

Session 7 · A Marriage Made in Heaven

Tobit 7:1-8:9a · Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants will discover the wedding-night prayer of Tobias and Sarah, one of the most beautiful prayers in all of Scripture and the only marriage prayer the Bible records from inside the bridal chamber. They will find it grounding marriage explicitly in Genesis 2, and they will learn why the Catechism quotes this prayer in full when it teaches on married love.

Catholic Touchstone. Marriage as God's design from creation, received as vocation and covenant rather than seized as possession, and elevated by Christ to a sacrament. Tonight's press meets the Reformation objection to sacramental marriage honestly, concessions included, and answers it from Ephesians 5 and the Church's living memory.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 7 is a homecoming to a house Tobias has never seen. Raguel recognizes in the young stranger the face of his kinsman Tobit, and the recognition dissolves into weeping when he hears of Tobit's blindness: the family bonds of the dispersed people hold across three hundred miles. Then the text does something that should raise your group's respect for everyone in the room: when Tobias raises the marriage, Raguel does not sell his daughter with a brochure. He tells the whole truth, seven husbands, seven deaths, and only then adds: but she is yours according to the decree of the book of Moses, and eat, drink, and be merry tonight (7:10-12). Full disclosure, then entrustment. The marriage contract is written and sealed (7:13), an instrument, as the text calls it, because covenants in Israel have bodies: words, witnesses, writing. And do not rush past Edna: she prepares the bridal chamber, weeps in it, and gathers her daughter's despair into one line of maternal defiance: The Lord of heaven and earth grant you joy in place of this sorrow of yours. Take courage, my daughter (7:17). Sarah enters the room where seven griefs began, accompanied by a mother's blessing.

Then 8:1-9a, and the order of events is the whole theology. The door closes on the most feared night in the book, and the couple does three things in sequence: Tobias burns the fish's heart and liver as commanded, and the demon flees to the remotest parts of Egypt, where the angel binds him (8:2-3); then Tobias says the strangest and strongest sentence a terrified bridegroom has ever said: Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy on us (8:4); and only after prayer do they sleep. Master the prayer itself (8:5-8) until you can walk the group through its architecture: it begins in blessing, Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers; it grounds this marriage in creation, quoting Genesis directly, Thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife as a helper and support... It is not good that the man should be alone; it renounces grasping, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity; and it asks for one thing: Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her. And Sarah's entire recorded speech on her wedding night is one word: Amen. A bridegroom prays a creation account, a renunciation, and a petition over his marriage, and his bride makes it hers with her Amen, and then they entrust themselves to sleep in a room with a grave being dug outside (next session's business). This is what the Church means when she calls marriage a vocation lived toward God.

Two preparation notes. First, sister here is covenant affection, kinswoman and beloved in one word, the idiom of the Song of Songs (my sister, my bride); head off any confusion gently. Second, the Catechism does your session's heavy lifting for you twice: CCC 1611 names Tobit as bearing moving witness to the

sense of marriage and the fidelity and tenderness of spouses, and CCC 2361 quotes tonight's prayer at length, in its teaching on the meaning of sexuality. Bring a Catechism and let someone find 2361 live: the effect of discovering tonight's obscure passage sitting in the middle of the Church's teaching on married love is worth two minutes of anyone's evening.

OT Roots and Fulfillment

The prayer's own root system is exposed on its surface: it quotes Genesis 2:18, and behind it stands the whole creation theology of marriage, one flesh, helper and support, the two made for each other before sin entered the world (Genesis 2:18-24). Raguel's decree of the book of Moses invokes the kinship-inheritance law (Numbers 36), and the written instrument stands in Israel's covenant practice: God's people document their bonds. Edna's blessing joins the line of Rebekah's family blessing her as she departed to marry a kinsman she had never met (Genesis 24:60), the same Genesis 24 whose road we walked last session.

The fulfillment is Christ's, in three ascending steps. Jesus, asked about marriage, reaches past Moses back to the same verses this prayer quotes, from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female... what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (Mark 10:6-9): marriage's meaning is fixed in Genesis, and God himself is the joiner. He works his first sign at a wedding in Cana, where the disciples see his glory (John 2:1-11), heaven's blessing planted at a bridal feast, as Raphael's presence blesses this one. And Paul lifts the veil entirely: a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife... this mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Marriage was designed from the beginning as a living image of a greater wedding, and Tobias and Sarah, joining hands over Genesis in a haunted room, are closer to that secret than they know.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Tertullian · *To His Wife 2.8* (c. AD 202)

Tertullian, the early Church's fierce North African voice, gives Christian history its most famous description of marriage: how beautiful the marriage of two Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow; they pray together, they worship together, they fast together, instructing one another, encouraging one another. Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in spirit. Where he learned that a marriage is built on praying together, tonight's chapter could have taught him: the first act of this union is a prayer: Tobias speaks it, and Sarah seals it with her Amen.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *Homily 20 on Ephesians* (c. AD 397)

Preaching on Ephesians 5, Chrysostom tells husbands to say to their wives words the world still finds shocking: I love you more than my own life, and to make of every household a little church, where spouses pray, read Scripture, and sanctify one another. He insists that married love, so ordered, is the closest natural image of Christ's love for the Church. Tobias, renouncing possession and asking to grow old together with her, is Chrysostom's husband seen eight centuries early.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II · *Familiaris Consortio 11* (1981)

The pope of the family teaches that God is love and in himself lives a mystery of personal loving

communion, and that in creating humanity male and female he inscribed in them the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being, and marriage is its covenant form. She was destined for you from eternity and thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve are this teaching in the old tongue: marriage is not a private arrangement but a vocation written into creation by the God who is love.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1601 gives the Church's definition: the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized. CCC 1603-1605 teach that marriage is not a purely human institution but was written by the Creator into the nature of man and woman, Genesis 2 being its charter. CCC 1611 names the books of Ruth and Tobit as bearing moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. And CCC 2361, teaching that sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman and becomes personal and truly human when integrated into the love of spouses, quotes Tobias and Sarah's wedding prayer at length as its chosen illustration. Tonight's passage is not marginal to the Church's teaching on marriage; it is one of its proof texts.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

- 1. The works of God, hidden.** The reader watches both prayers of chapter 3 converge in one room: the demon bound (Sarah's rescue) on the same night the marriage begins that will carry the gall home (Tobit's cure, still in the pack). Say none of this; steer sharp participants toward next week.
- 2. Provision before need.** First resolution tonight: the heart and liver from the Tigris do their work. The second (the gall) waits for Session 9. Note the pattern quietly: provisions are spent in the order needs mature.
- 3. Sealed guess.** Next session the envelopes open. Tell the group to bring their Take-Home 1 sheets, folds intact, and say nothing else. Anticipation should be at its peak walking out tonight.

Session Goals

1. Participants can walk through the wedding prayer's architecture: blessing, creation, renunciation, petition, Amen.
2. Participants have found Genesis 2:18-24 inside the prayer and Mark 10:6-9 behind it, and can say why marriage's meaning is anchored in creation.
3. Participants can answer the sacramental-marriage objection with its concessions intact: the word proves nothing, the enumeration developed, and the reality is apostolic.
4. Married participants leave with a concrete practice of praying as a couple; unmarried participants leave with the prayer as a school of what to want.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Win 10 min · Build 58 min · Send 12 min · Live It and closing prayer 10 min. The prayer itself (questions 4-5) is the summit; spend 25 minutes there and read it aloud twice. If you are running long, cut in this order: drop the Dig Deeper on the Tobias nights custom, compress question 1 (Raguel's disclosure) to a read and single observation, and let the Catechism 2361 discovery be announced rather than found.

A Marriage Made in Heaven

Tobit 7:1-8:9a · Discussion Guide · 90 minutes

Opening Prayer

God of our fathers, you made Adam and gave him Eve, and you have joined your people in covenant ever since. Be with us tonight as we stand at the door of the most feared room in this book, and teach us what two frightened people knew: that every union, every vocation, and every night is safest begun on its knees. Through Christ our Lord, who blessed a wedding at Cana. Amen.

Win · Opening the Door (10 minutes)

- W1.** Last week you inventoried your pack and reclaimed a sacramental. What did you find, or what did the practice stir up?
- W2.** What is the best marriage you have ever seen up close, at any distance of relation, and what one habit seemed to hold it together?

Build · Into the Text (58 minutes)

Full Disclosure at the Door

- 1.** Read Tobit 7:1-12. Watch Raguel: he recognizes kin, weeps over Tobit's blindness, and then, asked for his daughter, tells the suitor the entire truth: seven husbands, seven deaths. Only then: she is yours according to the decree of the book of Moses. Why does his honesty matter? What kind of covenant can be built on a concealed history?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Raguel refuses the easy sale. A father with seven griefs and a mocked daughter has every human motive to soften the record for suitor number eight, and he lays it out plain instead, then entrusts her under the law of Moses with a blessing: the Lord of heaven be with you both. The text is teaching what covenant requires: full truth before full gift. A marriage, like every covenant with God's name on it, cannot be built on managed information; consent is only real when it knows what it consents to. It is worth noting for your group that the Church still holds this: deliberate deception, used to obtain consent, about a quality of the other person that by its very nature can gravely disturb married life invalidates the marriage itself (Code of Canon Law, can. 1098). Raguel's honesty is not a detail; it is the foundation being poured.

- 2.** Now find Edna in 7:15-17. She prepares the room where seven marriages died, weeps in it, and then says to her daughter: The Lord of heaven and earth grant you joy in place of this sorrow of yours. Take courage, my daughter. What is Edna doing, and what does her one line teach about accompanying someone into a place of dread?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Edna does the thing that cannot be delegated: she goes into the feared room first, with her daughter, weeping and blessing in the same breath. She does not pretend the sorrow away, this sorrow of yours is named out loud, and she does not surrender to it: joy in place of sorrow is asked

of the Lord of heaven and earth, the biggest available name of God set against the room's history. That is the anatomy of real accompaniment: presence, named grief, and defiant blessing. Every parent, sponsor, and friend in your group will eventually walk someone to a door like this one; Edna is the pattern.

What They Did When the Door Closed

3. Read Tobit 8:1-4. On the most feared night in the book, list the sequence of the couple's actions in order. What comes first, what comes second, and what strikes you about a bridegroom whose wedding-night sentence is: Sister, get up, and let us pray?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The order: first, obedience, Tobias burns the heart and liver exactly as instructed, and the demon flees to the remotest parts of Egypt, where the angel binds him (hold that mechanism; a press in Session 6 already weighed it, and Session 8 returns to the aftermath). Second, prayer: Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy on us. Third, and only third, sleep. The night everyone measured in dread, the couple measures in obedience and prayer. And the address, sister, is covenant tenderness, the idiom of the Song of Songs (my sister, my bride): she is kin, beloved, and companion before she is anything else. The book is quietly defining what a wedding night is for: two people placing themselves, together, under mercy.

4. Now the prayer itself. Read Tobit 8:5-8 aloud, slowly, and then have the group map its architecture: what does it do first, second, third, and last? Then a live discovery: someone find Genesis 2:18-24 and read verses 18 and 24. What is the prayer standing on?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The architecture: it begins in blessing, Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers, praise before petition, on the hardest night; it grounds the marriage in creation, quoting Genesis directly: thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife as a helper and support... it is not good that the man should be alone; it renounces grasping: I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity, the marriage received as gift, not seized as possession; and it makes one petition: grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her. Then the whole of Sarah's recorded wedding speech: Amen. The Genesis discovery shows the prayer's foundation: this couple interprets their own wedding by the creation account, joining themselves not to a private romance but to God's original design, the two made for each other before sin entered the world. Marriage, prayed this way, is creation theology with two names filled in.

5. Weigh the renunciation and the petition. Not because of lust, but with sincerity: what is being renounced, and is the text being prudish about desire? And of everything a bridegroom could ask on his wedding night, Tobias asks: that I may find mercy and grow old together with her. What does that petition know about marriage that our culture forgets? Finally, a Catechism discovery: someone with a Catechism find paragraph 2361 and report what they find there.

Leader note: the Catechism quotes the longer Greek text of Tobit, so its wording differs slightly from your RSV2CE.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The renunciation is not of desire but of consumption: taking a person as instrument versus receiving a person as gift. The text is not prudish, this is the Bible that contains the Song of Songs, and the Catechism's very point in quoting this prayer is that sexuality becomes personal and truly

human when it is integrated into the love of spouses; what is renounced is the grasping that reduces the beloved to means. And the petition has marriage's real measure in it: not the wedding but the growing old, mercy stretched across decades, which is why he asks for mercy and longevity together, he knows the years will require it. Then the discovery: CCC 2361, the Church's teaching on the meaning of human sexuality, quotes this prayer at length as its illustration, and CCC 1611 names Tobit among the Old Testament's moving witnesses to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. For the third time in this study, a book missing from most Bibles turns out to be load-bearing, this time under the Church's whole theology of married love.

DIG DEEPER

An old and tender custom grew from this chapter: the Tobias nights, in which newlyweds began their marriage with a night, in some places three, given first to prayer, following the Vulgate's expanded account of the angel's counsel. The custom is piety, not precept; the Church has never bound couples to it, and the shorter Greek text our Bibles translate does not command it. But the instinct it preserves is tonight's whole lesson, and married couples in your group may enjoy the modern translation: many Catholic couples pray together on their wedding night and every night after, some using this very prayer. A marriage that begins by kneeling together has learned Tobias' sequence, whatever the calendar of its consummation.

Build, Then Press: Did Rome Invent Sacramental Marriage?

BUILD, THEN PRESS

The Reformation Objection, Given at Full Strength

Give the classic Protestant case its full voice, because it is careful and partly right: marriage is holy, but it is a creation ordinance, not a sacrament. It belongs to all humanity from Eden, pagans marry validly, so it cannot be a special channel of Christ's grace like baptism. Scripture never calls it a sacrament; the famous proof text, Ephesians 5:32, says this mystery (mysterion) is profound, and Jerome's Latin rendered mysterion as sacramentum, from which Rome, reading her Latin Bible, built a sacrament on a translation choice. And the tell, says the objector, is history: the Church herself did not settle a list of seven sacraments until the twelfth century, confirmed at Trent. If sacramental marriage were apostolic, why did it take eleven hundred years to say so?

6. First, concede what deserves concession: what in that case is simply true? Then press where the weight actually sits: read Ephesians 5:25-32 and Mark 10:6-9 aloud. Set aside the word sacrament entirely: what do those texts claim marriage between Christians is, and who does the joining? Does the doctrine rest on Jerome's Latin, or on something the Latin was reaching for?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Concede honestly, because the concessions cost the doctrine nothing: the bare word sacramentum in Ephesians 5:32 proves nothing, and Catholic theologians say so themselves; marriage is indeed a creation ordinance, written by the Creator into the nature of man and woman and honored in every culture (CCC 1603-1605), and the Church herself recognizes the marriages of the unbaptized as true natural marriages; and the formal enumeration of seven sacraments did crystallize in the twelfth century and was defined at Trent. Doctrine develops; Newman taught us not to be embarrassed by that, since an acorn's late oak is not a forgery.

Now press with the word set aside, because the doctrine never rested on it. Ephesians 5 makes a staggering claim about the reality: husbands are to love as Christ loved the Church, giving himself up for her; the Genesis one-flesh text is quoted and then decoded, this mystery is profound, and I

am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Paul is not decorating marriage with a comparison; he is revealing what marriage was designed to signify from the beginning, the covenant of Christ and his bride, and Christian spouses are told to live inside that signification. Add Mark 10:6-9: what God has joined together: God, not the state, not mere human custom, is the joiner. He joins through the spouses' own free consent, which "makes the marriage" (CCC 1626), and he himself seals the bond (CCC 1639); every true marriage is his handiwork. Now ask the objection's own question back: when the marriage of two baptized persons really signifies Christ and the Church, and God himself effects the bond, and the spouses are commanded to love with Christ's own self-giving love, which they cannot do without his grace, what is missing from the definition of a sacrament except the later word for it? A sacrament is an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church (CCC 1131). Ephesians supplies the sign and the signified, Mark supplies the divine agency, the command supplies the need for grace, and Christ himself supplies the institution: he took up the creation ordinance and raised it to the dignity of a sacrament (CCC 1601), his first sign at Cana confirming the goodness of marriage and proclaiming it an efficacious sign of his presence (CCC 1613). He did not invent a new institution; baptized spouses now marry in the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:39), and their natural covenant is caught up into his.

As for the eleven hundred years: the Church was living the reality long before enumerating it, blessing marriages, holding them indissoluble against every empire's divorce customs, and reading Ephesians 5 at weddings, exactly as she possessed the Trinity before Nicaea found the words. Tobit's contribution to the case is its earliest layer: centuries before Cana, this book already refused to treat marriage as a private contract, showing it instead as a bond decreed by the book of Moses, destined from eternity, sealed by prayer, and guarded by an angel, a covenant with God inside it. The Reformers kept marriage holy; the Church kept what Ephesians actually says about it.

Send · Taking It Out the Door (12 minutes)

- S1.** Tobias' petition was mercy, and growing old together. Whatever your state in life, married, hoping, single, consecrated, what would it mean to want what that prayer wants: a love measured in decades of mercy rather than moments of feeling?
- S2.** The couple's first act behind the closed door was prayer together. What is the closed-door place in your life, the relationship, the fear, the beginning, that has never once been prayed over out loud, and what would it take to change that this week?

Live It This Week

- 1.** If you are married: pray aloud with your spouse once this week, and consider using Tobias and Sarah's prayer itself (Tobit 8:5-8), ending with a shared Amen. If that is new territory, start with one Our Father, hands held.
- 2.** If you are single: write your own version of the petition, what you are actually asking God for in love and vocation, and pray it daily this week. Let Tobias school your wants: mercy, sincerity, and the long haul.
- 3.** Read Tobit 8:9b-21 and chapter 9 before next session, and BRING YOUR TAKE-HOME SHEET FROM SESSION 1, fold intact. The envelopes open next week.

Closing Prayer

Blessed are you, O God of our fathers, who made Adam and gave him Eve, who joins what no one

may put asunder, and who was in the room the night two frightened children of yours knelt down. Bless every marriage represented in this room, mend what is strained, and teach all of us, whatever our vocation, to receive love as gift and never seize it as prey. Grant us mercy, and years to grow old in it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory · Tobit 8:7 (RSV2CE)

"I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her."

Leader Reference Card

Every passage in order of use

Q1 Tobit 7:1-12 · recognition, disclosure, the decree of Moses

Q2 Tobit 7:15-17 · Edna's blessing in the feared room

Q3 Tobit 8:1-4 · the sequence: obedience, prayer, sleep

Q4 Tobit 8:5-8 · the wedding prayer

Q4 live discovery Genesis 2:18-24 · the prayer's foundation

Q5 discovery CCC 2361 · the prayer quoted in full; CCC 1611

Steelman chain Ephesians 5:25-32 · Mark 10:6-9 · 1 Corinthians 7:39

Fulfillment John 2:1-11 · Cana

Roots Numbers 36:6-9 · Genesis 24:60 · Song of Songs 4:9

Dig Deeper The Tobias nights custom · piety, not precept

Memory Tobit 8:7

Catechism CCC 1601 · CCC 1603-1605 · CCC 1611 · CCC 2361