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Study Questions for the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*

The Book of Sirach

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STUDY QUESTIONS

Sirach

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:11–30.** What virtue gives men and women access to wisdom? What place does the relationship between wisdom and fear of the Lord have in the author's thought? What is the importance of this theme in the Old Testament?
2. **1:14.** How important is fear of the Lord in the quest for wisdom? According to St. Augustine, how do the seven spiritual gifts presented by Isaiah teach us to ascend through fear of the Lord to wisdom?
3. **1:20.** How is wisdom pictured here, and what identification does this picture imply? Eating from what tree is equivalent to gaining wisdom, and how does this contrast with eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
4. **1:28.** How does one disobey the fear of the Lord? What does it mean to have a divided mind? According to Isaac of Nineveh, what is the conflict between the body and the will when one is attached to things of the world?

For application

1. **1:1–10.** In v. 10, the author says that wisdom can dwell with all flesh. Is there a difference between the wisdom that comes through normal growth in age and experience and that which comes from God? If so, how would you describe both types?
2. **1:11–20.** According to Ben Sira, what are some of the benefits of fear of the Lord? How does his description accord with your own experience?
3. **1:26–28.** How can keeping the commandments lead to the acquisition of wisdom? How does a divided mind undermine it?
4. **1:29–30.** How does an honest fear of the Lord improve one's relationships, especially with other Christians? How does a dishonest or hypocritical religiosity, in the words of v. 30, "bring dishonor upon" oneself? How does Sirach's admonition compare with Jesus' warnings regarding doing religious acts for public approval (see Mt 6:1–8, 16–18)?

Chapter 2

For Understanding

1. **2:6.** At what point in life does trust in God amidst severe tribulations reap rewards? Although it is our duty to seek God's straight way, what does God himself do for us?
2. **2:10.** On what considerations are readers invited to reflect regarding the past? Although it is tempting to answer "yes" when suffering presses hard, why does Ben Sira insist that the answer is "no"?
3. **2:15–18.** What virtues and what confidence do those who fear the Lord display? While God's majesty places high expectations on those who follow him, what does his mercy make up for?

For application

1. **2:1.** Why should a person who wishes to serve the Lord need to prepare himself for trials? Should this desire not make life easier? Of what kinds of trials might the author be thinking?
2. **2:2.** Why does Ben Sira counsel against being impetuous or hasty in times of calamity? Why should one be cautious about making decisions when adversity strikes?
3. **2:10–11.** Read the note for v. 10. Have you ever felt that the Lord has forsaken you or that his silence has shaken your trust? How was your trust in God's compassion and forgiveness restored? How deeply convinced are you that persevering in the fear of the Lord will increase your trust in his compassion and mercy?
4. **2:12–14.** Of the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance), which one is primarily threatened by timidity and despair in the face of adversity? Which is more difficult, physical or moral courage? Given the hostility that the modern world shows toward Christian morality, where do you think moral courage is most needed for Christians to lead a righteous life today?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1–16.** On what are these verses a commentary? Why should children who aspire to be wise be particularly careful to show honor and respect toward their parents? How important is this commandment to relating well with all figures of authority for the right ordering of society?
2. **3:2.** Whereas in Catholic tradition the fourth commandment to honor one's father and mother begins the second tablet of the Decalogue, which pertains to love of neighbor, where does Jewish tradition place this commandment? If honoring one's parents is directly related to honoring God, what does disrespect of parents amount to?
3. **3:8.** In the Bible, what does the father's blessing mean? Would the father's blessing be gratuitous or based on whether it was deserved?
4. **3:15.** In times of distress, how will the Lord remember a son's kindness to his father? What is Sirach *not* teaching about kindness to parents? In what context is the ability to merit spiritual blessings given by God? According to St. Augustine, to what do our merits amount?
5. **3:21–24.** By turning to the dangers of intellectual pride, against what is Ben Sira likely reacting? What does he contend about what his fellow Jews need to know?

For application

1. **3:1–9.** What benefits does Ben Sira say will accrue to adult children who honor their parents? How do you as an adult show honor to your father? Your mother? What kind of honor would you expect from your adult children?

Study Questions

2. **3:10–16.** Ben Sira writes in the context of intact families, where the father for good or ill determines the direction and reputation of the family. In today's society, what is the influence of the father on his children in an intact family? In a dysfunctional one? When a father is absent, is abusive, has abandoned the family, or is even unknown to his children, how can the adult child obey the commandment to honor his father?
3. **3:21–24.** Modern technological and scientific advances can lead even experts to believe that there are no limits to what human beings should know. How does this attitude compare with the one against which Ben Sira cautions? What are some ethical limits that researchers in the physical and biological sciences should observe, and why?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:1.** If almsgiving is not as an optional work of mercy left to the discretion of the giver, what does Ben Sira take it to be?
2. **4:17.** Why does wisdom at first act harshly toward those who seek her? Once the wise man passes the test, how does wisdom behave? In what way does this process describe well the spiritual life?
3. **4:21.** How does "a shame which brings sin" appear to reverse the causal relationship between sin and shame? What is perhaps the meaning here? How might the text about shame bringing glory and favor be understood? According to St. Gregory the Great, when is shame praiseworthy, and when is it reproachful?
4. **4:23.** What are the wise called to share with others? When is the wisdom of the wise of most use?

For application

1. **4:1–6.** What is your own practice of almsgiving? How seriously do you take the practice as an obligation? Where do you choose to contribute alms, and where do you avoid contributing? What moves you to give alms or to refrain from giving?
2. **4:7–10.** Have you ever volunteered to serve the poor at a homeless shelter or the imprisoned in a county jail or prison? If so, how did you see the face of Jesus in those you served, and what impression did they make on you? If not, what prevents you from doing some active service for the poor?
3. **4:17–19.** Read the note for v. 17. Why would someone who is starting out in the spiritual life encounter difficulty at first rather than consolation? How does a beginner learn discipline in the practice of prayer? What can one expect from perseverance in prayer? What happens if the beginner gives up because of the difficulties?
4. **4:26.** How often do you go to confession? Have you ever avoided confessing a sin because you were ashamed of it? If you hid a sin because of shame, how did you feel about hiding it, and did you eventually repent and actually confess it?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:4.** What does the wicked man think he can do? Although God is slow to anger, what will he do?
2. **5:5.** How did Jews seek forgiveness of sins? Against what does Jewish oral law warn?
3. **5:7.** Why is it a mark of wisdom to repent quickly? According to St. Fulgentius, what is the danger of putting off repentance?
4. **5:9.** How do farmers winnow grain? What happens if winnowing continues when the winds change direction? Similarly, what happens when the double-tongued sinner speaks dishonestly in order to accommodate everyone?

For application

1. **5:6.** Critics of the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation sometimes allege that it encourages a casual attitude toward sinning, since one can always go to confession afterward. Why is a firm purpose of amendment required of the penitent? Why must the penitent even avoid the "near occasions of sin"?
2. **5:7.** When you commit serious sin, what do you think God's attitude is toward you? How does that idea affect your willingness to turn to him?
3. **5:11–12.** How would you apply these verses to the use of social media, especially in regard to controversial issues? While you may not be able to avoid receiving inflammatory communications, how should you handle your responses to them?
4. **5:14.** Why is gossiping considered a sin? When does gossip become slander? How easy is it for you to fall into gossip, and how hard is it for you to refrain when others want you to participate? Have you ever confessed gossip?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:7.** How will a friend prove his loyalty to you? How soon can you trust him? How does Lady Wisdom trust the faithfulness of her followers?
2. **6:16.** What does "elixir of life" mean? How does the Hebrew read, and what does it imply? For those who fear the Lord, what is a faithful friend?
3. **6:25.** To what is wisdom compared? Paradoxically, what will the one who bears her load find? According to Jewish tradition, of what will one who accepts the yoke of the Torah be relieved?
4. **6:30.** To what does the expression "a cord of blue" refer? What do wisdom's "bonds" thus serve as a reminder to do?

For application

1. **6:5–7.** What is the difference between an acquaintance and a friend? How many close friends do you have? How do you choose them, and how do you test their friendship?
2. **6:14–17.** How do those you consider close friends measure up to the description of a faithful friend in these verses? How many of your friends would you consider companions in the spiritual life? With how many can you share spiritual concerns and insights?

3. **6:19–31.** As you learn a new skill, when do attempts to practice the skill seem to be hardest, and when do they become easier? Why does growth in the spiritual life seem so difficult at first? How does it become easier over time?
4. **6:34–37.** Why is it important for one who is serious about the spiritual life to have a spiritual director? What qualities should one look for in a spiritual director? Although a good spiritual director can teach the principles of spiritual development, where does actual growth come from?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:6–7.** What virtues should one possess who sets his heart on becoming a judge? Why does he need them?
2. **7:10.** What does it mean to be fainthearted in prayer? On the contrary, how should one pray? In the present context, what kind of prayer is presumably meant? Why should the one who prays not neglect to give alms?
3. **7:15.** What kind of work is held in high esteem in rabbinic writings? According to one Jewish tradition, what does the father who fails to teach his son to work actually teach him? If farm work is created by the Most High, to what passages in Genesis might Ben Sira be alluding?
4. **7:19.** Why is a wise and good wife not to be lightly dismissed? What charm in her is better than her external beauty? What does the Hebrew text say instead?
5. **7:25.** How does the Hebrew text for this verse read? Since Jewish fathers typically arranged marriages for their daughters, how important was finding a wise husband? What would succeeding in that task bring the father?

For application

1. **7:13.** The *Catechism* defines a lie as “speaking a falsehood with the intention of deceiving” (CCC 2482); subsequent paragraphs explain the seriousness of lying. What is the purpose of speech? Aside from the violence a lie does to another, what harm does the liar do to himself?
2. **7:23–24.** How did your parents discipline you as you were growing up? If you have children, how do you discipline them, and how different is your method of applying discipline from that of your parents? Since chastity is important for both sons and daughters, how can you teach them that virtue in an age that seems to abhor it?
3. **7:31.** What motive does this verse give for honoring priests? How do you show honor to the priests with whom you are acquainted or those you meet? How can you criticize a priest without dishonoring him?
4. **7:36.** Read the note for this verse. What is the Christian tradition regarding remembrance of the “four last things”? Since the end of your life is in the future, what does “remembrance” mean?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:1–19.** What advice do these verses provide? Since life provides only limited time and resources to do good, how do we “choose our battles”? How are all injunctions in this section expressed? Against what does the first part also warn readers?
2. **8:8.** What does “Do not slight the discourse of the sages” mean? What are maxims? With what do people of the Middle East typically sprinkle their speech? What does it mean to “gain instruction”? For what purpose, according to the Hebrew?
3. **8:9.** How is wisdom passed down? Otherwise, if wisdom is not passed down that way, what would every new generation need to do? What does one avoid by listening to the wise advice and lessons of the more experienced? By learning from your elders, what will you be able to do?
4. **8:19.** To what does Ben Sira now extend the need for prudence and discretion? Why is it not a good idea to “think aloud” unless surrounded with close, trustworthy friends? To what does “your good luck” refer here?

For application

1. **8:3.** How might this verse apply to the temptation to refute controversial posts on social media? How might any response “heap wood on [their] fire”?
2. **8:10.** Read the note for this verse. How can it apply to your conduct with friends or associates, for example, at a party or in a competition?
3. **8:13.** Why should you be careful about co-signing on a loan? What will happen if the person for whom you are co-signing defaults?
4. **8:17–19.** Have you ever revealed a secret to others that was entrusted to you in confidence, or entrusted a secret to another only to learn that it was subsequently spread abroad? If so, what lessons did you learn from that experience?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:3.** What does the expression “a loose woman” mean? What is the danger of going to meet her? What is the contrast with wisdom here?
2. **9:8.** How does the Hebrew for this verse read? Whose beauty is referred to here? What is the problem with a woman’s beauty? According to St. John Chrysostom, if beauty is a work of God’s wisdom, and God’s work could never be a cause of wickedness, what is the problem with looking on it?
3. **9:9.** What warning is being given here? To what can putting oneself in compromising circumstances lead? According to the Torah, what was the penalty for adultery? To what else, perhaps, can the “destruction” refer?
4. **9:10–18.** With what practical exhortations do these verses deal? For the author, to what do they apply? But in a modern context, to what can his counsel be extended?

Study Questions

For application

1. **9:2–8.** Compare these verses with what Jesus says about looking at women (Mt 5:28). What is the difference between seeing and looking? Is all looking sinful? If not, at what point does it become sinful?
2. **9:10b.** What is the analogy between a new friend and new wine intended to communicate? How do you “age” a friendship? Who are some of your lifelong friends, and what attracts you to their friendship?
3. **9:11.** Why does the *Catechism* define envy as a capital sin (CCC 2539)? When can envy become a mortal sin?
4. **9:15.** Do you have any friends with whom you can discuss spiritual things? What do you gain from conversations about matters pertaining to God?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:8.** How does Ben Sira view political regime changes? If “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”, how does he view the situation of rich and powerful states? What event does Ben Sira perhaps have in mind?
2. **10:13.** What does this verse seem to say? How does the Vulgate reverse it? How is the idea of a vicious circle of causality where sin engenders pride, which in turn causes more sin, plausible and compatible with the rest of the verse? How does the Hebrew read? To what topic does Ben Sira return? What explains why God’s judgment on prideful rulers and nations is so harsh?
3. **10:19–11:9.** What does this section cover? If prideful people seek honor but are unworthy of it, then who is worthy of it? What act is discouraged here?
4. **10:30.** About what is this verse not a claim? Rather, what is the point?

For application

1. **10:4.** As you survey the history of your country, how would you regard Ben Sira’s contention that God raises up the right leader for the time? Who would some of these people be, and why? How would you apply this verse to the history of the Church?
2. **10:13.** Read the note for this verse. Pride is considered one of the seven capital, or deadly, sins. Verse 18 below says that “pride was not created for men”; how, then, does it originate in the human heart? What makes it so deadly?
3. **10:19–24.** By what standards does the world honor certain individuals? By what standards does Ben Sira say they should be honored? As you examine your own life, by what standards would you like to be honored?
4. **10:28.** Jesus invites his disciples to learn from him because he is meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29). What does he mean by meekness and humility? Is humility contrary to proper self-esteem or its very definition? How does one acquire it?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:10.** In this new section, against what does Ben Sira caution? What does the warning about not going unpunished imply? Possibly what is one pursuing, and what is he fleeing?
2. **11:18.** Normally, diligence and self-denial are praised as virtues, but what is Ben Sira describing here? Although it is wise to prepare for one’s financial future, how are life and wealth to be used? Since no one knows the day of his death, what does the miser who hoards riches not know about them?
3. **11:26.** Of what are past fortunes or misfortunes unreliable indicators? While the Lord may allow temporary chastisements upon the righteous or prosperity upon the wicked, when will he render to each one according to his conduct? What does Ben Sira perhaps have in mind?
4. **11:28.** Although everyone experiences pleasurable moments during his lifetime, of what are such moments poor indicators? According to St. John Cassian, as long as one continues the struggle of this life, what is he never without? What does Cassian warn about the acquisition of virtue? According to Ben Sira, how will people know a deceased man’s true worth?

For application

1. **11:2–4.** What impresses you or puts you off when you first meet someone? How do you prepare to make a good impression on those you will meet for the first time? How do you judge others’ character more reliably, and how do you want them to judge yours?
2. **11:7.** If you are not acquainted with the facts, what should you do when someone you know is said to have done something wrong? What does charity demand? At what point would it be appropriate to conclude blame or innocence? Even if the person is guilty, what does charity continue to demand?
3. **11:25.** This verse applies also to the ups and downs of the spiritual life: when prayer is good, one forgets feelings of desolation; and when one is in the doldrums, one forgets that consolation will come. When you are feeling good about your prayer, how can you prepare for the times when it seems flat? And when prayer feels unfruitful, how do you prepare for it to improve?
4. **11:28.** Aside from physical descendants, what “children” does a person leave behind when he dies? According to St. Paul (1 Cor 3:11–15), upon what foundation should one build his life? How will his accomplishments—his children—be tested?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:1.** What should you know about the beneficiary of a deed that you do? What is the literal translation of the second half of the verse, and what does it mean?
2. **12:5.** Although Ben Sira’s adamant stance not to help the wicked seems harsh, what is his rationale? An ancient Jewish saying claims that doing good to an evil person is what sort of act?

3. **12:10.** To what does the copper refer? How were mirrors made of bronze treated to give a distinct reflection? How does the analogy apply to the ever-shifting wickedness of an enemy?
4. **12:13.** What kind of person does Ben Sira think a snake charmer is? Why should he not expect sympathy if he is bitten? How does this apply to one who cavorts with a sinner?

For application

1. **12:5.** Read the note for this verse. Why would the ancient Jewish saying maintain that doing good to an evil person is an evil act? What is the Christian answer to Ben Sira (Lk 6:27–36)?
2. **12:8–9.** Gilbert K. Chesterton was able to maintain strong friendships with people who fundamentally disagreed with him on almost everything, such as George Bernard Shaw. What enabled him to accomplish that? How do you relate to persons whose moral or political beliefs are directly contrary to yours? How do you hold them close as friends and keep them from becoming enemies?
3. **12:14.** How might friendship with someone whose conduct is consciously immoral become a “near occasion of sin” for you? While you may need to associate with persons known to live immoral lives, how might you protect yourself from their influence?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:1.** What is pitch? Just as pitch defiles and is difficult to clean off, how is it comparable with associating with a proud man?
2. **13:11.** Even if a powerful person speaks in a friendly way toward you, how should you conduct yourself? What might his friendly demeanor be masking?
3. **13:17.** Why do lambs avoid wolves? Likewise, why should godly men avoid sinners?
4. **13:24.** Under what condition is wealth not intrinsically evil? While poverty is undesirable, what behaviors are not always its cause?

For application

1. **13:1–7.** How would you apply Ben Sira’s advice to relationships between executives of competing businesses, between employees and employers, between sales people and potential customers, or between yourself and competitive neighbors? Why is caution in such relationships always necessary?
2. **13:10.** How experienced are you at networking when looking for a job? What are some strategies you use so as to see and be seen by prospective employers?
3. **13:22–23.** Have you ever tried to communicate moral or ethical concerns to an authority figure such as a politician or an executive in your company? If so, what reception did you receive? If you were ignored or put off, what did you do? If you have not tried to address concerns to authorities, what keeps you from doing so?
4. **13:25.** Read the note for this verse. Does the term “heart” here refer simply to mood changes or to something else? Why would a positive change in your circumstances, such as a new love or a windfall in your finances, change the way you appear?

Chapter 14

For understanding

1. **14:6.** In what sense is a miser even worse than a selfish person who does not give to others for the sake of self-indulgence? To what punishment does “retribution” refer in this verse?
2. **14:11.** Why does Ben Sira address readers in a fatherly way? What does the commandment “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” presuppose?
3. **14:21.** To what are the “ways” of wisdom equivalent? What is one able to do only after learning obedience?
4. **14:24.** What does the pursuer of wisdom become, so to speak? Why does he live next to her? How does one learn the deeper teachings of wisdom?

For application

1. **14:5–10.** How does a literary character like Ebenezer Scrooge exemplify these verses? According to the story, how does he learn the virtue of magnanimity? How do you think the Lord would like you to use your financial resources?
2. **14:11.** Read the note for this verse, particularly the comment about avoiding “harsh forms of asceticism”. Is it acceptable for the prudent Christian to avoid all asceticism? In contrast, is the devout Christian supposed to imitate saints who practiced extreme forms of asceticism? If not, what sorts of asceticism does Christian spirituality require, and why?
3. **14:14–16.** In the same vein as above, what should be the Christian attitude toward the pursuit of luxury? How does poverty of spirit call the Christian to live?
4. **14:20–27.** What is the difference in attitude between one who is open to wisdom and one who seeks it? Why is openness not sufficient for acquiring wisdom? How long should the active pursuit of wisdom last?

Chapter 15

For understanding

1. **15:9.** Why are songs of praise to God the natural response of the righteous? What form of prayer is praise? Why is praise unfitting on the lips of a sinner?
2. **15:11–20.** What topics does Ben Sira address in these verses? What claim does he refute? What must people do with respect to their own sins?

Study Questions

3. **15:14.** What extra clause does the Hebrew add to the middle of this verse? What idea does this verse refute? If God created man good, where did sin come from? Thus, where does evil originate? According to the Church, why does God permit evil?
4. **15:15.** Of what is this verse a strong affirmation? How will the commandments save you? What does the Hebrew text add here?

For application

1. **15:1–6.** According to Ben Sira, what benefits can the seeker of wisdom expect? How do these compare to the blessings of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12)?
2. **15:9–10.** Spiritual writers say that the prayer of praise does not benefit God, who does not need it, but it does benefit the one who prays. How so?
3. **15:11–12.** It seems to be a human trait to shift blame for sin from oneself to others. Have you ever directly or implicitly blamed others for the ways you were raised or for how you react to injury or for a wrong you have done? How might shifting blame resolve such issues for you? What is your responsibility for your own behavior?
4. **15:15.** When a temptation to commit sin seems overwhelming, how might it seem to limit the choices you think you have? If you give in to it, what should you do to recover? How might you prepare for the next time that temptation occurs?

Chapter 16

For understanding

1. **16:4.** How does the Hebrew text for this verse read? To whom is it probably alluding? To which "tribe of lawless men" is the verse probably alluding?
2. **16:11.** With whom is the expression "a stiffnecked person" usually associated? To whom is it employed to refer here? If the wilderness generation did not escape punishment, what of those who repeat their mistake? What are two facets of God's character?
3. **16:17.** What does the speaker in this verse foolishly suppose? What does he downplay?
4. **16:27.** To which works does Ben Sira specifically refer here? To what does "their dominion" refer, and how long will it last? What point about the stability of the created order is the author making?

For application

1. **16:1–3.** In ancient Israel, why would childlessness be a problem for a married couple? Why would some modern couples choose not to have children? Why does the Church require that couples be open to having children for their marriage to be considered valid?
2. **16:11.** Read the note for this verse. In your view, which facet of God's character is more dominant: his mercy or his wrath? Why? If, according to the New Testament, God is love (1 Jn 4:8), how do you understand what his wrath is? Why are the two not incompatible?
3. **16:17.** According to Ps 139, how well does God know you? How likely are you to escape his notice? How well do you want God to know you? How would such knowledge help you to know yourself?

Chapter 17

For understanding

1. **17:1.** What does the "earth" made into God's image indicate? According to the Church, of what is the human person composed? As the only one of God's visible creatures willed for its own sake, to what is he called?
2. **17:22.** What is a signet? How is a person's almsgiving like a signet? What does it mean that God keeps a person's deeds "like the apple of his eye"?
3. **17:23.** How does Ben Sira respond to the skeptics who think that God does not act? For what is "on their heads" a metaphor?
4. **17:28.** What is the state of the dead of the OT like? How does this perspective change in the NT?

For application

1. **17:4.** What does dominion over beasts and birds entail for human beings? Even though we use them for food and clothing, what respect do we owe these animals?
2. **17:11–14.** What makes human beings human? How consistent through the ages are the moral standards of the natural law? If historical circumstances change, do moral standards change with them? Why or why not?
3. **17:14.** This verse mentions the commandments of the Decalogue that refer to one's neighbor. What is their purpose? Even though most are phrased in the negative, what are their positive meanings?
4. **17:27–28.** At what point in life is one's choice for or against God finalized? Why cannot that choice be changed after death?

Chapter 18

For understanding

1. **18:8.** To whom does Ben Sira now shift attention? Compared to his Maker, how significant is man? What does this verse not deny but rather strongly affirm? To what does this perhaps refer?
2. **18:20.** What preparation is even more important than preparing for speaking or falling ill? What is the hour of visitation? What does self-examination reveal?
3. **18:23.** Before you make a vow to the Lord, what should you do? Why is it unwise to make a rash vow that you are unlikely to keep?

4. **18:25.** What is this verse possibly an appeal to do in times of wealth or poverty? More likely, since hunger and poverty are often viewed as punishments for sin, of what is this a reminder?

For application

1. **18:5–7.** St. Thomas Aquinas says that the human mind cannot *comprehend*—that is, understand—God, but that it can apprehend, or perceive, him as he chooses to reveal himself. How do you perceive the presence of God in your life? How can perceiving him change your understanding of your relationship with him?
2. **18:20.** Spiritual writers recommend examining one's conscience daily. How often do you do it? When is a good time to do it? In addition to reminding yourself of your faults, what other purposes can self-examination have?
3. **18:22–23.** What promises have you made to the Lord out of personal devotion? Have you been able to keep them? What does keeping a promise indicate about your relationship with God? (On the subject of promises and vows, see CCC 2101–3.)
4. **18:32–33.** What is your position on whether or not to buy on credit? What sorts of things, such as luxuries or entertainments, do you buy with credit cards? How deeply in debt are you, and how quickly do you repay the charges?

Chapter 19

For understanding

1. **19:1.** How does the Hebrew for this verse read, and to what does it refer? To what does neglect of small matters lead?
2. **19:10.** What should you do with a rumor? What does Ben Sira's sarcastic remark imply about fools?
3. **19:11.** How are fools' inability to control their speech like a newborn coming from his mother's womb? How does restraining themselves resemble a woman's labor pains?
4. **19:25.** How can one be scrupulous in his affairs but unjust? How does one distort kindness?

For application

1. **19:4.** How does sin injure the sinner? What kinds of injury does sin cause him? If it takes a long time for a good character to develop through the practice of virtue, how quickly does a bad character develop?
2. **19:16.** What is the purpose of speech? St. James compares the tongue to a rudder that turns a ship or to a spark that ignites a forest fire (Jas 3:4–5). What are some of the ways we can do great damage with our tongues? How can we control the rudder or stamp out the fire once it starts? When we cause damage through what we say, how do we undo the damage?
3. **19:24.** There is a popular belief that evil people are more interesting than good ones; yet the saints maintain that evil people are actually *less* interesting than good ones. Why do worldly people believe that goodness is boring? Why are they wrong? In contrast, why do the saints believe that holy people are some of the most interesting you will ever meet?
4. **19:29–30.** Ben Sira says that a "sensible" person can judge another's character by how he looks, dresses, laughs, and even walks. How often do you use these or similar criteria to determine whether you like or dislike those you meet? How often are your first impressions borne out? How do you think you appear to others?

Chapter 20

For understanding

1. **20:1.** If it is appropriate to rebuke someone who has done wrong, what can happen when the timing is wrong? What is sometimes wiser than speaking?
2. **20:18–26.** What do these verses provide? With what consequences do they deal?
3. **20:29.** To what do "presents and gifts" refer here? Why are they forbidden? What do they inhibit authorities from doing?
4. **20:30–31.** How is hidden wisdom like hidden treasure? How is wisdom to be beneficial? What is it better for a fool to hide and for the wise to reveal? According to St. Gregory the Great, why should persons who can preach the gospel but shrink back out of excessive humility be admonished? If they do not supply the bread of grace when souls are perishing from a famine of the word of God, what are they liable to receive?

For application

1. **20:1–2.** The note for v. 1 refers to Mt 18:15–17, on fraternal correction. What does Jesus say is the Christian's duty in this regard? What kinds of offenses does Jesus have in mind that would involve taking corrections to the Church as a last resort? If, then, you see a parishioner doing something that is objectively wrong, what is your duty? What would be the desired benefit for the parishioner whom you are admonishing?
2. **20:10.** When you invite a friend or acquaintance to dinner, what do you expect in return? When you are invited, what do you expect to do in return? Do you feel that some form of reciprocation is in order? What would Jesus recommend for you (see Lk 14:12–14)?
3. **20:24.** How do lies distort a person's character? How does lying violate the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance)? How does telling the truth, even when inconvenient or dangerous, strengthen them in one's character?
4. **20:29.** Why do most societies forbid bribery? Have you ever been offered a payment or a favor, either to squelch a wrong or to promote some purpose? What was in it for you? Why would conscience be bothered at such offers?

Chapter 21

For understanding

1. **21:3.** What is the danger in "a two-edged sword"? What does the analogy emphasize?
2. **21:9.** Of what does tow consist, and what is its danger? Why is "a flame of fire" not necessarily a form of punishment in the afterlife?

Study Questions

3. **21:21.** In contrast to the fool's view of education, in what does submitting to the education of wisdom result? To what is wisdom thus likened?
4. **21:26.** When do fools speak, and when do the wise? According to Hilary of Poitiers, why is the heart of a fool in his mouth? By contrast, where does the tongue of the wise come from? To what does the tongue of the wise subject itself?

For application

1. **21:3.** If lawlessness is like a two-edged sword, what are some of its benefits? What are some of its dangers? St. John regards sin as lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4). How does it kill? What does it kill?
2. **21:6.** Why should one who fears the Lord invite his correction? What benefit is there in praying that the Lord will reveal your faults to you?
3. **21:10.** Compare this verse with what Jesus says about the wide and narrow doors (Mt 7:13–14). Why is the door to heaven so narrow and hard and that to hell so wide and easy? Some theologians believe that no one goes to hell. What do you think? Why is the existence of hell not an indictment of God's goodness?
4. **21:23–24.** What is a voyeur? Why is voyeurism more than mere boorishness or lack of manners? Why did medieval society regard curiosity as a serious sin, and why do modern people dismiss it as such? How can it lead to sin?

Chapter 22

For understanding

1. **22:4.** How does the Latin for this verse read? What is the sense of the verse? What kind of daughter will attract a good husband who will cherish her?
2. **22:11.** While one naturally mourns the dead, why should one mourn the fool even more?
3. **22:18.** Instead of "fences", how do some manuscripts read? Where were they placed, and why? Just as small rocks easily fall off the wall, what happens to a cowardly, unresolved person with foolish thoughts?
4. **22:19.** What are two of the most sensitive parts of the human body? Though both are quickly wounded, how quickly do they heal?

For application

1. **22:3–5.** Much attention is given in our culture to raising girls to be strong, independent women. If you are or desire to be a parent, how would you raise a girl to be a strong Christian woman? What virtues would you emphasize? How would you prepare her for her vocation in life, whether as a married or a single woman?
2. **22:7–15.** What are some of the marks of a fool in these verses? What is Ben Sira's view of the fool's future? What word would Scripture use for an intelligent person who has been taught the way to eternal life but ignores it?
3. **22:16.** Compare this verse with Jesus' parable about a house built on rock versus one built on sand (Lk 6:47–49). Whereas Ben Sira focuses on a mind built on good principles, on what does Jesus focus? How compatible are the two points of view?

Chapter 23

For understanding

1. **23:2.** To what does the expression "discipline of wisdom" allude? To what does wisdom's discipline over the mind really amount? What does Ben Sira pray might correct his sins?
2. **23:9.** What are oaths? When only should oaths be sworn?
3. **23:16.** To what does this numerical proverb refer? To what two acts might "fornication with his near of kin" refer?
4. **23:18.** What does the adulterer wrongly think is hidden? According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, why must we take care of our body as our own? Just as a scar remains after a wound in the body has healed, what does sin do?

For application

1. **23:2.** If you wish to progress in prayer, how do you discipline your thoughts? Why is silence before God important? How difficult is it for you to silence your imagination when you are at prayer? Why is it important not to give up because of the difficulty?
2. **23:9.** Why does Ben Sira advise not habitually uttering the name of God? How might doing so risk violating the second commandment of the Decalogue? What is your response when you hear companions thoughtlessly utter God's or Jesus' name? If you do not respond, at least mentally, why not?
3. **23:17.** How is fornication actively promoted in our society? Why do most people in our culture see little wrong with it? Despite that, how does the practice of fornication injure the Christian community? What does the New Testament say that fornicators can expect (e.g., Eph 5:3–5)?
4. **23:25.** Read the note for this verse. Why would the Jewish law take such a harsh position toward the children of an adulterous union? How does the Church regard children whom society considers illegitimate?

Chapter 24

For understanding

1. **24:10.** Where did personified Wisdom dwell? What kind of ministry did Wisdom perform before the Lord? Of what was the Tabernacle an earthly representation? What did Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem replace? Thus, how long was Wisdom present with Israel?
2. **Topical Essay: Nuptial Union with Lady Wisdom through Salvation History.** How does the Bible often portray the pursuit of Wisdom as a romantic courtship and nuptial mystery? How should wise men court her? How is the nuptial nature of this union with Wisdom underscored in Sirach? In the following four ways, how does the imagery of Sirach 24 evoke specific

moments in salvation history: Wisdom's initial presence at creation and in the Garden of Eden, her restoration in the Torah, her indwelling in the Temple's liturgy, and her final revelation to the world at the end of times?

3. **24:13.** What is the cedar of Lebanon? What is the cypress? With what does Ezekiel associate both trees? Where were both types of wood used, and of what are both characteristic? Where is Hermon?
4. **24:15.** What are cassia and camel's thorn? What were both used to make for the Tabernacle? What are galbanum, onycha, and stacte used to make, together with frankincense? What role does Wisdom thus play?

For application

1. **24:3–9.** Compare these verses with the opening of John's Gospel (Jn 1:1–5, 10–14). How is Wisdom like the Word, who was with God in the beginning? How is she as a created being different from the Word? Where do both make their dwelling?
2. **24:15.** What is the liturgical purpose of incense? Why does the celebrant cause smoke to rise before the altar, the crucifix, and the Gospel book at Mass? Why does he incense the remains of the deceased at funerals? How does incense serve as a reminder of prayer?
3. **24:19–21.** Compare these verses with Jesus' invitation for all who labor and are weary to come to him (Mt 11:28–30). What is the yoke that Jesus invites all to take up? How does it give rest? What does Lady Wisdom offer?

Chapter 25

For understanding

1. **25:3.** To what does "you have gathered nothing" refer? When should wisdom be acquired? What happens if a man neglects to pursue wisdom throughout his life? According to St. John Cassian, how should the wealth of the old be measured?
2. **25:8.** What find is closely related to finding wisdom? What do the Hebrew and Syriac versions add here, and to what does the analogy refer? What situation was an embarrassment in the ancient world?
3. **25:13–26:27.** With what counsel does this section deal? If this controversial section can appear misogynistic to modern readers, what considerations can offset the author's harsh critique of "bad wives"?
4. **25:24.** According to Ben Sira, to what did Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden lead? For what is Eve declared responsible, although other texts of Scripture underscore Adam's culpability?

For application

1. **25:4–5.** Some cultures prize the wisdom of the aged. What is the attitude of our culture toward the elderly? How many old people do you know? Which of them has the sort of wisdom you would want to learn from? What sort of wisdom do they offer (e.g., technical expertise, social savvy, insight into life)?
2. **25:10–11.** What kinds of spiritual reading do you do? When it comes to the saints, do you prefer biographies or works that they have written? Either way, what do you hope to learn from them?
3. **25:16–20.** What Ben Sira says of wicked wives can just as easily be said of wicked husbands. What seems to be the principal marital issue he cites in these verses? What problems in communication characterize your family of origin, and how have they carried over into the ways you communicate?
4. **25:24.** Read Rom 5:12–19. What does St. Paul say about the origin of sin among mankind? What was the result of the sin of that first man? What is the result of the grace brought about by the second Adam?

Chapter 26

For understanding

1. **26:1.** How is Ben Sira's hyperbole about being married to a good wife confirmed by modern studies?
2. **26:13.** In the ancient world, of what was being fat a sign? What does a good wife do for her husband?
3. **26:16.** What time of day is it when the sun is at its zenith? What is the Greek word for "ordered", and what does it mean? How, then, could the verse be rendered? To what does Ben Sira liken the good wife's home?
4. **26:18.** To what do the "pillars of gold" probably refer? What role does the sensible wife play? How does Jewish tradition also hold that the world is supported?

For application

1. **26:1–4.** What to you is the mark of a good marriage? In your experience, what are the roles of the husband and of the wife that make for a good marriage? According to the vows spoken in the wedding liturgy, what are the spouses to be for each other? What are they to do for each other?
2. **26:8.** Alcoholism is a scourge for many families and may affect them for generations. Do you have any experience with alcoholism in current or previous generations of your family? If so, how have you or other members of your family dealt with it? What kinds of external support have you or your family received (e.g., from organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous)?
3. **26:15.** How would you describe the virtue of chastity? Given that married couples have sexual relationships, how is chastity demonstrated within a marriage? How can chastity within marriage be violated, apart from an adulterous relationship?
4. **26:29.** Read the note for this verse. What are the challenges in running an honest business? What business ethics policies are in place at your place of employment? Which of these are written down, and which are merely assumed? What are the consequences of violating company ethics policies?

Chapter 27

For understanding

1. **27:4.** For what is a sieve used? What passes through the mesh, and what is filtered out? How does the analogy apply to the faults of a bad man? How do his faults become evident?

Study Questions

2. **27:5.** What happens to a potter's vessel when it is improperly made and is baked in a furnace? How is the quality of just men manifested? Rather than "in tribulation", how does the Greek text read?
3. **27:23.** How does the deceptive man appear, and how does he speak? What does he pretend to do? When will he speak very differently? What will he do with your words?
4. **27:28.** What is the literal translation of this verse? In what sense can it also mean that "mockery and abuse are the lot of the proud"?

For application

1. **27:1-3.** These verses continue the thought of 26:29. What is a scam? How do you think people who perpetrate such frauds rationalize their behavior? Which of the commandments do con artists violate?
2. **27:4-7.** Jesus says that from the heart the mouth speaks (Mt 12:34) and that what comes from the mouth defiles a person (Mt 15:18-20). What things did he have in mind? As you analyze your own speech habits, what comes from your mouth that glorifies God, and what comes out that can defile you?
3. **27:13-14.** How often do you spend time with friends who tell off-color jokes or pepper their speech with vulgar or scatological language? Why does St. Paul advise Christians to avoid such speech themselves (Eph 4:29, 5:4)?
4. **27:16-21.** As you read these verses carefully, does Ben Sira seem to have in mind a single betrayal of secrets or multiple ones? Accidental or deliberate? If the betrayal is a single occurrence, or accidental, what hope for restoring the friendship might there be? How does one restore trust?

Chapter 28

For understanding

1. **28:9.** How does a sinful man disturb friends? According to Rabanus Maurus, why are the contentious wicked? Why are heretics and schismatics chief among them?
2. **28:14.** What is the literal meaning for the word translated as "slander"? To what two things may it refer? What does Ben Sira's poetic exaggeration illustrate about slander?
3. **28:19.** From what does God shield the man who is protected? Whom does slander enslave?
4. **28:23.** What will those who slander suffer? What does the burning quality of slander illustrate? What do the comparisons of slander to lions and leopards underline?

For application

1. **28:1-6.** How are these verses similar to Jesus' admonitions about forgiving others (Mt 6:14-15; 18:21-35)? Although forgiving others is necessary for us if we wish to receive God's forgiveness, why is it usually so difficult to do? Since unforgiveness has consequences in the next life, what consequences can it have in this life?
2. **28:17.** "Sticks and stones may break my bones", but how much injury can words cause? Are written insults less injurious than spoken ones? Why do social media users freely level insults online that they would never think of doing face-to-face?
3. **28:21.** Read the note for this verse. What is calumny? When a reputation is ruined through calumny, which of the Ten Commandments is violated? How grave a sin is this?
4. **28:25.** What does it mean to "make balances and scales for your words"? What does a child learn who frequently hears negative speech such as sarcasm, criticism, barbed humor, or derogatory nicknames coming from you? If your conversations are marked by negative speech patterns, what can you do to correct these habits?

Chapter 29

For understanding

1. **29:3.** How do you as the borrower confirm your word? What will happen if you repay your loans faithfully?
2. **29:12.** To what is giving alms likened? What will God do for a generous person? According to St. Augustine, why will people who show mercy to others be saved?
3. **29:14-20.** Of what does the practice of "giving surety" consist? Although Proverbs is wary of this practice, what does Ben Sira think of it?
4. **29:21-28.** What counsel do these verses offer? In the ancient world, how could one seek a better life, but at what cost? What kind of life does Ben Sira prefer?

For application

1. **29:4-7.** Many financial counselors advise against lending money to relatives for many of the reasons Ben Sira gives here. Do you have any experience of asking relatives for a loan or of being asked for one? If you borrowed from a relative, how quickly did you repay the loan? If you lend a relative money, how will you ensure that you will be repaid?
2. **29:14-20.** If you cannot afford to finance a child's education with your own resources, what alternatives do you have for helping him financially? What financial programs are available to you? Which of you, yourself or the student, will be responsible for repaying the student's loans? If you, how will the student learn financial responsibility?
3. **29:23.** How satisfied are you with what you have? How often do you want to upgrade your possessions? How would you feel about a downturn in the economy that would restrict your ability to spend? What was St. Paul's motive for being content with plenty or scarcity (Phil 4:11-13)?

Chapter 30

For understanding

1. **30:1-13.** What counsel do these verses offer? What kind of disciplinarian is it assumed that a father should be? How should these guidelines be taken in a modern context?
2. **30:9.** What is the meaning behind "he will frighten you"? What is Ben Sira concerned that a father may lose?

3. **30:12.** In what sense should a father bow down his son's neck? What analogy is Ben Sira using here? What penalty did the Torah prescribe for a stubborn and rebellious son? What record is there that the sentence was ever carried out?
4. **30:17.** Although even the righteous sometimes express a desire to die, what do they always do? What do they recognize, in other words? What does eternal rest mean here? For whom does the Church call for special respect to be given? What does she deem about euthanasia?

For application

1. **30:1.** What is your philosophy of how to discipline children? What part does corporal punishment play in it? How do you expect your methods of discipline to change as your children get older?
2. **30:7-13.** How do you discipline a child so as to teach respect for your authority without alienating him? What is the danger in making your child your "best friend"? By the same token, how do you encourage your child to confide in you during times of trouble?
3. **30:16-17.** What becomes of your relationship with the Lord when you contract a serious and incurable illness such as cancer? What does it mean to die with dignity? What is "redemptive suffering", and how do you transform your suffering accordingly?
4. **30:21-25.** What kind of life do you think the Lord is giving you? If physical comfort is not his will for you, what is? What role do penitential disciplines such as physical mortification play? From a spiritual perspective, what attention should you be giving to the food you eat?

Chapter 31

For understanding

1. **31:8.** Why is the rich man blessed? Who is Ben Sira praising?
2. **31:11.** Ultimately, what is wealth? If it is not money that is evil, what is? What does the person who has acquired wealth honestly deserve? What does the verse assume?
3. **31:17-18.** What should the well-mannered person not be the first to do? What virtue should he display, and what should he be the first to do?
4. **31:28-30.** What contrast do these verses draw? According to St. Ambrose, when God gave wine, what did he know about it? To human freedom, what choice did he give in that regard? Of what did the Lord make it a means?

For application

1. **31:5-7.** What are your concerns about management of your wealth? In terms of investment, where do you think you should put your money? If you are married, in what ways do you and your spouse agree about the use of money?
2. **31:12-14.** What is a reasonable Christian approach toward food? In response to the Corinthian axiom that "food is made for the stomach, and the stomach for food", what did St. Paul answer about the purpose of the body (1 Cor 6:13)?
3. **31:21.** Read the note for this verse. Does the Christian approach to food approve of Ben Sira's solution to feeling over-stuffed? What are some of the causes behind eating disorders such as bulimia or anorexia? How can they be treated?
4. **31:27-30.** How does the *Catechism* define the virtue of temperance (CCC 1809)? What about the consumption of alcohol does temperance forbid (CCC 2290)? How might these principles apply to the abuse of drugs (CCC 2291)?

Chapter 32

For understanding

1. **32:1.** Who is the "master of the feast"? In that capacity, how should he act?
2. **32:12.** Where and when should the banqueter presumably amuse himself? What does the pleasant atmosphere at banquets make people prone to do? What does Ben Sira remind banqueters to do?
3. **32:17.** What does the sinful man reject? How does the Hebrew for this verse read? Instead of following the Torah, what does the sinful man do with it?
4. **32:24.** How does the Hebrew for this verse read? What actions constitute a path to flourishing?

For application

1. **32:1-2.** When you give a party, what is your role before your guests? When is it appropriate for you to join the fun? Until that time, what should you be doing?
2. **32:11.** How do you decide when is a good time to leave an enjoyable party? What message do you send by leaving too soon or lingering too long?
3. **32:14-17.** Do you believe that traditional moral teachings apply to current cultural situations or that they should be amended to reflect changing cultural norms? How does your position align with Ben Sira's? Why does Scripture generally hold that doing what each person thinks is right leads to moral chaos?
4. **32:19.** What kind of decision-maker are you: bold and confident or irresolute and uncertain? If you are the first, how do you respond when you realize your judgment is mistaken? If you are the second, how can you overcome the fear that any decision you make could be wrong?

Chapter 33

For understanding

1. **33:3.** What were the Urim and the Thummim? For what were they used?
2. **33:16.** What does Ben Sira consider himself to be? What is one who gleans? From what has Ben Sira gleaned? How has he "filled [his] wine press"?

Study Questions

3. **33:24–33.** With what do the instructions in these verses deal? For whom does Ben Sira advocate severity, and for whom kindness? What sort of time does his counsel reflect?
4. **33:26.** To what is the slave compared? What are some instruments for disciplining disobedient servants? What did Israelite law limit, and what did it protect? On the basis of the seventh commandment, why does Catholic teaching denounce the enslavement of human beings?

For application

1. **33:3.** When you seek God's will for your life, how do you go about it? For example, if you face two alternatives, both of which appear equally good, how do you decide which one (if either) the Lord is leading you toward? What trust do you have that the Lord is leading you when you decide?
2. **33:7–9.** Why does the Church establish certain days as Holy Days of Obligation? Which day of the week is the most important? What does it celebrate? What is Ordinary Time, and why is it called that?
3. **33:17.** Since there is very little money to be gained from it, why do spiritual writers pen spiritual books? What spiritual works have you read, and what have you learned from them?
4. **33:27.** How does meaningful labor enhance one's life? How do you teach children the value of work? What purpose does periodic leisure serve? What is the difference between rest and idleness?

Chapter 34

For understanding

1. **34:5.** What do the occult practices of divinations and omens attempt to know? Just as these are strictly forbidden by the Torah, what occult practices does the Church continue to forbid, and why?
2. **34:7.** According to St. Gregory the Great, what faith should one have in dreams? Who can best distinguish illusions from revelations and discover the meaning of their words and images? If a soul is not prudent in the matter of dreams, what can happen and by what spirit?
3. **34:18–26.** Whom does Ben Sira, like many before him, criticize, and for what? Because these sacrifices are empty rituals, what does the Lord do?
4. **34:20.** What does the shocking comparison (alluding to 2 Kings 25:6–7) illustrate? Why is such a sacrifice offensive to the Lord?

For application

1. **34:6.** According to Matthew's Gospel, St. Joseph was four times directed by the Lord through dreams, mainly in critical situations (1:20–21; 2:13, 19–20, 22). Described as a "just man" (Mt 1:19), what may have protected him from misinterpreting his dreams? Given Ben Sira's cautions against dreams, what qualities of a dream might lead one to test and see if it is from the Lord?
2. **34:9.** How does travel enhance a person's education? If one cannot afford to travel abroad, how else can he gain the experience that travel provides?
3. **34:14.** According to St. Paul (2 Tim 1:7), what spirit have Christians been given? How does that spirit manifest itself in your spiritual and emotional life?
4. **34:23–26.** When you recite an Act of Contrition, what promises are you making to God? If you have no real intention to reform your behavior, is the priest's prayer of absolution valid? If not, why confess the sin?

Chapter 35

For understanding

1. **35:1.** In what two ways can the making of many offerings be interpreted? What is a peace offering?
2. **35:4.** What does it mean to appear before the Lord empty-handed? Of what does Ben Sira underscore the spiritual significance? At the same time, what obligation of his fellow Jews does he not lessen?
3. **35:12.** What can sacrifices not do with God? What does it mean that God is perfectly just?
4. **35:16–17.** Whose sacrifices does the Lord find pleasing? What does Ben Sira mean by saying that prayer "pierces the clouds"? How long does Israel persist in prayer, and who is perhaps referred to here? According to St. Fulgentius, when is the only time that victory over the adversary is won?

For application

1. **35:4.** What do you have to offer the Lord? What do you think he wants from you? How many of your goods, both internal and external, have you placed at his disposal?
2. **35:8.** How do you feel about requests for money from the pulpit? If you believe that "the Church is always asking for money", when was the last time you actually heard a homily about money? How generously do you respond to diocesan or parish money requests?
3. **35:9.** Do you tithe? If not, why not? Based on your adjusted gross income, what percentage of your income do you actually contribute to the Church? If you contribute one percent or less, what prevents you from increasing your contribution?

Chapter 36

For understanding

1. **36:11.** Even though many Jews had returned to Judea from exile in Babylon, what was the fate of many more Israelites? For what does Ben Sira pray, and to what does "the beginning" refer? What is the most frequently attested prophecy in the Bible?
2. **36:15.** What does Ben Sira ask God to acknowledge? What prophecies does he want God to fulfill?

- 36:19. What parallel between types of discernment does Ben Sira draw? As a well-trained palate can discern good food from bad, what can an intelligent man discern?
- 36:25. What does the Hebrew for this verse say? Whose pathetic saying does it echo? What does Ben Sira, speaking in an OT context, imply about unmarried men? In a NT context, what is celibacy elevated by Jesus to become?

For application

- 36:1–5. How did God use the Israelites to show the nations his mighty deeds? How does Ben Sira want him to use the nations to show Israel his glory? What goal does he hope to achieve?
- 36:6. In announcing the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII invited the faithful to ask the Holy Spirit to show new signs and work new wonders in the Church. Why are signs and wonders important in our day? What new signs and wonders would you like to see the Holy Spirit pour out on the Church?
- 36:19. How should a lie be constructed so as to convince the unwitting to accept it? How can a theologian convince the faithful to believe that an act that the word of God forbids is acceptable and may even be virtuous? How does one recognize the lie there?
- 36:25. Read the note for this verse. In what ways is a wife a “fence” or “hedge” for a man? How does marriage encourage a holy life? Why are both marriages and celibate vocations declining in our culture? How can they be encouraged?

Chapter 37

For understanding

- 37:5. How is the Hebrew text different from the Greek, and how does it better fit the second half of the verse? What does a real friend not hesitate to do?
- 37:11. Why should one not seek counsel from the nine types of people listed? To whom does a woman’s rival perhaps refer?
- 37:12. To whom should one turn for reliable advice? Why will he likely be faithful to you? What does “one who is in accord with your soul” mean?
- 37:13. If you fear the Lord, what may your own deliberations constitute, and why? Why may a person’s own conscience be more reliable than several counselors?

For application

- 37:7–8. To whom do you go to seek advice? What are this person’s qualifications for giving advice? How reliable do you find it? If you detect a bias of some sort, how does it influence the advice you are given and your willingness to follow it?
- 37:12. How do you select a spiritual director? What do you look for in a spiritual director? Assuming your director is trustworthy, how willing are you to obey his direction when it goes counter to your own sensibility?
- 37:23. In school, who was your favorite teacher? What attracted you to this person? How lasting an influence has this teacher had on you? How willing are you to pass the teacher’s wisdom on to those whom you teach?
- 37:30. How do you know when you have had too much of a good thing? Whether it be food, drink, entertainment, sports, leisure time, even enjoyable conversation, how do you know when it is time to quit? Before involving yourself in such activities, how do you prepare to avoid going to excess?

Chapter 38

For understanding

- 38:1. How does the OT usually see illness, and what does it suggest to many? How is Ben Sira’s positive view of physicians consonant with the practical wisdom he exhibits throughout the book? Indeed, from whom does the physician’s skill come?
- 38:10. What correlation does cleansing one’s heart from sin imply? For what can sickness be a punishment that God inflicts? What can be an important step toward recovering health?
- 38:11. What was “a sweet-smelling sacrifice”, and what did it include? What does this passage imply about prayer, repentance, and fulfilling religious obligations?
- 38:17. In Middle Eastern cultures, what do people not suppress at the death of a loved one? How is it appropriate to express it? What does every person who dies deserve? What would anything less bring against the mourner? How long does the formal period of mourning in Judaism last? What should the mourner do after that?
- 38:24. In what did the scribe, as a professional religious scholar, specialize? What is the Greek term for leisure? What point does the etymology confirm in this section?

For application

- 38:1–3. What is your attitude toward medical doctors (whether or not you are one)? How often have you needed to make use of their services? As a patient, how compliant are you with following the doctor’s directions?
- 38:9–14. What part does prayer play when you need medical attention? In cases of serious illness or danger of death, have you ever made use of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?
- 38:16–20. How do you express grief over the death of a loved one? What do you think is an appropriate way to grieve? What is the purpose of a Christian funeral? What sort of funeral would you like for yourself?
- 38:25–33. Ben Sira questions the wisdom of those engaged in manual labor, valuable as their work is. What sort of education have you had to date (e.g., in liberal arts, the law, technical pursuits, business)? If you chose a particular course of studies, why did you choose it? What kind of wisdom has it given you?

Chapter 39

For understanding

- 39:1. What is the scribe’s object of study? What is the foundation of all wisdom and the focus of the scribe’s attention? For what does it provide the foundation?

Study Questions

2. **39:4.** Because of his wisdom, what influence does the scholar have? Ideally, about what should the well-traveled sage acquire experience?
3. **39:13–15.** To what does Ben Sira, speaking in a fatherly tone, invite readers, and how? What do these parallels imply when the wise praise and thank the Lord?
4. **39:16.** What is the theme of the hymn? What brought the universe into existence? How does God continue his work in the history of the world?

For application

1. **39:1–3.** What is your approach to studying Scripture? What do you hope to gain from it? If you are not familiar with Scripture study, where would you go to learn some tools and techniques?
2. **39:5.** What is your favorite time for prayer? Your favorite place? What pattern of prayer do you tend to follow? What part does Scripture play in your daily prayer?
3. **39:14–15.** Since God does not need our praise, what is the purpose of praising him? In these two verses, how does Ben Sira suggest one should praise the Lord? How else might you do it?
4. **39:24.** Has your life taken a direction different from what you expected? If so, how confident are you that the change of direction was the Lord's doing? Has the direction of your life influenced your growth in holiness? If so, in what way?

Chapter 40

For understanding

1. **40:13.** When do the wadis of the Judean desert carry rushing streams of water, and when do they dry completely?
2. **40:18–27.** What does Ben Sira survey in these verses? How does he list life's blessings? In what does the list culminate?
3. **40:19.** How is a man remembered? What does the Hebrew text add here?
4. **40:27.** How does the Hebrew of this verse read? To what idea does the fear of the Lord lead back? According to St. Augustine, what is the Church, rich in graces and chaste delights, rightly called, and for whom? What is perhaps the sense behind saying that fear of the Lord covers a man better than any glory?

For application

1. **40:2–4.** How often do you think about death? What aspects of it occupy your thoughts? What do you most fear about it? How do you try to allay these fears?
2. **40:13.** Ben Sira compares the wealth of the unjust to a flash flood in the desert that dries up quickly or to a thunderclap whose roar rumbles away into silence. How would you put his meaning into your own words? In an era when the rich seem to get richer while the poor get poorer, how do you reconcile Ben Sira's thought with your experience? What brings an end to the unjust man's wealth?
3. **40:22.** What things do you find most beautiful? Which do you prefer: the beauty of nature or beautiful objects made by artists? Why has God blessed mankind with the ability to appreciate beauty for its own sake and even create it?
4. **40:28–30.** How familiar are you with homelessness where you live? What is your opinion of homeless people, and on what is this opinion based? How many homeless people actually choose that life? Assuming you are not homeless yourself, what can you do to help those who are?

Chapter 41

For understanding

1. **41:2.** As what is Death personified? For whom can it come as a relief?
2. **41:5.** To what does the subject shift? According to Rabanus Maurus, why are the children of sinners abominable to the Lord? Where do sinners place themselves?
3. **41:6.** What sort of legacy can grave sin have in families where it is allowed to flourish? Who has the contrasting legacy in name and memory?
4. **41:14–42:8.** What is the distinction Ben Sira makes between proper and improper shame?

For application

1. **41:2.** Have you ever known anyone who took his own life? According to the *Catechism* (CCC 2281–83), why is suicide objectively and gravely evil? What can diminish the moral responsibility of the one committing suicide? Why, then, should we not despair of the eternal salvation of those who take their own lives?
2. **41:5–6.** What types of sins practiced or tolerated within families can you think of that tend to perpetuate themselves across generations? How can the children of "inherited sins" free themselves from their influences?
3. **41:12–13.** In these days of mass media, what dangers can threaten one's reputation? Why is the destruction of someone's good name likened to murder? Since a good name is so important, how do you protect it?
4. **41:20–22.** What is "custody of the eyes"? How is it possible to be around physically beautiful people and not look lustfully at them? How does custody of the eyes help with custody of the imagination?

Chapter 42

For understanding

1. **42:5.** What is a common practice in the Middle East in relation to dealing with merchants? How should one feel in getting a good deal out of negotiations with them? What is a moral obligation, not a cause for shame, for parents?
2. **42:9–14.** In the Middle East, since shame is a family affair, what happens if a misdeed becomes public? What explains in part why Ben Sira speaks so harshly in what follows?

3. **42:9–10.** What are five ways in which a daughter can be a source of anxiety for her father?
4. **42:11.** What did a daughter's misbehavior become for the family? What does the Hebrew add, and for what reason?

For application

1. **42:9–10.** Read the note for this verse. In connection with the examples given, how have our cultural standards changed? How have they remained the same?
2. **42:11.** Read the note for this verse. Which modern religious groups impose such stringent controls over women's behavior? What criticisms do men in these groups have of the behavior and dress of Western women? To what extent might controversies over these issues result from the clash between a society where behavior is a family concern and one where it is the business only of the individual? Which is right?
3. **42:18–19.** Why does God's knowledge of what people will do not determine how they will act? If man has free will, what control does God have over his future?

Chapter 43

For understanding

1. **43:6.** Even more than the sun, what role does the moon play in Judaism? How long will the moon endure as a sign?
2. **43:8.** What does the pun on the Hebrew word *hodesh* mean? How does the moon increase? As what sort of instrument does it serve for the hosts on high? According to Rabanus Maurus, why does Ben Sira speak of the moon after the sun? And as the moon is illumined by the sun, how is the Church illumined? How is the Church rightly compared to the moon?
3. **43:13–26.** From the astral bodies, to what does Ben Sira turn, and what do they do? What foretaste and anticipation does the image of the storm provide?
4. **43:28.** Although God is present within creation, what is his relation to it?

For application

1. **43:2–5.** Read Ps 19, which speaks of the sun in similar terms. In the psalm, what benefits does the Law give that compare to those given by the sun?
2. **43:6–8.** How is the Blessed Virgin, like the Church, compared to the moon? What light does she reflect? Who benefits from it?
3. **43:21.** How can forest fires, which cause enormous damage to humans, benefit nature? When should such fires be fought, and when should they be allowed to burn themselves out?
4. **43:30.** Of what strength in praising God might Ben Sira be thinking? What purpose does liturgy serve? Of all liturgical functions, which most directly and powerfully exalts the Lord?

Chapter 44

For understanding

1. **44:1–50:24.** With what do these chapters deal? What does Ben Sira say is manifested not only in the natural world but even more in the heroic figures of biblical history? Following an introduction, how does his survey proceed? Why does the author draw attention to these pious men?
2. **44:11.** Under what conditions are the blessings of the righteous also for their posterity?
3. **44:16.** When did Enoch live? How does the Hebrew read in his regard? Is anything stated in Genesis about the reason why God "took" Enoch? How does Ben Sira's view that he was an example of repentance represent a theological development? What does the Hebrew call him? What do other traditions state about why God took him?
4. **44:20.** Why does the statement that Abraham "kept the law" seem like an anachronism? However, on what basis do ancient Jewish commentaries hold that Abraham kept the Law even before it had been revealed to Israel? What is the "covenant in his flesh"? When was Abraham tested?

For application

1. **44:1.** Why do we honor the saints? What examples do they give us? Although it is not always wise to imitate some of the things the saints did, such as extreme penances, what is there about even these actions that is commendable?
2. **44:8–14.** Whom does the Church celebrate on the feasts of All Saints and All Souls? How often do you remember the souls in Purgatory, especially deceased relatives and friends? How appropriate is it to pray to deceased persons whose virtue you admire for their intercession?
3. **44:19–21.** From Abraham's story in Genesis, what do you most admire about his fidelity? How does it speak to you in your own struggles with trust in the Lord?
4. **44:23.** According to Genesis, Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright; yet, as Ben Sira says, God acknowledged him in place of the first-born anyway. How has God regarded you despite your faults? How has he fulfilled his plan for your life to date?

Chapter 45

For understanding

1. **45:8.** What part of the high priest's garments were the breeches? What was the "long robe"? What was the ephod? According to Rabanus Maurus, what do the vestments of the high priest signify?
2. **45:9.** On the vestments, what were the pomegranates? Where were the golden bells sewn? On what day could the congregation especially hear the high priest ministering inside the sanctuary?
3. **45:20.** When were the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of the priests increased? What part of the harvest was reserved for the priests? To what does the unusual expression "bread of first fruits" perhaps refer?

Study Questions

4. **45:23.** Who was Phinehas? After whom was he third in glory? How did he prove himself zealous? By identifying fear of the Lord as the driving force behind Phinehas' action, what does Ben Sira imply? What did Phinehas' action avert?

For application

1. **45:4.** Moses was known for his meekness, despite being a strict and uncompromising leader of Israel; likewise, Jesus called himself meek and praised meekness in his disciples (Mt 5:5; 11:29). What is meekness? What vice does it oppose? In what way is meekness necessary for persons who exercise authority?
2. **45:8–12.** What kinds of vestments do priests and bishops wear? Why should their vestments look beautiful and imposing? How does the bishop's miter compare with the high priest's headdress (v. 12)?
3. **45:15–17.** These verses allude to three of Aaron's priestly roles: to sanctify through sacrifice, to govern with authority, and to teach the commandments. How do Christian bishops and priests exercise these same roles? How do they receive the authority to exercise these roles (see the first part of v. 15)?
4. **45:25.** The priesthood of Aaron is passed on through lineal descent, from son to son. How is the priesthood of Jesus Christ passed on? How does a candidate for the Christian priesthood discern a vocation?

Chapter 46

For understanding

1. **46:1.** Who was Joshua the son of Nun? What tribe did he come from, and what was his original name? Because Joshua was considered a prophet, how is the Book of Joshua classified? What does the Hebrew name Joshua mean?
2. **46:7.** To what period do the days of Moses refer? Who was Caleb, and to what tribe did he belong? When the people murmured, rebelled, and wished to go back to Egypt, who were the only two who supported Moses?
3. **46:11.** Who were the Judges? Although Ben Sira does not name them, who were the most important? Though Ben Sira says that the hearts of the Judges did not fall into idolatry, why is his comment perhaps stated tongue-in-cheek?
4. **46:13.** Who was Samuel? As what was he recognized both during his life and after his death? How did Samuel establish the kingdom? How differently does the Hebrew read?

For application

1. **46:1.** Look up the passage in Luke's Gospel where the angel Gabriel announces to Mary the birth of her son (Lk 1:30–35). How does the pun mentioned in the note for this verse also appear in Gabriel's message? In contrast to the inheritance into which Joshua led the Israelites, into what inheritance does Jesus lead us?
2. **46:11.** A refrain that runs through parts of the OT, particularly in Judges, is that "doing what is right in [one's] own eyes" is not a good thing (Deut 12:8; Judg 17:6, 21:25; Prov 12:15, 21:2). Why not? In Judges, what were the consequences of doing what each person thought was right? What are the consequences now? Whose eyes determine what it is better to do?
3. **46:13.** How did the young Samuel learn that the Lord was calling him as a prophet (1 Sam 3:9ff.)? How valuable is this advice in the spiritual life? How does one invite the Lord to speak, and how does one know when the Lord answers?

Chapter 47

For understanding

1. **47:9.** How does the Hebrew for this verse read? To what initiative of David's in liturgical worship does Ben Sira refer?
2. **47:11.** What sins of David did God forgive? How did God exalt David's power, and with what expectation for his royal house and his throne?
3. **47:19.** For what was Solomon notorious? By what was he controlled? According to Origen of Alexandria, what do the many women to whom Solomon gave himself signify? Desiring to investigate them, as one who is knowledgeable and wise, what was he unable to do?
4. **47:23.** How did Solomon's son Rehoboam cause the people to revolt? To what did this lead, and what did Jeroboam do?

For application

1. **47:9.** What should music contribute to the liturgy? When Pope Pius X reformed Church music, he placed special emphasis on Gregorian chant. How often have you either heard or sung chant melodies in your parish? At your parish, what is the balance between having a choir perform versus everyone being encouraged to sing?
2. **47:12–17.** According to v. 13, what seems to have been the God-intended purpose of Solomon's reign? How well did he fulfill it? These verses describe the encyclopedic nature of Solomon's knowledge; however, is knowledge the same as wisdom? If not, what is the difference?
3. **47:18–19.** Why do peace and prosperity often pose dangers to the faith? During the era of economic prosperity that has followed World War II, how has the Church fared? If this prosperity continues, what do you think the future of the Church will be?
4. **47:22.** What sort of root from David's stock do you think Ben Sira had in mind? In the Christian understanding, who was that root?

Chapter 48

For understanding

1. **48:10.** To what does "the appointed time" refer here? With whom did Elijah become identified? What did the prophet Malachi expect the Messiah's forerunner to bring? How would God restore the tribes of Jacob?
2. **48:12.** What was Elisha's relationship to Elijah? Because Elisha was given a "double share" of Elijah's spirit, what did that make him? During whose reigns did Elisha prophesy, and what position did he take regarding them?

3. **48:15.** Despite Elisha's miracle-working power, on what path did the Northern Kingdom of Israel continue? Who conquered and deported the northern tribes of Israel in the eighth century B.C.? What does the Hebrew state more clearly was the identity of the surviving remnant? In contrast to the rival dynasties in the Northern Kingdom, what happened to the royal Davidic line in the Southern Kingdom?
4. **48:17.** Who was Hezekiah, and what did he accomplish? What is the pun on Hezekiah's name? How did he bring water to Jerusalem?

For application

1. **48:7.** Read the note for this verse. When Elijah came to Sinai, God asked him, "What are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:9). What happened at Sinai that made Elijah want to go there? Why do Christians go to places where significant events happened? What pilgrimages have you made, and what effects did they have on your faith?
2. **48:12-15.** Periodically, God raises up saints and charismatic leaders to bring about renewal in the Church. What renewal movements are you aware of that either have taken place in the past or are now ongoing? What have been their effects on the Church? When such movements seem to peak and then die out, what long-term legacy do they leave behind?
3. **48:25.** What is the purpose of prophecy? If it is not primarily for the sake of foretelling the future, what does it intend to communicate (see 1 Cor 12-14)? Assuming prophecy still occurs as private revelation, how should Christians judge whether it is genuine?

Chapter 49

For understanding

1. **49:2.** What does the Hebrew for this verse read about Josiah? After the book of the Law was found in the Temple, what was Josiah's reaction? In response, what did he launch?
2. **49:6.** When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, what did they do to the people of Judah? Who was Jeremiah? When did he minister in Jerusalem? Of what did he tirelessly warn its last kings?
3. **49:10.** Who were the 12 Minor Prophets? How have they come to be preserved in the Hebrew canon? For what does Ben Sira's prayer that their bones might be revived perhaps express a hope? Although much of their writing warns of judgment and calls for repentance, what picture does Ben Sira present of these Prophets?
4. **49:16.** Who was Shem, and what was his importance? Who was Seth? What name does the Hebrew add? What is said of Adam, the father of humanity?

For application

1. **49:3.** How would you describe the behavior of a person who "sets his heart" upon the Lord? How might his behavior be construed as a threat to some people? Would you like to live with such a person?
2. **49:7.** As recounted in the autobiographical sections of the Book of Jeremiah, what similarities do you notice between his life and that of Jesus? For example, when did God give Jeremiah his mission, and what was it? Why did God call him to remain celibate in a culture when men were expected to marry? How was he treated by the religious authorities?
3. **49:8.** What influence did the Book of Ezekiel have on New Testament writings, particularly on the Revelation to John? How do both works envision heaven and its inhabitants? How are those intended for God identified with a brand or mark in both? What form does that same brand still take in today's Church (hint: at the beginning of the baptismal liturgy)?
4. **49:14.** Catholics believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven. How might the assumptions of Enoch and Elijah validate this dogma?

Chapter 50

For understanding

1. **50:1-24.** To what does praise of Israel's ancestors give way? What does the transition to this chapter following the praise of Adam in 49:16 suggest that Ben Sira wishes to do?
2. **Word Study: High Priest (50:1).** What does the Greek title *hierus ho megas* mean literally? What did the elaborate garments that the high priest wore represent? What was his primary role, especially on Yom Kippur? By the late Second Temple period, what had the high priest's garments come to represent? Who was the high priest officiating in Jerusalem from 291 to 196 B.C., a short time before Ben Sira wrote his book? In what kind of language does Ben Sira portray him as an "incarnation" of wisdom? What does this language imply?
3. **50:5-21.** Of what are these verses possibly a description? What do others contend is in view? Either way, what does Ben Sira's reuse of language from the poem on wisdom in chap. 24 suggest?
4. **50:24.** How does the Hebrew for this verse read? What easily explains the reason for the difference in textual variations? When Ben Sira's grandson translated the text into Greek, how did he adapt it?

For application

1. **50:1.** The note for this verse says that the high priest Simon fortified the city and the Temple to protect them from enemy attack. How can Christian churches protect themselves from attacks such as bombings and shootings? What if any safety precautions does your church have in place?
2. **50:5-11.** In the Roman Catholic Church, certain vestments, such as the pallium, are reserved for specific members of the clergy, and then only at certain times. When worn, what do such vestments signify? How might Ben Sira's description of the high priest's vestments and the impression they made help us understand the significance of these modern vestments?
3. **50:15.** The expression "blood of the grape" has eucharistic overtones. In Christian art and church decoration, what does the image of a bunch of grapes symbolize? What does the wine consecrated at Mass actually become?

Study Questions

Chapter 51

For understanding

1. **51:1–30.** As possibly an addition to the original text of Sirach, of what does this chapter consist? What does the Hebrew version also include between these two sections?
2. **51:13.** What is one key to becoming wise that Ben Sira offers? What role did Ben Sira's experiences as a well-traveled man abroad play? What reminder does Ben Sira give about wisdom?
3. **51:23.** What does Ben Sira offer here? What literally is his invitation? What does *bet midrash* mean? According to St. Augustine, what does one learn in the Church, the house of instruction?
4. **51:30.** What work is one to do? When? What is your reward? What subscription does the Hebrew text add?

For application

1. **51:13.** When did you begin to sense a desire for a relationship with God? How did you pursue it? What conversion events have you been through, and how have they matured that relationship?
2. **51:19–20.** Have you ever pursued a goal, such as a skill in sports, following a strict regimen? Why is strictness of self-control necessary for that? How does this apply to the practice of virtue? How often and how long should you pray for the grace to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect?
3. **51:23.** St. Paul invites Christians to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). What aspects of Paul's imitation of Christ should we imitate? How do the lives of other saints encourage this imitation? When would you be able to ask others to imitate you as you imitate Christ?
4. **51:30.** When should you be seeking holiness? How long will it take to achieve it? How does God grant it to you? When will you know that you have received it?