

Session 11 • The Summit Gifts: Counsel, Understanding, Wisdom

1 Kings 3:5-14; James 1:5-8; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the three summit Gifts, counsel that decides rightly in the concrete, understanding that penetrates what faith holds, wisdom that savors what it sees, and learns the crucial distinction between these sanctifying Gifts, given to all the baptized, and charisms, distributed individually for the good of others.

Catholic Touchstone. The seven Gifts are given to all the faithful for their sanctification; charisms are special graces distributed among the faithful of every rank for the renewal and building up of the Church (CCC 1266, 1830-1831; 799-800).

What You Need to Know

Augustine's staircase reaches its top tonight. Counsel perfects prudence: it is the Spirit's promptness in the concrete decision, the right word at the tribunal Jesus promised (Matthew 10:19-20), the instinct that knows which good to do now. Understanding (*intellectus*, from a root meaning to read within) penetrates revealed truth: not learning more articles of faith but seeing into the ones already held, the way a line of the Creed suddenly opens like a door. Wisdom (*sapientia*, cognate with tasting) both sees the whole in God's light and savors it: Aquinas ties the Gift to judging divine things by a kind of connaturality, the way the chaste person judges chastity rightly by lived kinship with it, not by consulting a book. Wisdom helps us judge and live in the light of our love for God.

Then draw the line this study has needed since Session 1, because next week's inventory depends on it. The seven Gifts are sanctifying: given to all the baptized, strengthened at Confirmation, ordered to the holiness of the one who receives them. Charisms (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12) are distributed: "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," varying person to person, ordered to the building up of others. Baptism gives sanctifying grace and the seven Gifts (CCC 1266); the Gifts belong to that life of grace, not to Baptism's permanent mark, so mortal sin destroys the life of grace though it never erases Baptism, and God calls us back through repentance and Reconciliation (CCC 1272, 1861). And Scripture's own questions, "Are all apostles? ... Do all speak with tongues?" (1 Corinthians 12:29-30), expect the answer no: no one should presume to possess every charism. Confusing the two categories produces both anxiety (why do I lack gifts others have?) and pride (my gifts must mean my holiness). The distinction dissolves both: the seven Gifts help every baptized person grow in holiness, while different charisms equip different people for different service.

Expect the cessationist question, since many Protestant friends hold that the dramatic charisms ceased with the apostles. Take it seriously in the steelman; the Catholic position: *Lumen Gentium* 12 teaches that the Spirit distributes charisms among the faithful of every rank, from the extraordinary to the simple and widespread, the Catechism speaks of charisms in the present tense as part of the Church's life now (CCC 2003), and discernment belongs to the Church's pastors, who also caution the faithful against presumptuously seeking extraordinary gifts (*Lumen Gentium* 12). Session 12 and the Inventory Guide build directly on this.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Solomon at Gibeah is the Old Testament's wisdom-request scene: offered anything, the young king asks for an understanding mind to govern, "able to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9), and God is pleased that he asked for this rather than long life or riches. James 1:5 democratizes the offer: if any of you lacks wisdom, ask, and it will be given generously.

Isaiah's messianic king does not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear (Isaiah 11:3-4): counsel and understanding pierce beneath appearances. And the wisdom literature personifies Wisdom as present at creation, delighting in the sons of men (Proverbs 8), a portrait many Fathers and the tradition have read as opening toward Christ, the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Voices of the Church

St. Catherine of Siena

Witness of her life (summary)

An unschooled laywoman counseled magistrates, queens, and finally the pope himself, urging Gregory XI's return from Avignon to Rome. Her counsel carried weight no office gave her; its authority was transparency to the Spirit, formed in what she called the cell of self-knowledge. The Gift of counsel in her shows its signature: Spirit-aided right judgment about the next concrete step, delivered with a boldness her station could never explain, and still submitted to testing within the Church she served.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae II-II, qq. 8 and 45 (summary)

On understanding: the Gift penetrates to the heart of what is proposed for belief, seeing into revealed truth rather than adding to it. On wisdom: the Gift judges divine things through connaturality with them, a sympathy of the soul with God born of charity. His famous comparison: one man judges chastity correctly by studying moral science, another by possessing the virtue; the second knows by kinship. Wisdom is that second knowing, aimed at God.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

The Science of the Cross (summary)

A brilliant philosopher who followed truth from phenomenology into the Church and finally to Auschwitz, she spent her last years writing on St. John of the Cross and titled the work *The Science of the Cross*. Her life traces understanding becoming wisdom: the truths she first analyzed she came to savor; and the faith they belonged to she sealed with martyrdom at Auschwitz. Study, she shows, is not wisdom's rival: joined to the love of God, study helps wisdom grow.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1830-1831 once more, now with the distinction in view: the seven Gifts are permanent dispositions making the faithful docile to the Spirit, belonging in fullness to Christ, completing and perfecting the virtues of those who receive them: ordered, that is, to the receiver's holiness.

CCC 799-800 define charisms: graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world; they are to be received with gratitude by the one who receives them and by all members of the Church.

CCC 801 adds the governor: no charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds, whose office is not to extinguish the Spirit but to test everything and hold fast what is good.

CCC 2690 notes that the Holy Spirit gives to certain of the faithful gifts of wisdom, faith, and discernment for the sake of the common good which is prayer: spiritual direction as a lived example of counsel serving others.

Thread Watch

Threads in play

Darkness-to-light. One session remains. The summit Gifts complete the equipment; the sending completes the study. Say nothing yet.

Inventory preparation. Announce at Send: next week each participant receives a personal Gifts Inventory Guide, and the session will use it. Anticipation helps attendance.

Session Goals

1. Define counsel, understanding, and wisdom precisely, including wisdom-as-savoring via connaturality.
2. Draw the sanctifying Gifts versus charisms distinction clearly enough to carry Session 12.
3. Steelman cessationism and answer it with Lumen Gentium 12 and 1 Corinthians.
4. Send the group into the inventory week asking for wisdom by name (James 1:5).

Time Note

Runs 85-90 minutes. If time is short, use the one-sentence summary in the optional objection section and continue; keep a clear explanation of counsel, understanding, and wisdom. The extended Aquinas comparison (Build question 3) may be shortened after its main point has been explained.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of counsel, understanding, and wisdom. Give us your promptness in our decisions, your light within our creed, and the taste for divine things that study alone cannot supply. Amen.

Win · Opening Questions

1. What makes it difficult to decide well when two good options compete?
2. What is a truth you had known for years that one day suddenly opened up, and you finally saw into it?

Build · Into the Text

Read 1 Kings 3:5-14 aloud. Ask the group to notice both what Solomon asks for and what God notices about the asking.

1. Offered anything, Solomon asks for "an understanding mind... able to discern between good and evil" (the Hebrew says, literally, a listening heart), and God is pleased by the request itself. What does the shape of this scene teach about how the summit Gifts are obtained?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

They are asked for, and the asking is itself pleasing to God. Solomon wants wisdom for his task, governing a people too great to number, not as an ornament. James 1:5 throws the offer open to everyone: God gives wisdom generously and without reproaching to any who ask in faith. The summit Gifts are not seized by talent; they are requested by need.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. Paul says the unspiritual man cannot understand the things of the Spirit, while the spiritual man judges all things. Is Paul describing intelligence? What is he describing?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Not intelligence: Corinth had clever people on every corner. He is describing capacity granted by indwelling: "we have received... the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us" (2:12). Understanding penetrates revealed truth from inside, by the Spirit who searches the depths of God. This is why a theology degree and the Gift of understanding are different possessions, sometimes found in the same person and sometimes not.

3. Aquinas explains that love gives us a kind of familiarity with what we love; he calls it connaturality. He compares two people who judge chastity rightly but differently: a moral scholar who knows it by study, and a chaste man who knows it from the inside. Unpack the comparison. What is wisdom, on this account?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The scholar knows about chastity by study; the chaste man knows it by kinship, from inside the virtue. Wisdom is that second kind of knowing aimed at God himself: charity makes the soul kin to divine things, and kinship makes judgment sure and sweet. Hence the old wordplay the tradition

loves: sapientia tastes (sapere) what it knows. Wisdom makes right judgment in divine things sweet as well as sure, which is why the simplest daily communicant may out-judge the professor in the things of God. The Gift does not depend on feeling spiritual pleasure: it lives in judging and loving by charity, and those hold in dry seasons too.

Live Discovery

Say: this study has used the word "gift" in two different senses without sorting them, and now we must. Send half the group to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and half to Isaiah 11:2-3 with one question each: who receives what is described here, everyone or different people? Compare findings aloud. Isaiah's seven rest whole on the one Messiah, and the Church teaches that his anointing is shared with his members in Baptism and Confirmation (CCC 1266, 1303); Paul's list is explicitly apportioned: "to each is given," "to one... to another... to another."

4. Build the distinction from the two texts: sanctifying Gifts versus charisms. Who gets which, and what is each ordered to? Then name the two errors the distinction cures.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The seven Gifts: given to all the baptized, strengthened at Confirmation, ordered to the holiness of the receiver (CCC 1266, 1303, 1831). Charisms: distributed individually as the Spirit wills, ordered to the common good and the building up of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:7; CCC 799). Every baptized Christian receives all seven Gifts (CCC 1266); Paul's rhetorical questions in 12:29-30 expect a no, so no one should presume to possess every charism. This cures anxiety (a missing charism is not missing holiness equipment) and pride (an abundant charism is not evidence of superior holiness: gifts exercised without love profit nothing, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, and Session 8's warning about wonders stands close by). Next week's inventory keeps the two in separate labeled parts for exactly this reason.

Steelman · The charisms ceased with the apostles

Optional discussion. Use this section when someone raises the objection or it is live for your group. Otherwise give one sentence and continue: some Christians hold that the dramatic gifts ended with the apostles; the Church teaches that the Spirit still distributes charisms, extraordinary and simple, and that her pastors discern them (Lumen Gentium 12; CCC 800-801, 2003).

At full strength, in its strongest form: the apostles and prophets were the Church's once-for-all foundation (Ephesians 2:20), and the dramatic charisms were sign-gifts attesting that foundation, "signs of a true apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:12) by which God bore witness to the first preaching (Hebrews 2:3-4). Foundations are laid once; the attesting signs belong to the laying. Some add the textual argument that "the perfect" of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is the completed New Testament, though the more careful cessationists read that verse eschatologically and rest their case on the foundation argument. Church history seems to cooperate: the dramatic gifts grow rare after the first centuries. And the pastoral record of charismatic excess, manufactured tongues, false healings, manipulative prophecy, suggests God in his wisdom retired equipment that human vanity cannot handle.

Press the group: first, the text: what is "the perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10? Read 13:12: when the perfect comes we shall see face to face and know as we are known. Catholic tradition commonly reads this eschatologically, and the better cessationists agree, which is why the weight falls on the foundation argument. So answer that argument directly: the apostolic foundation is indeed unrepeatable, but Paul's charism lists were written to ordinary congregations for their common life ("to each is given... for the common good," 1 Corinthians 12:7), not to apostles for their credentials; the gift of the Spirit himself, not merely his attestations, is the Church's inheritance. Uniqueness of foundation does not entail cessation of gifts. Second, the history and the teaching: charisms have been reported of particular saints across the centuries, and the Church's living documents speak of charisms in the present tense: Lumen Gentium 12 on special graces distributed among the faithful of every rank, whether extraordinary or simple and widely diffused, and CCC 2003 on charisms at the service of the charity which builds up the Church now. (The Church recognizes the holiness of canonized saints and proposes them as models and intercessors; do not assume that this authenticates every report of an extraordinary gift associated with them.) Third, honor the friend's pastoral worry, because the Church shares it: charisms are tested, referred to the shepherds, and never presumed (CCC 801; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). The Church responds by testing claims and correcting abuses, not by assuming that every charism has ceased.

Dig Deeper · Counsel in the concrete

Jesus promised the Spirit would supply words in the hour of trial: "do not be anxious how you are to speak... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20). Counsel is the Gift at street level: the right word to the grieving friend, the sensed wrongness of a profitable plan, the timing that turns truth from weapon to medicine. It grows through consultation, honest spiritual direction, and the habit of asking before deciding, which is why the Church commends direction and the tradition calls counsel prudence's perfection.

Send · Closing Questions

1. Which would help you most this week: deciding what to do, understanding something the Church teaches, or seeing a situation more clearly in the light of your love for God? Ask for that Gift by name tonight (James 1:5).
2. Where has the confusion of holiness with gifting cost you: anxiety over gifts you lack, or quiet pride over gifts you have?

Live It This Week

- Pray James 1:5 daily this week over one named decision, and before deciding, consult one wise person.
- Take one line of the Creed you recite without thinking and sit with it fifteen minutes, asking the Spirit of understanding to open it.
- Come next week and bring this guide and a pen; the inventory night is best done together. If you must miss it, ask your leader to walk you through the booklet afterward.

Closing Prayer

Father, you were pleased when Solomon asked for a discerning heart. We ask tonight for counsel in our decisions, understanding within our creed, and wisdom that tastes and sees that you are good. Give generously and without reproach, as your word promises. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage read or discussed in this session, in order of appearance, with key leader background.

- 1 Kings 3:5-14
- James 1:5-8
- 1 Corinthians 2:9-16
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
- Isaiah 11:2-4
- 1 Corinthians 1:24 (leader background)
- 1 Corinthians 12:29-30
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
- 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 (steelman)
- Ephesians 2:20 (steelman)
- 2 Corinthians 12:12 (steelman)
- Hebrews 2:3-4 (steelman)
- Matthew 10:19-20
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (steelman)
- Proverbs 8 (leader background)