fashioned them were never two projects. The Church later named him patron of the natural sciences. He is Wisdom 7:17-21 with a Dominican habit on: the syllabus of creation, received as gift and studied as praise.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 159. Faith and science: though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason, because the God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith is the same God who gave the light of reason, and God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. Consequently methodical research in every branch of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, since the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God.

CCC 283. The question of origins has been enriched by many scientific studies of the age of the cosmos and the development of life, discoveries that invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH • LEADER ONLY

Thread 1, The Face of Wisdom. Final approach; maximum discipline. Tonight's key sentence is 7:10: I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases. The light imagery planted since 3:7 is now naming itself. Do not comment on it beyond letting it be read well. **CRITICAL LOGISTICS:** at the close of tonight's session, remind everyone to bring their sealed Take-Home 1 with their written guess next week; the guesses open in Session 8. Bring a few blank cards for anyone who lost theirs, and have them rewrite their guess from memory before next session begins, not after the reveal.

Thread 3, The Missing Book. Tonight's steelman handles pseudonymity, the strongest form of the authorship objection. The answer given in the discussion guide is honest and reusable; deliver it with confidence and, as always, park the full canon question for Session 14.

Threads 2 and 4. Resolved. Tonight's one entrance into life and common departure (7:6) is a gentle echo of the equality theme; welcome callbacks without reopening the files.

Session Goals

1. Let the royal autobiography level the room, and land 7:7's therefore: wisdom arrives where it is prayed for, and the prayer is available to everyone in it.
2. Lead the group to discover Gibeon (1 Kings 3:5-14) behind Wisdom 7:7-11.
3. Walk the preference ladder of 7:8-10 honestly, ending on the radiance line without comment.
4. Lead the group to discover Matthew 6:33 behind 7:11, and land the seek-first economy.
5. Answer the pseudonymity steelman like adults, commission the sciences from 7:15-21, and set up next week's reveal logistics.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Welcome and opening prayer, 8 minutes. Win questions, 10. Build on 7:1-6, 12. Build on 7:7 with the Gibeon discovery, 15. Build on the preference ladder, 7:8-10, 10. Build on 7:11-12 with the Matthew discovery, 10. Build on 7:13-14, 6. Build on 7:15-21, 8. Steelman moment, 6. Send, Live It, and the Take-Home 1 reminder, 4. Closing prayer, 1.

If you are running long, cut in this order: first drop Question 7 (fold friendship with God into Question 8's answer), then drop the first Dig Deeper (on the swaddling cloths). Do not cut either discovery, the preference ladder, or the closing reminder to bring Take-Home 1.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud, all respond Amen.

Father, the wisest of kings asked in the night, and you gave without reproaching. We take the same posture of asking tonight. Give us wisdom above scepters and gold, above health and beauty, above everything we have been chasing instead. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening Questions

1. The classic thought experiment: you get one wish, no wishing for more wishes. What do you honestly think most people would choose? What would you have chosen at eighteen?
2. Who is the most brilliant person you know who is also genuinely humble? How do you think those two things coexist in them?

Transition: Last week the royal teacher promised to hide nothing about wisdom and how he found her. Tonight he keeps the promise, and he starts his story in the last place any ancient king would ever start it.

Build: Wisdom 7:1-6, The King in the Delivery Room

Have someone read 7:1-6 aloud.

3. **Ancient royal self-presentation typically reached for omens, divine ancestry, marvels.** This king opens with: I am mortal like all men; my first sound was a cry, like that of all; I was nursed in swaddling cloths. Why start here? What does verse 6, one entrance into life for all mankind, do to the distance between him and you?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

It abolishes it. If the wisest man in Israel's memory came through the same door as everyone in this room, then his wisdom cannot be an accident of birth, and neither can ours be an impossibility of birth. The humility is strategic: he levels the ground precisely so that verse 7's therefore can reach every mortal listening: Therefore I prayed. The common door sets up the prayer; the prayer is where wisdom actually arrives, and it is on offer to everyone in this room.

Build: Wisdom 7:7, Therefore I Prayed

Have someone read 7:7 aloud.

4. Verse 7: Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. Live discovery: there is a famous night behind this sentence, a dream, an offer, and a young king's request. Find it in 1 Kings 3.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Kings 3:5-14, Gibeon. God appears to the young Solomon in a dream: ask what I shall give you. Solomon asks for an understanding mind to govern the people, and it pleases the Lord that he asked this and not long life, riches, or the life of his enemies; God grants the wise and discerning mind, and adds riches and honor unasked. State the method without softening it: the wisest man alive obtained wisdom by asking. Not pedigree, not IQ, not credentials; a prayer. St. James turns Gibeon into a standing offer for everyone: if

any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching (Jas 1:5). The offer has never been withdrawn, and it is on the table in this room tonight.

Build: Wisdom 7:8-10, What He Preferred Her To

Have someone read 7:8-10 aloud.

- 5. Read verses 8 to 10 again and list what Solomon ranks below wisdom: scepters, thrones, wealth, gems, gold, silver, health, beauty, even light itself. Go around the room: which of these would honestly be hardest for you to put below wisdom? No pious answers allowed.**

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

For most young adults the hard ones are not scepters but the modern translations: career trajectory, financial security, health, appearance, being seen. He does not call these things worthless, gold is still gold; he calls them light next to her, a little sand, clay. Preference is not contempt for goods but a correct price list. Here is the final line once more: I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases.

Leader: Let the honesty happen; this question only works if people tell the truth. Do not explain the final line; reread it once, and move on.

Build: Wisdom 7:11-12, All Good Things

Have someone read 7:11-12 aloud.

- 6. Verse 11:** All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands uncounted wealth. He preferred her to everything and received everything with her. Live discovery: Jesus states the same economy in one sentence in the Sermon on the Mount. Find it in Matthew 6. Verse 12 adds his confession: I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know that she was their mother. He enjoyed the gifts before he could name their source. Where have you done the same?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Matthew 6:33: seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. It is Gibeon's pattern made a promise: Solomon asked for wisdom only, and God added what he did not ask. The order is everything; the goods arrive as accompaniment, not as target. What Jesus promises is precise. The all these things of 6:33 are defined three verses earlier: the food, drink, and clothing of 6:25-32, the Father's care for what his children genuinely need. Solomon's gold and honor are the Old Testament shape of the promise, given to a king for a kingdom; the New Testament shape is a Father who feeds his own and reorders their wanting. Fewer zeroes, better math. Chase the all these things first and you lose both; seek first, and things find their proper size. Beware the counterfeit version: this is not a prosperity formula, as chapter 8's speaker and a certain crucified King will make clear. It is a promise about what accompanies wisdom, on wisdom's terms.

Build: Wisdom 7:13-14, The Unhidden Treasure

Have someone read 7:13-14 aloud.

7. Verses 13 and 14: I learned without guile and I impart without grudging; wisdom is an unfailing treasure, and those who get it obtain friendship with God. Most treasures are guarded. Why is this one given away, and according to verse 14, what is the greatest result of receiving it?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Because wisdom is the kind of wealth that multiplies by being shared; grudging it would betray it, and envy, remember, is the other party's crest (2:24; 6:23). The payout is stated plainly and it is staggering: friendship with God. Not information about God, friendship with him, the same destination as 3:9, abiding with him in love. Everything we do in this study, every question and discovery, serves that one outcome.

Build: Wisdom 7:15-21, The Knowledge of Creation

Have someone read 7:15-21 aloud.

8. Verses 17 to 21 list what God gave him unerring knowledge of: the structure of the world, the elements, seasons and solstices, the constellations, the natures of animals, the varieties of plants, the virtues of roots. What areas of the created world does Solomon say wisdom helped him understand? What does that suggest about faith and the study of creation?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Cosmology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, botany, pharmacology, taught, the sage says, by wisdom herself, whom the next verse calls the fashioner of all things (7:22). Creation is her handiwork, and so studying it is a form of reverence. Truth found in a laboratory cannot contradict truth found in revelation, since both have one Author. The Church teaches there can be no real discrepancy between faith and research carried out in a truly scientific manner that does not override the moral law (CCC 159). And such discoveries, it adds, invite even greater admiration for the Creator (CCC 283). Her history says it louder: the medieval university grew up under the Church's patronage, chartered by popes and staffed by clerics. The father of genetics, Gregor Mendel, did his pea experiments as an Augustinian friar and later became abbot. And the priest Georges Lemaître first proposed what became the Big Bang theory. Any participant carrying the assumption that faith and science are enemies should meet Wisdom 7 tonight.

A Question Worth Facing

Present this at full strength before answering.

A thoughtful friend, Catholic or Protestant, raises a hand: "I have to say the quiet part out loud. This chapter says I was nursed in swaddling cloths, I prayed, I preferred her to thrones, in Solomon's voice. But you told us in Session 1 that Solomon almost certainly did not write this; it was composed in Greek, centuries after him. So the book opens its most personal chapter with, frankly, a false byline. How is that not deception? And how can a book be inspired by the God of truth while pretending to be written by someone it was not?"

Respond from the text: Honor the question; it is the adult version of the authorship issue, and the answer begins with how ancient literature actually worked. Writing in the persona of a great master was a recognized convention of the wisdom schools, closer to a tribute or a dramatic monologue than to forgery. Deception requires an intent to deceive, and on the reading most scholars find persuasive, a Greek-speaking audience in Alexandria had no reason to imagine that a newly discovered Solomonic manuscript had turned up. Be honest that this last point is debated; some scholars argue ancient readers, later Fathers included, did take such attributions at face value. So do not rest the answer on audience psychology. Rest it on what the book itself does: notice the author never even says the name Solomon; he puts on the persona the way a preacher says, imagine

Solomon told you his story. The Bible the friend already accepts does this too: Ecclesiastes speaks as the son of David, king in Jerusalem, and a wide range of scholars, including conservative ones, read it as a later sage writing in Solomon's persona. Many psalms gathered under David's name come from later hands in his tradition. Inspiration was never a claim about bylines. It is the claim that God himself inspires the human writer, the Holy Spirit as principal author in the Church's classic formulation (CCC 105-106; Dei Verbum 11), whoever that writer was. The Church's recognition of that inspiration rests on the Spirit and the Church's discernment, not on a signature. One more turn of the screw, gently: the persona is not decoration but argument. By speaking as Solomon, the author says, the best of our tradition, at its wisest, points here. Whether the Church discerned rightly in receiving this book is a fair question, and it has an appointment: Session 14.

DIG DEEPER

The other King in swaddling cloths. No other person in Scripture is pointed out by his swaddling cloths (Job 38:9 wraps the sea in one, but no person). And this will be a sign for you, you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (Lk 2:12). Wisdom 7 argued that no king has a different beginning; at Bethlehem the eternal King, entering time, chose the common entrance on purpose. Notice the shape of the sign given to the shepherds. It is no portent in the sky, but a baby in swaddling bands lying in a feeding trough: half of it utterly ordinary, the cloths every newborn got, and half of it unthinkable, the trough no king's son ever got. Lowliness is the whole content of the sign, and it is how they will know him. The delivery-room humility of Wisdom 7 turns out to be a dress rehearsal for the Incarnation.

DIG DEEPER

The pearl merchant. Jesus told the same preference as a parable: a merchant in search of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Mt 13:45-46). Note what the parable and Wisdom 7 share: the seller is not grieving. Renunciation in both texts is a trade executed by someone who has correctly priced the merchandise, and the parable's twin at Matthew 13:44 names the joy out loud: in his joy he goes and sells all that he has. Joy, not loss, is the tell of a person who has actually seen the pearl.

Send: Closing Questions

9. Which good thing in your life are you most tempted to value above wisdom right now? What would it mean, concretely, to put it in its proper place this week, not to despise it, just to value it rightly?
10. Solomon prayed and it was given; James says God gives without reproaching. What has actually been stopping you from asking for wisdom, directly, out loud, tonight?

Live It This Week

- **Read ahead, slowly.** Read Wisdom 7:22 through 8:1 with a pencil, the passage we open next session. Read it twice. Mark every word that describes what wisdom is like.
- **Pray Gibeon nightly.** Each night this week, pray one sentence before sleep: Lord, give your servant an understanding mind. Thirty seconds; see what a week of it does.

- **Put one good thing in its proper place.** Fast once this week from the good thing you named in the Send questions, a day without the comfort, the app, the mirror, the metric, as a practical act of preference.
- **Bring Take-Home 1 next week.** Find your Take-Home sheet from Session 1 with your sealed guess and bring it next session. This is important; do not open or revise it. If you have lost it, write your original guess from memory on a card this week, before next session, and bring that.

Closing Prayer

Father, at Gibeon you were pleased by a young man who, offered anything, asked for wisdom. Be pleased with us tonight, because we are asking for the same thing. Give us understanding minds and preferring hearts; teach us the price list of heaven, where gold is sand and your friendship is the treasure. And as we study the world you fashioned, let every truth we find, in Scripture or in science, lead us back to you, the one Author of both. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.” (**Wisdom 7:7**)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 7, grouped by role.

Primary Text

- Wisdom 7:1-21 (read in movements: 7:1-6, 7:7, 7:8-10, 7:11-12, 7:13-14, 7:15-21)

Discovery Passages (found live by the group)

- 1 Kings 3:5-14 (Gibeon; the session's key discovery; parallel 2 Chronicles 1:7-12)
- Matthew 6:33 (seek first; second discovery)

Supporting References (leader's pocket)

- Genesis 2:7 (the first-formed child of earth)
- Proverbs 3:13-15 and 8:10-11 (wisdom better than jewels)
- Job 28 (the mine that cannot find her)
- 1 Kings 4:29-34 (Solomon's natural knowledge)
- James 1:5 (ask God, who gives generously)
- Luke 2:7, 12 (swaddling cloths; Dig Deeper 1)
- Matthew 13:45-46 (the pearl of great price; Dig Deeper 2)

Wisdom 2:24 and 6:23 (envy, the other party's crest)

Wisdom 3:7 and 3:9 (the shining of the righteous; abiding in love, friendship's destination)

Ecclesiastes 1:1 (the son-of-David persona convention; steelman)

- CCC 105-106 (inspiration; principal author as the classic formulation; steelman answer)

Catechism

- CCC 159 (no real discrepancy between faith and reason)
- CCC 283 (scientific discoveries invite greater admiration of the Creator)

Voices of the Church

- St. Francis of Assisi, the renunciation before the bishop of Assisi (c. 1206; Thomas of Celano, First Life 15; Legend of the Three Companions; Bonaventure, Major Legend II.4)
- St. Thomas Aquinas, the "straw" episode of December 1273, preserved through Reginald of Piperno in Bartholomew of Capua's canonization testimony (1319)
- St. Albert the Great, Doctor of the Church, patron of the natural sciences

Memory Verse

- Wisdom 7:7