

SIRACH



THE PROLOGUE

Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others^a that followed them, and for these we should praise Israel for instruction and wisdom. Now, those who read the scriptures must not only themselves understand them, but must also as lovers of learning be able through the spoken and written word to help the outsiders. So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that by becoming familiar also with his book^b those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law.

You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original.

When I came to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Euergetes and stayed for some time, I found opportunity for no little instruction.^c It seemed highly necessary that I should myself devote some diligence and labor to the translation of this book. During that time I have applied my skill day and night to complete and publish the book for those living abroad who wished to gain learning and are disposed to live according to the law.

^a Or other books

^b Gk with these things

^c Other ancient authorities read *I found a copy affording no little instruction*

Read Sirach 1

This book begins with a poem that gives extravagant praise to wisdom. It comes from the Lord, not from elsewhere. Wisdom is so vast that it is inaccessible to humans. The Lord created wisdom and poured her out on all his works, particularly on those who love God. There follows a poem on “fear of the Lord,” seen as the root of joy and gladness for humans as well as the crown of wisdom. Finally, the poet advises students how to pursue the wisdom they desire: avoid unjustified anger, maintain patience and prudence, keep the commandments in loyal humility and candor. Whoever approaches God with guile and arrogance will receive the dishonor due a sinner.

Reflect: Many consider wisdom something that certain people achieve in old age, especially if they have had extensive experience. Sirach considers wisdom a gift of the creator God, the fruit of a life spent in “fear of the Lord,” in pursuing with joy God’s vision of life lived abundantly.

In Praise of Wisdom

- 1** All wisdom is from the Lord,
and with him it remains forever.
- 2** The sand of the sea, the drops of rain,
and the days of eternity—who can count them?
- 3** The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth,
the abyss, and wisdom^a—who can search
them out?
- 4** Wisdom was created before all other things,
and prudent understanding from eternity.^b
- 6** The root of wisdom—to whom has it been
revealed?
Her subtleties—who knows them?^c
- 8** There is but one who is wise, greatly to be
feared,
seated upon his throne—the Lord.
- 9** It is he who created her;
he saw her and took her measure;
he poured her out upon all his works,
- 10** upon all the living according to his gift;
he lavished her upon those who love him.^d

Fear of the Lord Is True Wisdom

- 11** The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation,
and gladness and a crown of rejoicing.
- 12** The fear of the Lord delights the heart,
and gives gladness and joy and long life.^e
- 13** Those who fear the Lord will have a happy end;
on the day of their death they will be blessed.
- 14** To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
she is created with the faithful in the womb.
- 15** She made^f among human beings an eternal
foundation,
and among their descendants she will abide
faithfully.
- 16** To fear the Lord is fullness of wisdom;
she inebriates mortals with her fruits;
- 17** she fills their^g whole house with desirable goods,
and their^g storehouses with her produce.
- 18** The fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom,
making peace and perfect health to flourish.^h
- 19** She rained down knowledge and discerning
comprehension,
and she heightened the glory of those who
held her fast.
- 20** To fear the Lord is the root of wisdom,
and her branches are long life.ⁱ
- 22** Unjust anger cannot be justified,
for anger tips the scale to one’s ruin.

^a Other ancient authorities read *the depth of the abyss*

^b Other ancient authorities add as verse 5, *The source of wisdom is God’s word in the highest heaven, and her ways are the eternal commandments.*

^c Other ancient authorities add as verse 7, *The knowledge of wisdom—to whom was it manifested? And her abundant experience—who has understood it?*

^d Other ancient authorities add *Love of the Lord is glorious wisdom; to those to whom he appears he apportions her, that they may see him.*

^e Other ancient authorities add *The fear of the Lord is a gift from the Lord; also for love he makes firm paths.*

^f Gk made as a nest

^g Other ancient authorities read *her*

^h Other ancient authorities add *Both are gifts of God for peace; glory opens out for those who love him. He saw her and took her measure.*

ⁱ Other ancient authorities add as verse 21, *The fear of the Lord drives away sins; and where it abides, it will turn away all anger.*

Pray: Ask God to reveal to you the depth of the gift of wisdom.

Act: Observe someone you consider to be wise, and ask yourself: What qualities make this person seem wise to me? Could it be the fact that the person demonstrates humility, patience, and prudence in dealing with others?

Read Sirach 2

Sirach advises his students to serve God by preparing themselves for trials and suffering, clinging to God steadfastly and trusting in God. “Fear of the Lord” requires trust, and waiting, and hope for the lasting gifts of joy and mercy. And this kind of trust is based on an understanding of God as compassionate and merciful, one who forgives and saves in time of trouble.

Reflect: Do you know anyone who trusted in God but was ultimately disappointed? What kind of faith is required to “fear the Lord”?

Pray: Ask for a deeper knowledge of the ways in which God has shown mercy and compassion to you.

Act: Consider a way in which you can model God’s welcoming and forgiving mercy.

- 23 Those who are patient stay calm until the right moment,
and then cheerfulness comes back to them.
- 24 They hold back their words until the right moment;
then the lips of many tell of their good sense.
- 25 In the treasuries of wisdom are wise sayings,
but godliness is an abomination to a sinner.
- 26 If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments,
and the Lord will lavish her upon you.
- 27 For the fear of the Lord is wisdom and discipline,
fidelity and humility are his delight.
- 28 Do not disobey the fear of the Lord;
do not approach him with a divided mind.
- 29 Do not be a hypocrite before others,
and keep watch over your lips.
- 30 Do not exalt yourself, or you may fall
and bring dishonor upon yourself.
The Lord will reveal your secrets
and overthrow you before the whole
congregation,
because you did not come in the fear of the Lord,
and your heart was full of deceit.

Duties toward God

- 2** My child, when you come to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for testing.^a
- 2 Set your heart right and be steadfast,
and do not be impetuous in time of calamity.
- 3 Cling to him and do not depart,
so that your last days may be prosperous.
- 4 Accept whatever befalls you,
and in times of humiliation be patient.
- 5 For gold is tested in the fire,
and those found acceptable, in the furnace of
humiliation.^b
- 6 Trust in him, and he will help you;
make your ways straight, and hope in him.
- 7 You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy;
do not stray, or else you may fall.
- 8 You who fear the Lord, trust in him,
and your reward will not be lost.
- 9 You who fear the Lord, hope for good things,
for lasting joy and mercy.^c
- 10 Consider the generations of old and see:
has anyone trusted in the Lord and been
disappointed?
Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the
Lord^d and been forsaken?

^a Or trials

^b Other ancient authorities add *in sickness and poverty put your trust in him*

^c Other ancient authorities add *For his reward is an everlasting gift with joy.*

^d Gk of him

Read Sirach 3:1–16

The teacher applies the commandment to “honor your father and your mother” to a variety of life situations, and considers the ways in which adults are called to live this word from God. The disabilities of old age offer particular trials as well as opportunities for demonstrating “honor” and respect.

Reflect: Often this commandment seems to be reduced to advice to children to obey their parents’ commands. Are not the needs and demands of parents on their adult children much more challenging? Ponder the saying: “like warmth upon frost it [kindness] will melt away your sins.”

Pray: Ask for the grace to respond generously, lovingly, and wholeheartedly to the needs of parents and other relatives and close friends who are aging.

Act: In all that you do, model an adult spirituality, a mature way to “fear the Lord.”

Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected?

- 11 For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of distress.
- 12 Woe to timid hearts and to slack hands, and to the sinner who walks a double path!
- 13 Woe to the fainthearted who have no trust! Therefore they will have no shelter.
- 14 Woe to you who have lost your nerve! What will you do when the Lord’s reckoning comes?
- 15 Those who fear the Lord do not disobey his words, and those who love him keep his ways.
- 16 Those who fear the Lord seek to please him, and those who love him are filled with his law.
- 17 Those who fear the Lord prepare their hearts, and humble themselves before him.
- 18 Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of mortals; for equal to his majesty is his mercy, and equal to his name are his works.^a

Duties toward Parents

- 3 Listen to me your father, O children; act accordingly, that you may be kept in safety.
- 2 For the Lord honors a father above his children, and he confirms a mother’s right over her children.
- 3 Those who honor their father atone for sins,
- 4 and those who respect their mother are like those who lay up treasure.
- 5 Those who honor their father will have joy in their own children, and when they pray they will be heard.
- 6 Those who respect their father will have long life, and those who honor^b their mother obey the Lord; they will serve their parents as their masters.^c
- 8 Honor your father by word and deed, that his blessing may come upon you.
- 9 For a father’s blessing strengthens the houses of the children, but a mother’s curse uproots their foundations.
- 10 Do not glorify yourself by dishonoring your father, for your father’s dishonor is no glory to you.
- 11 The glory of one’s father is one’s own glory, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother.
- 12 My child, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives;

^a Syr: Gk lacks this line

^b Heb: Other ancient authorities read *comfort*

^c In other ancient authorities this line is preceded by *Those who fear the Lord honor their father,*

Read Sirach 3:17–29

The teacher advises the student to conduct life's affairs with humility, to avoid meddling in matters that pertain to others, to avoid trusting one's own opinions too much. People who are stubborn and proud will ultimately find trouble and sorrows.

Reflect: Self-preoccupation, shown in pride or in meddling or overreaching, can lead one away from the joy of the wise person, away from wisdom.

Pray: Pray for an open, receptive approach to God and to your life, and ask for the grace to let go of the self-preoccupation that gets in the way of relations with others.

Act: Reflect on what is your responsibility, what is within your purview, and act on it.

- 13 even if his mind fails, be patient with him;
because you have all your faculties do not
despise him.
- 14 For kindness to a father will not be forgotten,
and will be credited to you against your sins;
- 15 in the day of your distress it will be remembered
in your favor;
like frost in fair weather, your sins will melt
away.
- 16 Whoever forsakes a father is like a blasphemer,
and whoever angers a mother is cursed by the
Lord.

Humility

- 17 My child, perform your tasks with humility;^a
then you will be loved by those whom God
accepts.
- 18 The greater you are, the more you must humble
yourself;
so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord.^b
- 20 For great is the might of the Lord;
but by the humble he is glorified.
- 21 Neither seek what is too difficult for you,
nor investigate what is beyond your power.
- 22 Reflect upon what you have been commanded,
for what is hidden is not your concern.
- 23 Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you,
for more than you can understand has been
shown you.
- 24 For their conceit has led many astray,
and wrong opinion has impaired their
judgment.
- 25 Without eyes there is no light;
without knowledge there is no wisdom.^c
- 26 A stubborn mind will fare badly at the end,
and whoever loves danger will perish in it.
- 27 A stubborn mind will be burdened by troubles,
and the sinner adds sin to sins.
- 28 When calamity befalls the proud, there is no
healing,
for an evil plant has taken root in him.
- 29 The mind of the intelligent appreciates proverbs,
and an attentive ear is the desire of the wise.

Alms for the Poor

- 30 As water extinguishes a blazing fire,
so almsgiving atones for sin.
- 31 Those who repay favors give thought to the
future;
when they fall they will find support.

^a Heb: Ck meekness

^b Other ancient authorities add as verse 19,
*Many are lofty and renowned, but to the
humble he reveals his secrets.*

^c Heb: Other ancient authorities lack verse 25

Read Sirach 3:30—4:10

Sirach outlines a way of being disposed toward the poor, a way that should characterize one who fears the Lord. Pay attention to those who seek your help, for God hears the cry of the poor and the wronged. Pay particular attention to the fatherless, and offer assistance to their widowed mothers. Giving alms atones for your sins. Be aware of the possibility that your actions might rob poor persons of what they need.

Reflect: Seldom do we consider that giving alms and performing other acts of charity are ways of atoning for our own sins, means of reconciliation with God and with others. How do I normally “give a hearing to the poor”?

Pray: Ask God for the grace to hear the cries of the poor as God hears them.

Act: Spend time researching and learning the various ways in which persons can become poor, often through little or no fault of their own.

Duties toward the Poor and the Oppressed

- 4** My child, do not cheat the poor of their living,
and do not keep needy eyes waiting.
- 2 Do not grieve the hungry,
or anger one in need.
- 3 Do not add to the troubles of the desperate,
or delay giving to the needy.
- 4 Do not reject a suppliant in distress,
or turn your face away from the poor.
- 5 Do not avert your eye from the needy,
and give no one reason to curse you;
- 6 for if in bitterness of soul some should curse you,
their Creator will hear their prayer.
- 7 Endear yourself to the congregation;
bow your head low to the great.
- 8 Give a hearing to the poor,
and return their greeting politely.
- 9 Rescue the oppressed from the oppressor;
and do not be hesitant in giving a verdict.
- 10 Be a father to orphans,
and be like a husband to their mother;
you will then be like a son of the Most High,
and he will love you more than does your
mother.

The Rewards of Wisdom

- 11 Wisdom teaches^a her children
and gives help to those who seek her.
- 12 Whoever loves her loves life,
and those who seek her from early morning
are filled with joy.
- 13 Whoever holds her fast inherits glory,
and the Lord blesses the place she^b enters.
- 14 Those who serve her minister to the Holy One;
the Lord loves those who love her.
- 15 Those who obey her will judge the nations,
and all who listen to her will live secure.
- 16 If they remain faithful, they will inherit her;
their descendants will also obtain her.
- 17 For at first she will walk with them on tortuous
paths;
she will bring fear and dread upon them,
and will torment them by her discipline
until she trusts them,^c
and she will test them with her ordinances.
- 18 Then she will come straight back to them again
and gladden them,
and will reveal her secrets to them.
- 19 If they go astray she will forsake them,
and hand them over to their ruin.

Read Sirach 4:11–19

Wisdom addresses her children: whoever seeks her will find joy and glory, will dwell in security and obtain her. Wisdom tests persons at first. Once she trusts them, she reveals her secrets to them. In the Hebrew text of these verses, Lady Wisdom speaks in the first person to those who seek her.

Reflect: Lady Wisdom extends an invitation to love her and have life, and she invites persons to develop a relationship with her.

Pray: Ask for the gift of a relationship with Lady Wisdom.

Act: Prepare yourself for a life-long engagement with wisdom; that relationship needs attention and care if it is to continue to grow and lead to joy.

^a Heb Syr: Gk exalts

^b Or he

^c Or until they remain faithful in their heart

Read Sirach 4:20—5:8

The teacher advises the student to speak with sincerity and truth and courage, and not to be lazy or surly or presumptuous. There is a great difference between, on one hand, faith in a God who forgives and, on the other, disregard of responsibilities because God's forgiveness is assumed or taken for granted.

Reflect: In a mysterious way, God's mercy and righteous anger are intertwined, so it is foolish to put off conversion to God.

Pray: Ask for the grace to speak straightforwardly, honestly, and with humility, for there are innumerable ways to sin by speech.

Act: Speak appropriately, when it is called for, and in ways that are constructive for the community.

- 20 Watch for the opportune time, and beware of evil, and do not be ashamed to be yourself.
- 21 For there is a shame that leads to sin, and there is a shame that is glory and favor.
- 22 Do not show partiality, to your own harm, or deference, to your downfall.
- 23 Do not refrain from speaking at the proper moment,^a and do not hide your wisdom.^b
- 24 For wisdom becomes known through speech, and education through the words of the tongue.
- 25 Never speak against the truth, but be ashamed of your ignorance.
- 26 Do not be ashamed to confess your sins, and do not try to stop the current of a river.
- 27 Do not subject yourself to a fool, or show partiality to a ruler.
- 28 Fight to the death for truth, and the Lord God will fight for you.
- 29 Do not be reckless in your speech, or sluggish and remiss in your deeds.
- 30 Do not be like a lion in your home, or suspicious of your servants.
- 31 Do not let your hand be stretched out to receive and closed when it is time to give.

Precepts for Everyday Living

- 5 Do not rely on your wealth, or say, "I have enough."
- 2 Do not follow your inclination and strength in pursuing the desires of your heart.
- 3 Do not say, "Who can have power over me?" for the Lord will surely punish you.
- 4 Do not say, "I sinned, yet what has happened to me?" for the Lord is slow to anger.
- 5 Do not be so confident of forgiveness^c that you add sin to sin.
- 6 Do not say, "His mercy is great, he will forgive^d the multitude of my sins," for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger will rest on sinners.
- 7 Do not delay to turn back to the Lord, and do not postpone it from day to day; for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will come upon you, and at the time of punishment you will perish.
- 8 Do not depend on dishonest wealth, for it will not benefit you on the day of calamity.

^a Heb: Ck at a time of salvation

^b So some Gk Mss and Heb Syr Lat: Other Ck Mss lack *and do not hide your wisdom*

^c Heb: Ck *atonement*

^d Heb: Ck *he (or it) will atone for*

Read Sirach 5:9—6:4

Sirach gives a number of counsels about right and moral speech and appropriate use of the tongue.

Reflect: Both glory and dishonor can come from the act of speaking, so a person's tongue can prove a source of his or her downfall (or, conversely, of honor).

Pray: Before speaking, ask God to give you a sense of how your speech sounds to others.

Act: Let God's knowledge of your speech be your guide in deciding what to say and how to say it.

Read Sirach 6:5–17

Here is the first instruction in a series of four concerning friendship. Sirach begins by advising courtesy with friends, but then suggests that one test potential friends, to discern whether they will be dependable in times of trouble and inconvenience.

Reflect: A true friend is one of the great joys of life, a sturdy shelter in time of trouble. Who are the genuine friends in my own life?

Pray: Ask for "fear of the Lord," for it aids in finding a faithful friend; and ask also for the grace to be a faithful friend yourself.

Act: Invite friends into relationship, and then act in ways that foster the growth of those friendships.

- 9 Do not winnow in every wind,
or follow every path.^a
- 10 Stand firm for what you know,
and let your speech be consistent.
- 11 Be quick to hear,
but deliberate in answering.
- 12 If you know what to say, answer your neighbor;
but if not, put your hand over your mouth.
- 13 Honor and dishonor come from speaking,
and the tongue of mortals may be their downfall.
- 14 Do not be called double-tongued^b
and do not lay traps with your tongue;
for shame comes to the thief,
and severe condemnation to the
double-tongued.
- 15 In great and small matters cause no harm,^c
and do not become an enemy instead of a friend;
for a bad name incurs shame and reproach;
so it is with the double-tongued sinner.

6

- 1 Do not fall into the grip of passion,^d
or you may be torn apart as by a bull.^e
- 2 Your leaves will be devoured and your fruit
destroyed,
and you will be left like a withered tree.
- 3 Evil passion destroys those who have it,
and makes them the laughingstock of their
enemies.

Friendship, False and True

- 4 Pleasant speech multiplies friends,
and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies.
- 5 Let those who are friendly with you be many,
but let your advisers be one in a thousand.
- 6 When you gain friends, gain them through testing,
and do not trust them hastily.
- 7 For there are friends who are such when it suits
them,
but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.
- 8 And there are friends who change into enemies,
and tell of the quarrel to your disgrace.
- 9 And there are friends who sit at your table,
but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.
- 10 When you are prosperous, they become your
second self,
and lord it over your servants;
- 11 but if you are brought low, they turn against you,
and hide themselves from you.
- 12 Keep away from your enemies,
and be on guard with your friends.

^a Gk adds *so it is with the double-tongued sinner* (see 6.1)

^b Heb: Gk a *slanderer*

^c Heb Syr: Gk *be ignorant*

^d Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^e Meaning of Gk uncertain

Read Sirach 6:18–37

Sirach advises students to pursue wisdom by searching out discipline. Like the farmer's toil, one's work will produce fruit, in due time. Seek discipline like a yoke, and ultimately you will find rest and glory and joy. Docility leads to growth in knowledge. Finally, search out God's statutes and commandments: they will lead you to wisdom.

Reflect: The acquisition of wisdom requires both discipline and careful examination and study of God's law.

Pray: Listen prayerfully to Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28–30 ("Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens...") as they reflect verse 28 here.

Act: Acquaint yourself with a wise person; choose a spiritual discipline; meditate on God's commandments.

- 14 Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter:
 whoever finds one has found a treasure.
- 15 Faithful friends are beyond price;
 no amount can balance their worth.
- 16 Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;
 and those who fear the Lord will find them.
- 17 Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship
 aright,
 for as they are, so are their neighbors also.

Blessings of Wisdom

- 18 My child, from your youth choose discipline,
 and when you have gray hair you will still find
 wisdom.
- 19 Come to her like one who plows and sows,
 and wait for her good harvest.
 For when you cultivate her you will toil but little,
 and soon you will eat of her produce.
- 20 She seems very harsh to the undisciplined;
 fools cannot remain with her.
- 21 She will be like a heavy stone to test them,
 and they will not delay in casting her aside.
- 22 For wisdom is like her name;
 she is not readily perceived by many.
- 23 Listen, my child, and accept my judgment;
 do not reject my counsel.
- 24 Put your feet into her fetters,
 and your neck into her collar.
- 25 Bend your shoulders and carry her,
 and do not fret under her bonds.
- 26 Come to her with all your soul,
 and keep her ways with all your might.
- 27 Search out and seek, and she will become
 known to you;
 and when you get hold of her, do not let her go.
- 28 For at last you will find the rest she gives,
 and she will be changed into joy for you.
- 29 Then her fetters will become for you a strong
 defense,
 and her collar a glorious robe.
- 30 Her yoke^a is a golden ornament,
 and her bonds a purple cord.
- 31 You will wear her like a glorious robe,
 and put her on like a splendid crown.^b
- 32 If you are willing, my child, you can be
 disciplined,
 and if you apply yourself you will become
 clever.
- 33 If you love to listen you will gain knowledge,
 and if you pay attention you will become wise.

^a Heb: Ck Upon her

^b Heb: Ck crown of gladness

- 34 Stand in the company of the elders.
Who is wise? Attach yourself to
such a one.
- 35 Be ready to listen to every godly
discourse,
and let no wise proverbs escape
you.
- 36 If you see an intelligent person, rise
early to visit him;

- let your foot wear out his
doorstep.
- 37 Reflect on the statutes of the Lord,
and meditate at all times on his
commandments.
It is he who will give insight to^a your
mind,
and your desire for wisdom will be
granted.

Read Sirach 7:1–17

This list of prohibitions appears to put into practical terms some of the notions in the previous section, which seemed more general and abstract.

Reflect: How many of these prohibitions concern matters of “social justice”? How many concern religious practices? For Sirach, is there any great divide between social and religious issues?

Pray: Ask God for the grace to allay your concerns and cares about others.

Act: Value honest labor, and your humility will yield much fruit.

Miscellaneous Advice

- 7** Do no evil, and evil will never overtake you.
- ² Stay away from wrong, and it will turn away from you.
- ³ Do^b not sow in the furrows of injustice, and you will not reap a sevenfold crop.
- ⁴ Do not seek from the Lord high office, or the seat of honor from the king.
- ⁵ Do not assert your righteousness before the Lord, or display your wisdom before the king.
- ⁶ Do not seek to become a judge, or you may be unable to root out injustice; you may be partial to the powerful, and so mar your integrity.
- ⁷ Commit no offense against the public, and do not disgrace yourself among the people.
- ⁸ Do not commit a sin twice; not even for one will you go unpunished.
- ⁹ Do not say, “He will consider the great number of my gifts, and when I make an offering to the Most High God, he will accept it.”
- ¹⁰ Do not grow weary when you pray; do not neglect to give alms.
- ¹¹ Do not ridicule a person who is embittered in spirit, for there is One who humbles and exalts.
- ¹² Do not devise^c a lie against your brother, or do the same to a friend.
- ¹³ Refuse to utter any lie, for it is a habit that results in no good.
- ¹⁴ Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray.
- ¹⁵ Do not hate hard labor or farm work, which was created by the Most High.
- ¹⁶ Do not enroll in the ranks of sinners; remember that retribution does not delay.

^a Heb: Gk will confirm

^b Gk My child, do

^c Heb: Gk plow

Read Sirach 7:18–36

Here we have advice dealing with the life of family and friends as well as responsibilities toward priests and those who suffer and mourn.

Reflect: How many of these proverbs concern those in special need, such as the oppressed, servants, and hired laborers? Note how Sirach aligns love of God with honor for the Jewish priests; does this suggest his great love and affection for temple worship and liturgy?

Pray: Ask God for a deeper sense of the love received from parents (vv. 27–28) and for insight into how you can express your gratitude for that love.

Act: Resolve to devote yourself to the corporal works of mercy, which are reflected in verses 32–36 in a special way.

- 17 Humble yourself to the utmost,
for the punishment of the ungodly is fire and worms.^a

Relations with Others

- 18 Do not exchange a friend for money,
or a real brother for the gold of Ophir.
- 19 Do not dismiss^b a wise and good wife,
for her charm is worth more than gold.
- 20 Do not abuse slaves who work faithfully,
or hired laborers who devote themselves to
their task.
- 21 Let your soul love intelligent slaves;^c
do not withhold from them their freedom.
- 22 Do you have cattle? Look after them;
if they are profitable to you, keep them.
- 23 Do you have children? Discipline them,
and make them obedient^d from their youth.
- 24 Do you have daughters? Be concerned for their
chastity,^e
and do not show yourself too indulgent with
them.
- 25 Give a daughter in marriage, and you complete
a great task;
but give her to a sensible man.
- 26 Do you have a wife who pleases you?^f Do not
divorce her;
but do not trust yourself to one whom you
detest.
- 27 With all your heart honor your father,
and do not forget the birth pangs of your
mother.
- 28 Remember that it was of your parents^g you were
born;
how can you repay what they have given to
you?
- 29 With all your soul fear the Lord,
and revere his priests.
- 30 With all your might love your Maker,
and do not neglect his ministers.
- 31 Fear the Lord and honor the priest,
and give him his portion, as you have been
commanded:
the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the
shoulders,
the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first
fruits of the holy things.
- 32 Stretch out your hand to the poor,
so that your blessing may be complete.

^a Heb for the expectation of mortals is worms

^b Heb: Gk *deprive yourself of*

^c Heb *Love a wise slave as yourself*

^d Gk *bend their necks*

^e Gk *body*

^f Heb Syr *lack who pleases you*

^g Gk *them*

- 33 Give graciously to all the living;
do not withhold kindness even
from the dead.
- 34 Do not avoid those who weep,
but mourn with those who
mourn.

- 35 Do not hesitate to visit the sick,
because for such deeds you will
be loved.
- 36 In all you do, remember the end of
your life,
and then you will never sin.

Read Sirach 8

Sirach continues his practical advice about human relationships through a series of negative prohibitions, most of which concern relationships with people outside the family. He counsels prudence and caution with regard to those who could do one harm.

Reflect: What kinds of people should be avoided when pursuing friendships? What kinds of behaviors should one avoid when dealing with the repentant? With the elderly?

Pray: Ask God for the ability to discern the character of others with patience and prudence, love and generosity.

Act: Pay more attention to the words of sages and wise persons in order to become more prudent in dealing with others.

Prudence and Common Sense

- 8** Do not contend with the powerful,
or you may fall into their hands.
- 2 Do not quarrel with the rich,
in case their resources outweigh yours;
for gold has ruined many,
and has perverted the minds of kings.
- 3 Do not argue with the loud of mouth,
and do not heap wood on their fire.
- 4 Do not make fun of one who is ill-bred,
or your ancestors may be insulted.
- 5 Do not reproach one who is turning away from sin;
remember that we all deserve punishment.
- 6 Do not disdain one who is old,
for some of us are also growing old.
- 7 Do not rejoice over anyone's death;
remember that we must all die.
- 8 Do not slight the discourse of the sages,
but busy yourself with their maxims;
because from them you will learn discipline
and how to serve princes.
- 9 Do not ignore the discourse of the aged,
for they themselves learned from their parents;^a
from them you learn how to understand
and to give an answer when the need arises.
- 10 Do not kindle the coals of sinners,
or you may be burned in their flaming fire.
- 11 Do not let the insolent bring you to your feet,
or they may lie in ambush against your words.
- 12 Do not lend to one who is stronger than you;
but if you do lend anything, count it as a loss.
- 13 Do not give surety beyond your means;
but if you give surety, be prepared to pay.
- 14 Do not go to law against a judge,
for the decision will favor him because of his
standing.
- 15 Do not go traveling with the reckless,
or they will be burdensome to you;
for they will act as they please,
and through their folly you will perish with them.
- 16 Do not pick a fight with the quick-tempered,

^a Or ancestors

and do not journey with them
through lonely country,
because bloodshed means nothing
to them,
and where no help is at hand,
they will strike you down.

17 Do not consult with fools,
for they cannot keep a secret.

18 In the presence of strangers do
nothing that is to be kept secret,
for you do not know what they will
divulge.^a

19 Do not reveal your thoughts to
anyone,
or you may drive away your
happiness.^b

Read Sirach 9:1–16

Sirach advises a young man on two important topics for the process of maturation in his society: relationships with women and relationships with friends. There are many kinds of women—and of men—with whom a relationship might well lead to disastrous results.

Reflect: Although written from the perspective of a man, the advice given here can be useful to both men and women in preserving familial relationships and building sturdy friendships.

Pray: Ask God for the grace of prudence as well as for the gift of openness to others, since both are needed if our lives are to reflect God's love.

Act: In our time, we speak of "boundaries" in relationships. Can you identify in the sayings of Sirach advice having to do with relational "boundaries," advice that could be applicable today?

Advice concerning Women

- 9 Do not be jealous of the wife of your bosom,
or you will teach her an evil lesson to your
own hurt.
- 2 Do not give yourself to a woman
and let her trample down your strength.
- 3 Do not go near a loose woman,
or you will fall into her snares.
- 4 Do not dally with a singing girl,
or you will be caught by her tricks.
- 5 Do not look intently at a virgin,
or you may stumble and incur penalties for her.
- 6 Do not give yourself to prostitutes,
or you may lose your inheritance.
- 7 Do not look around in the streets of a city,
or wander about in its deserted sections.
- 8 Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman,
and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another;
many have been seduced by a woman's beauty,
and by it passion is kindled like a fire.
- 9 Never dine with another man's wife,
or revel with her at wine;
or your heart may turn aside to her,
and in blood^c you may be plunged into
destruction.

Choice of Friends

- 10 Do not abandon old friends,
for new ones cannot equal them.
A new friend is like new wine;
when it has aged, you can drink it with
pleasure.
- 11 Do not envy the success of sinners,
for you do not know what their end will be like.
- 12 Do not delight in what pleases the ungodly;
remember that they will not be held guiltless
all their lives.
- 13 Keep far from those who have power to kill,
and you will not be haunted by the fear of
death.

^a Or it will bring forth

^b Heb: Gk and let him not return a favor to you

^c Heb: Gk by your spirit

Read Sirach 9:17—11:6

These teachings concern persons in public life (9:17—10:5), the vice of arrogance (10:6—18), and the pursuit of genuine glory (10:19—11:6). Personal integrity offers a key to successful leadership, and fear of the Lord leads to genuine glory and wisdom.

Reflect: How does a ruler's value system and behavior affect the people? How does arrogance and pride poison all relationships? What are the qualities of the people whom you most admire?

Pray: Ask for grace to be free of arrogance.

Act: Be persistent and strong in commending those who act wisely and honorably.

But if you approach them, make no misstep,
or they may rob you of your life.
Know that you are stepping among snares,
and that you are walking on the city
battlements.

- 14 As much as you can, aim to know your neighbors,
and consult with the wise.
- 15 Let your conversation be with intelligent people,
and let all your discussion be about the law of
the Most High.
- 16 Let the righteous be your dinner companions,
and let your glory be in the fear of the Lord.

Concerning Rulers

- 17 A work is praised for the skill of the artisan;
so a people's leader is proved wise by his
words.
- 18 The loud of mouth are feared in their city,
and the one who is reckless in speech is
hated.

10 A wise magistrate educates his people,
and the rule of an intelligent person is well
ordered.

- 2 As the people's judge is, so are his officials;
as the ruler of the city is, so are all its
inhabitants.
- 3 An undisciplined king ruins his people,
but a city becomes fit to live in through the
understanding of its rulers.
- 4 The government of the earth is in the hand of
the Lord,
and over it he will raise up the right leader for
the time.
- 5 Human success is in the hand of the Lord,
and it is he who confers honor upon the
lawgiver.^a

The Sin of Pride

- 6 Do not get angry with your neighbor for every
injury,
and do not resort to acts of insolence.
- 7 Arrogance is hateful to the Lord and to mortals,
and injustice is outrageous to both.
- 8 Sovereignty passes from nation to nation
on account of injustice and insolence and
wealth.^b
- 9 How can dust and ashes be proud?
Even in life the human body decays.^c
- 10 A long illness baffles the physician;^d
the king of today will die tomorrow.

^a Heb: Gk scribe

^b Other ancient authorities add here or after
verse 9a, *Nothing is more wicked than one
who loves money, for such a person puts
his own soul up for sale.*

^c Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^d Heb Lat: Meaning of Gk uncertain

- 11 For when one is dead
he inherits maggots and vermin^a
and worms.
- 12 The beginning of human pride is to
forsake the Lord;
the heart has withdrawn from its
Maker.
- 13 For the beginning of pride is sin,
and the one who clings to it pours
out abominations.
Therefore the Lord brings upon them
unheard-of calamities,
and destroys them completely.
- 14 The Lord overthrows the thrones of
rulers,
and enthrones the lowly in their
place.
- 15 The Lord plucks up the roots of the
nations,^b
and plants the humble in their
place.
- 16 The Lord lays waste the lands of the
nations,
and destroys them to the
foundations of the earth.
- 17 He removes some of them and
destroys them,
and erases the memory of them
from the earth.
- 18 Pride was not created for human
beings,
or violent anger for those born of
women.

Persons Deserving Honor

- 19 Whose offspring are worthy of honor?
Human offspring.
Whose offspring are worthy of honor?
Those who fear the Lord.
Whose offspring are unworthy of honor?
Human offspring.
Whose offspring are unworthy of honor?
Those who break the
commandments.

- 20 Among family members their leader
is worthy of honor,
but those who fear the Lord are
worthy of honor in his eyes.^c
- 22 The rich, and the eminent, and the
poor—
their glory is the fear of the Lord.
- 23 It is not right to despise one who is
intelligent but poor,
and it is not proper to honor one
who is sinful.
- 24 The prince and the judge and the
ruler are honored,
but none of them is greater than
the one who fears the Lord.
- 25 Free citizens will serve a wise
servant,
and an intelligent person will not
complain.

Concerning Humility

- 26 Do not make a display of your
wisdom when you do your work,
and do not boast when you are in
need.
- 27 Better is the worker who has goods
in plenty
than the boaster who lacks bread.
- 28 My child, honor yourself with
humility,
and give yourself the esteem you
deserve.
- 29 Who will acquit those who
condemn^d themselves?
And who will honor those who
dishonor themselves?^e
- 30 The poor are honored for their
knowledge,
while the rich are honored for their
wealth.
- 31 One who is honored in poverty, how
much more in wealth!
And one dishonored in wealth,
how much more in poverty!

^a Heb: Ck *wild animals*

^b Other ancient authorities read *proud nations*

^c Other ancient authorities add as verse 21, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of acceptance; obduracy and pride are the beginning of rejection.*

^d Heb: Ck *sin against*

^e Heb Lat: Ck *their own life*

Read Sirach 11:7–28

The teacher here advises moderation, paralleling the popular Greek adage, “nothing in excess.” God’s power and actions can instantaneously change one’s situation.

Reflect: This passage ends by stating that persons are known by the way they die (v. 28). What does this mean?

Pray: Ask for a deeper faith in God, who has power over all things.

Act: We need to trust that the way of generosity and moderation will lead to joy and happiness.

The Deceptiveness of Appearances

- 11** The wisdom of the humble lifts their heads high, and seats them among the great.
- 2** Do not praise individuals for their good looks, or loathe anyone because of appearance alone.
- 3** The bee is small among flying creatures, but what it produces is the best of sweet things.
- 4** Do not boast about wearing fine clothes, and do not exalt yourself when you are honored; for the works of the Lord are wonderful, and his works are concealed from humankind.
- 5** Many kings have had to sit on the ground, but one who was never thought of has worn a crown.
- 6** Many rulers have been utterly disgraced, and the honored have been handed over to others.

Deliberation and Caution

- 7** Do not find fault before you investigate; examine first, and then criticize.
- 8** Do not answer before you listen, and do not interrupt when another is speaking.
- 9** Do not argue about a matter that does not concern you, and do not sit with sinners when they judge a case.
- 10** My child, do not busy yourself with many matters; if you multiply activities, you will not be held blameless.
If you pursue, you will not overtake, and by fleeing you will not escape.
- 11** There are those who work and struggle and hurry, but are so much the more in want.
- 12** There are others who are slow and need help, who lack strength and abound in poverty; but the eyes of the Lord look kindly upon them; he lifts them out of their lowly condition
- 13** and raises up their heads to the amazement of the many.
- 14** Good things and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth, come from the Lord.^a
- 17** The Lord’s gift remains with the devout, and his favor brings lasting success.
- 18** One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this:
- 19** when he says, “I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!” he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies.

^a Other ancient authorities add as verses 15 and 16, ¹⁵Wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of the law come from the Lord; affection and the ways of good works come from him. ¹⁶Error and darkness were created with sinners; evil grows old with those who take pride in malice.

Read Sirach 11:29—12:18

Sirach recommends great caution in the pursuit of friendships. He describes five dangerous types of persons (the spy, the talebearer, the evil person, the wicked person, and the stranger). He also describes dangerous types of behavior that should serve as warnings about potential friends.

Reflect: What kinds of experiences and hurts might underlie the extremely cautious approach to human relationships presented in this section?

Pray: In Christian tradition, some have described the guise of the evil one in language reminiscent of 12:16, speaking sweetly and tearfully to lead one to an evil end. (In discernment of spirits, this is a sign of an evil spirit). Ask for the grace to view the “end” to which a given spirit or inclination leads you.

Act: Pursue friendships that are mutually constructive and edifying.

- 20 Stand by your agreement and attend to it,
and grow old in your work.
- 21 Do not wonder at the works of a sinner,
but trust in the Lord and keep at your job;
for it is easy in the sight of the Lord
to make the poor rich suddenly, in an instant.
- 22 The blessing of the Lord is^a the reward of the pious,
and quickly God causes his blessing to flourish.
- 23 Do not say, “What do I need,
and what further benefit can be mine?”
- 24 Do not say, “I have enough,
and what harm can come to me now?”
- 25 In the day of prosperity, adversity is forgotten,
and in the day of adversity, prosperity is not
remembered.
- 26 For it is easy for the Lord on the day of death
to reward individuals according to their conduct.
- 27 An hour’s misery makes one forget past delights,
and at the close of one’s life one’s deeds are
revealed.
- 28 Call no one happy before his death;
by how he ends, a person becomes known.^b

Care in Choosing Friends

- 29 Do not invite everyone into your home,
for many are the tricks of the crafty.
- 30 Like a decoy partridge in a cage, so is the mind
of the proud,
and like spies they observe your weakness;^c
- 31 for they lie in wait, turning good into evil,
and to worthy actions they attach blame.
- 32 From a spark many coals are kindled,
and a sinner lies in wait to shed blood.
- 33 Beware of scoundrels, for they devise evil,
and they may ruin your reputation forever.
- 34 Receive strangers into your home and they will
stir up trouble for you,
and will make you a stranger to your own family.

- 12 If you do good, know to whom you do it,
and you will be thanked for your good deeds.
- 2 Do good to the devout, and you will be repaid—
if not by them, certainly by the Most High.
- 3 No good comes to one who persists in evil
or to one who does not give alms.
- 4 Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner.
- 5 Do good to the humble, but do not give to the
ungodly;
hold back their bread, and do not give it to them,
for by means of it they might subdue you;
then you will receive twice as much evil

^a Heb: Gk *is in*

^b Heb: Gk *and through his children a person becomes known*

^c Heb: Gk *downfall*

- for all the good you have done to them.
- 6 For the Most High also hates sinners and will inflict punishment on the ungodly.^a
- 7 Give to the one who is good, but do not help the sinner.
- 8 A friend is not known^b in prosperity, nor is an enemy hidden in adversity.
- 9 One's enemies are friendly^c when one prospers, but in adversity even one's friend disappears.
- 10 Never trust your enemy, for like corrosion in copper, so is his wickedness.
- 11 Even if he humbles himself and walks bowed down, take care to be on your guard against him.
Be to him like one who polishes a mirror, to be sure it does not become completely tarnished.
- 12 Do not put him next to you, or he may overthrow you and take your place.
Do not let him sit at your right hand, or else he may try to take your own seat,
- and at last you will realize the truth of my words, and be stung by what I have said.
- 13 Who pities a snake charmer when he is bitten, or all those who go near wild animals?
- 14 So no one pities a person who associates with a sinner and becomes involved in the other's sins.
- 15 He stands by you for a while, but if you falter, he will not be there.
- 16 An enemy speaks sweetly with his lips, but in his heart he plans to throw you into a pit; an enemy may have tears in his eyes, but if he finds an opportunity he will never have enough of your blood.
- 17 If evil comes upon you, you will find him there ahead of you; pretending to help, he will trip you up.
- 18 Then he will shake his head, and clap his hands, and whisper much, and show his true face.

Caution Regarding Associates

- 13** Whoever touches pitch gets dirty, and whoever associates with a proud person becomes like him.
- 2 Do not lift a weight too heavy for you, or associate with one mightier and richer than you.
How can the clay pot associate with the iron kettle? The pot will strike against it and be smashed.
- 3 A rich person does wrong, and even adds insults; a poor person suffers wrong, and must add apologies.
- 4 A rich person^d will exploit you if you can be of use to him, but if you are in need he will abandon you.
- 5 If you own something, he will live with you; he will drain your resources without a qualm.
- 6 When he needs you he will deceive you, and will smile at you and encourage you;

^a Other ancient authorities add *and he is keeping them for the day of their punishment*

^b Other ancient authorities read *punished*

^c Heb: *Gk grieved*

^d *Gk He*

Read Sirach 13:1—14:2

The teacher draws concrete distinctions between people who are rich and powerful and those who are poor. His descriptions of the rich include very critical, often satirical, elements. He notes that in common human relations it is difficult for people of different categories to mix well.

Reflect: What are the key elements of Sirach's critique of the rich? Does it ring true?

Pray: Prayerfully ponder the radically different message in Isaiah 11:6ff: "The wolf shall live with the lamb..."

Act: After considering possible impeding factors, take action to relate to someone you might consider "other" or "different."

he will speak to you kindly and say, "What do you need?"

- 7 He will embarrass you with his delicacies, until he has drained you two or three times, and finally he will laugh at you. Should he see you afterwards, he will pass you by and shake his head at you.
- 8 Take care not to be led astray and humiliated when you are enjoying yourself.^a
- 9 When an influential person invites you, be reserved, and he will invite you more insistently.
- 10 Do not be forward, or you may be rebuffed; do not stand aloof, or you will be forgotten.
- 11 Do not try to treat him as an equal, or trust his lengthy conversations; for he will test you by prolonged talk, and while he smiles he will be examining you.
- 12 Cruel are those who do not keep your secrets; they will not spare you harm or imprisonment.
- 13 Be on your guard and very careful, for you are walking about with your own downfall.^b
- 15 Every creature loves its like, and every person the neighbor.
- 16 All living beings associate with their own kind, and people stick close to those like themselves.
- 17 What does a wolf have in common with a lamb? No more has a sinner with the devout.
- 18 What peace is there between a hyena and a dog? And what peace between the rich and the poor?
- 19 Wild asses in the wilderness are the prey of lions; likewise the poor are feeding grounds for the rich.
- 20 Humility is an abomination to the proud; likewise the poor are an abomination to the rich.
- 21 When the rich person totters, he is supported by friends, but when the humble^c falls, he is pushed away even by friends.
- 22 If the rich person slips, many come to the rescue; he speaks unseemly words, but they justify him. If the humble person slips, they even criticize him; he talks sense, but is not given a hearing.
- 23 The rich person speaks and all are silent; they extol to the clouds what he says. The poor person speaks and they say, "Who is this fellow?"

^a Other ancient authorities read *in your folly*

^b Other ancient authorities add as verse 14, *When you hear these things in your sleep, wake up! During all your life love the Lord, and call on him for your salvation.*

^c Other ancient authorities read *poor*

And should he stumble, they even
push him down.

²⁴ Riches are good if they are free from
sin;
poverty is evil only in the opinion
of the ungodly.

²⁵ The heart changes the countenance,
either for good or for evil.^a

²⁶ The sign of a happy heart is a
cheerful face,
but to devise proverbs requires
painful thinking.

Read Sirach 14:3–19

These are instructions—oriented particularly to those who are wealthy—about the appropriate use of possessions and wealth. If you are stingy with yourself, you are likely to be so with others. And, when you are putting off enjoyment of goods and friends, consider your end, which is death. Don't wait too long, or you may not have that enjoyment.

Reflect: Give some thought to the view of material goods in these teachings: are they goods to be hoarded? Why or why not?

Pray: Ask God for the grace of generosity with others and with yourself.

Act: Begin making plans to share some of your resources with others, especially the poor and oppressed, who have a claim on you.

14 Happy are those who do not blunder with their
lips,
and need not suffer remorse for sin.

² Happy are those whose hearts do not condemn
them,
and who have not given up their hope.

Responsible Use of Wealth

³ Riches are inappropriate for a small-minded
person;
and of what use is wealth to a miser?

⁴ What he denies himself he collects for others;
and others will live in luxury on his goods.

⁵ If one is mean to himself, to whom will he be
generous?

He will not enjoy his own riches.

⁶ No one is worse than one who is grudging to
himself;
this is the punishment for his meanness.

⁷ If ever he does good, it is by mistake;
and in the end he reveals his meanness.

⁸ The miser is an evil person;
he turns away and disregards people.

⁹ The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied with
his share;
greedy injustice withers the soul.

¹⁰ A miser begrudges bread,
and it is lacking at his table.

¹¹ My child, treat yourself well, according to your
means,
and present worthy offerings to the Lord.

¹² Remember that death does not tarry,
and the decree^b of Hades has not been shown
to you.

¹³ Do good to friends before you die,
and reach out and give to them as much as
you can.

¹⁴ Do not deprive yourself of a day's enjoyment;
do not let your share of desired good pass by
you.

¹⁵ Will you not leave the fruit of your labors to another,
and what you acquired by toil to be divided by
lot?

^a Other ancient authorities add *and a glad
heart makes a cheerful countenance*

^b Heb Syr: *Gk covenant*

Read Sirach 14:20—15:10

The teacher urges the student to search out wisdom, which again appears personified. The relationship with wisdom is compared to that with a mother or a spouse, someone who welcomes, nourishes, supports, and gives joy.

Reflect: Consider what it means to pursue wisdom like a scout or a hunter and then lodge near her.

Pray: Ask for the grace to praise wisdom, to praise God (15:9–10).

Act: Try to identify a “wisdom figure” in your life, and have a conversation with her or him.

- 16 Give, and take, and indulge yourself,
because in Hades one cannot look for luxury.
17 All living beings become old like a garment,
for the decree^a from of old is, “You must die!”
18 Like abundant leaves on a spreading tree
that sheds some and puts forth others,
so are the generations of flesh and blood:
one dies and another is born.
19 Every work decays and ceases to exist,
and the one who made it will pass away with it.

The Happiness of Seeking Wisdom

- 20 Happy is the person who meditates on^b wisdom
and reasons intelligently,
21 who^c reflects in his heart on her ways
and ponders her secrets,
22 pursuing her like a hunter,
and lying in wait on her paths;
23 who peers through her windows
and listens at her doors;
24 who camps near her house
and fastens his tent peg to her walls;
25 who pitches his tent near her,
and so occupies an excellent lodging place;
26 who places his children under her shelter,
and lodges under her boughs;
27 who is sheltered by her from the heat,
and dwells in the midst of her glory.

15 Whoever fears the Lord will do this,
and whoever holds to the law will obtain
wisdom.^d

- 2 She will come to meet him like a mother,
and like a young bride she will welcome him.
3 She will feed him with the bread of learning,
and give him the water of wisdom to drink.
4 He will lean on her and not fall,
and he will rely on her and not be put to shame.
5 She will exalt him above his neighbors,
and will open his mouth in the midst of the
assembly.
6 He will find gladness and a crown of rejoicing,
and will inherit an everlasting name.
7 The foolish will not obtain her,
and sinners will not see her.
8 She is far from arrogance,
and liars will never think of her.
9 Praise is unseemly on the lips of a sinner,
for it has not been sent from the Lord.
10 For in wisdom must praise be uttered,
and the Lord will make it prosper.

^a Heb: Ck covenant

^b Other ancient authorities read *dies in*

^c The structure adopted in verses 21-27 follows the Heb

^d Gk *her*

Read Sirach 15:11—16:23

Now the teacher turns to a completely different area of human concern: sin and free will. He advises people not to blame their turning from the commandments, their straying, or their sins on God; the human being is able to act loyally and to do God's will (15:11–20). The teacher then reflects on various punishments for sin, first dispelling the notion that a large family is an unconditioned good: if the children are evil or useless, it is not a boon. Afterwards, he recalls experiences from Israel's history of divine punishment for sins.

Reflect: Have you ever been tempted to consider yourself good and sinless when things are going well for you? Have you observed others who seemed to consider that their questionable behavior would pass unnoticed? What is your response to their optimism?

Pray: Ponder the role of God as creator of the universe, and of each of us, and who allows each of us to follow our own inclinations. Then recall that God is capable of both righteous anger and mercy. Consider Deuteronomy 30:15–20: "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity."

Act: When evaluating the evil or questionable actions of others, do not hesitate to look for a similar pattern in your own life, and respond appropriately.

Freedom of Choice

- 11 Do not say, "It was the Lord's doing that I fell away";
for he does not do^a what he hates.
- 12 Do not say, "It was he who led me astray";
for he has no need of the sinful.
- 13 The Lord hates all abominations;
such things are not loved by those who fear him.
- 14 It was he who created humankind in the beginning,
and he left them in the power of their own free choice.
- 15 If you choose, you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.
- 16 He has placed before you fire and water;
stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.
- 17 Before each person are life and death,
and whichever one chooses will be given.
- 18 For great is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power and sees everything;
- 19 his eyes are on those who fear him,
and he knows every human action.
- 20 He has not commanded anyone to be wicked,
and he has not given anyone permission to sin.

God's Punishment of Sinners

- 16 Do not desire a multitude of worthless^b
children,
and do not rejoice in ungodly offspring.
- 2 If they multiply, do not rejoice in them,
unless the fear of the Lord is in them.
- 3 Do not trust in their survival,
or rely on their numbers;^c
for one can be better than a thousand,
and to die childless is better than to have
ungodly children.
- 4 For through one intelligent person a city can be
filled with people,
but through a clan of outlaws it becomes
desolate.
- 5 Many such things my eye has seen,
and my ear has heard things more striking
than these.
- 6 In an assembly of sinners a fire is kindled,
and in a disobedient nation wrath blazes up.
- 7 He did not forgive the ancient giants
who revolted in their might.

^a Heb: Ck you ought not to do

^b Heb: Ck unprofitable

^c Other ancient authorities add *For you will groan in untimely mourning, and will know of their sudden end.*

Read Sirach 16:24—17:14

Sirach shifts from discussing the sins of humans to considering the grounds for good behavior: God's gift of creation. He speaks of creation of sky and earth (16:24–30) and also of human beings (17:1–10). Humans know God's glory and precepts (vv. 11–14).

Reflect: The teacher's reflections correspond to Genesis 1 (creation of the cosmos, culminating in humans) and Genesis 2 (creation of Adam, human beings); he even alludes to the gifts of discernment of good and evil, knowledge and understanding.

Pray: In appreciation of God's creation, pray Psalm 104.

Act: Pay attention to those who try to combine biblical notions of creation with the best scientific knowledge available in our day.

- 8 He did not spare the neighbors of Lot,
whom he loathed on account of their arrogance.
- 9 He showed no pity on the doomed nation,
on those dispossessed because of their sins;^a
- 10 or on the six hundred thousand foot soldiers
who assembled in their stubbornness.^b
- 11 Even if there were only one stiff-necked person,
it would be a wonder if he remained
unpunished.
- For mercy and wrath are with the Lord;^c
he is mighty to forgive—but he also pours out
wrath.
- 12 Great as is his mercy, so also is his chastisement;
he judges a person according to his or her
deeds.
- 13 The sinner will not escape with plunder,
and the patience of the godly will not be
frustrated.
- 14 He makes room for every act of mercy;
everyone receives in accordance with his or
her deeds.^d
- 17 Do not say, "I am hidden from the Lord,
and who from on high has me in mind?
Among so many people I am unknown,
for what am I in a boundless creation?"
- 18 Lo, heaven and the highest heaven,
the abyss and the earth, tremble at his
visitation!^e
- 19 The very mountains and the foundations of the
earth
quiver and quake when he looks upon them.
- 20 But no human mind can grasp this,
and who can comprehend his ways?
- 21 Like a tempest that no one can see,
so most of his works are concealed.^f
- 22 Who is to announce his acts of justice?
Or who can await them? For his decrees^g is far
off."^h
- 23 Such are the thoughts of one devoid of
understanding;
a senseless and misguided person thinks
foolishly.

God's Wisdom Seen in Creation

- 24 Listen to me, my child, and acquire knowledge,
and pay close attention to my words.
- 25 I will impart discipline preciselyⁱ
and declare knowledge accurately.
- 26 When the Lord created^j his works from the
beginning,

^a Other ancient authorities add *All these things he did to the hard-hearted nations, and by the multitude of his holy ones he was not appeased.*

^b Other ancient authorities add *Chastising, showing mercy, striking, healing, the Lord persisted in mercy and discipline.*

^c Gk him

^d Other ancient authorities add ¹⁵*The Lord hardened Pharaoh so that he did not recognize him, in order that his works might be known under heaven.* ¹⁶*His mercy is manifest to the whole of creation, and he divided his light and darkness with a plumb line.*

^e Other ancient authorities add *The whole world past and present is in his will.*

^f Meaning of Gk uncertain: Heb Syr *If I sin, no eye can see me, and if I am disloyal all in secret, who is to know?*

^g Heb *the decree*: Gk *the covenant*

^h Other ancient authorities add *and a scrutiny for all comes at the end*

ⁱ Gk *by weight*

^j Heb: Gk *judged*

and, in making them, determined
their boundaries,
27 he arranged his works in an eternal
order,
and their dominion^a for all
generations.

They neither hunger nor grow weary,
and they do not abandon their tasks.

28 They do not crowd one another,
and they never disobey his word.
29 Then the Lord looked upon the
earth,
and filled it with his good things.
30 With all kinds of living beings he
covered its surface,
and into it they must return.

Read Sirach 17:15–32

Human actions, good or bad, are clearly seen and judged by God, but we must remember well the mercy and compassion of God and repent of our sin.

Reflect: Only those who have been forgiven can truly glorify and give God praise!

Pray: Ask for the grace to return to God and to experience God's mercy and forgiveness.

Act: Choose your acts and paths with the knowledge that God accompanies you.

17 The Lord created human beings out of earth,
and makes them return to it again.
2 He gave them a fixed number of days,
but granted them authority over everything on
the earth.^b
3 He endowed them with strength like his own,^c
and made them in his own image.
4 He put the fear of them^d in all living beings,
and gave them dominion over beasts and birds.^e
6 Discretion and tongue and eyes,
ears and a mind for thinking he gave them.
7 He filled them with knowledge and understanding,
and showed them good and evil.
8 He put the fear of him into^f their hearts
to show them the majesty of his works.^g
10 And they will praise his holy name,
9 to proclaim the grandeur of his works.
11 He bestowed knowledge upon them,
and allotted to them the law of life.^h
12 He established with them an eternal covenant,
and revealed to them his decrees.
13 Their eyes saw his glorious majesty,
and their ears heard the glory of his voice.
14 He said to them, "Beware of all evil."
And he gave commandment to each of them
concerning the neighbor.
15 Their ways are always known to him;
they will not be hid from his eyes.ⁱ
17 He appointed a ruler for every nation,
but Israel is the Lord's own portion.^j
19 All their works are as clear as the sun before him,
and his eyes are ever upon their ways.
20 Their iniquities are not hidden from him,
and all their sins are before the Lord.^k
22 One's almsgiving is like a signet ring with the
Lord,^l
and he will keep a person's kindness like the
apple of his eye.^m
23 Afterward he will rise up and repay them,
and he will bring their recompense on their heads.
24 Yet to those who repent he grants a return,
and he encourages those who are losing hope.

^a Or elements

^b Lat: Gk it

^c Lat: Gk proper to them

^d Syr: Gk him

^e Other ancient authorities add as verse 5,
They obtained the use of the five faculties of the Lord; as sixth he distributed to them the gift of mind, and as seventh, reason, the interpreter of one's faculties.

^f Other ancient authorities read *He set his eye upon*

^g Other ancient authorities add *and he gave them to boast of his marvels forever*

^h Other ancient authorities add *so that they may know that they who are alive now are mortal*

ⁱ Other ancient authorities add ¹⁶*Their ways from youth tend toward evil, and they are unable to make for themselves hearts of flesh in place of their stony hearts.* ¹⁷*For in the division of the nations of the whole earth, he appointed*

^j Other ancient authorities add as verse 18,
whom, being his firstborn, he brings up with discipline, and allotting to him the light of his love, he does not neglect him.

^k Other ancient authorities add as verse 21,
But the Lord, who is gracious and knows how they are formed, has neither left them nor abandoned them, but has spared them.

^l Gk him

^m Other ancient authorities add *apportioning repentance to his sons and daughters*

A Call to Repentance

- 25 Turn back to the Lord and forsake your sins;
pray in his presence and lessen your offense.
- 26 Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity,^a
and hate intensely what he abhors.
- 27 Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades
in place of the living who give thanks?
- 28 From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased;
- those who are alive and well sing the Lord's praises.
- 29 How great is the mercy of the Lord, and his forgiveness for those who return to him!
- 30 For not everything is within human capability,
since human beings are not immortal.
- 31 What is brighter than the sun? Yet it can be eclipsed.
So flesh and blood devise evil.
- 32 He marshals the host of the height of heaven;
but all human beings are dust and ashes.

Read Sirach 18:1–14

God's compassion is too great for humans to fathom. Sirach asks the psalmist's question, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" (Ps 8:4) and is led to focus on the brevity of human life rather than its glories (Sir 18: 1–10).

Reflect: While humans may show mercy to other humans, God's mercy is "for every living thing."

Pray: Spend some time reflecting on and praying with Psalm 8.

Act: Imagine what would be required of us to show compassion to "all flesh"—including all non-human beings and the environment they need to exist.

The Majesty of God

- 18** He who lives forever created the whole universe;
² the Lord alone is just.^b
- ⁴ To none has he given power to proclaim his works;
and who can search out his mighty deeds?
- ⁵ Who can measure his majestic power?
And who can fully recount his mercies?
- ⁶ It is not possible to diminish or increase them,
nor is it possible to fathom the wonders of the Lord.
- ⁷ When human beings have finished, they are just beginning,
and when they stop, they are still perplexed.
- ⁸ What are human beings, and of what use are they?
What is good in them, and what is evil?
- ⁹ The number of days in their life is great if they reach one hundred years.^c
- ¹⁰ Like a drop of water from the sea and a grain of sand,
so are a few years among the days of eternity.
- ¹¹ That is why the Lord is patient with them
and pours out his mercy upon them.
- ¹² He sees and recognizes that their end is miserable;
therefore he grants them forgiveness all the more.
- ¹³ The compassion of human beings is for their neighbors,
but the compassion of the Lord is for every living thing.

^a Other ancient authorities add *for he will lead you out of darkness to the light of health.*

^b Other ancient authorities add *and there is no other beside him; ³he steers the world with the span of his hand, and all things obey his will; for he is king of all things by his power, separating among them the holy things from the profane.*

^c Other ancient authorities add *but the death of each one is beyond the calculation of all*

Read Sirach 18:15—19:3

The teacher offers wise counsel on many different aspects of human life, some religious and some relational. Especially important is the counsel to plan one's deeds in full knowledge of the quick changes brought by the passing of time.

Reflect: What wisdom is ingrained in the advice not to combine words of correction or warning with the giving of a gift or charity (18:15–18)! Sirach advises well on the psychology of giving and benefaction.

Pray: Ask for the wisdom to imagine how quickly time and opportunity pass.

Act: Practice patterns of action that reduce procrastination!

He rebukes and trains and teaches them,
and turns them back, as a shepherd his flock.

- 14 He has compassion on those who accept his discipline
and who are eager for his precepts.

The Right Spirit in Giving Alms

- 15 My child, do not mix reproach with your good deeds,
or spoil your gift by harsh words.

- 16 Does not the dew give relief from the scorching heat?

So a word is better than a gift.

- 17 Indeed, does not a word surpass a good gift?
Both are to be found in a gracious person.

- 18 A fool is ungracious and abusive,
and the gift of a grudging giver makes the eyes dim.

The Need of Reflection and Self-Control

- 19 Before you speak, learn;
and before you fall ill, take care of your health.

- 20 Before judgment comes, examine yourself;
and at the time of scrutiny you will find forgiveness.

- 21 Before falling ill, humble yourself;
and when you have sinned, repent.

- 22 Let nothing hinder you from paying a vow promptly,
and do not wait until death to be released from it.

- 23 Before making a vow, prepare yourself;
do not be like one who puts the Lord to the test.

- 24 Think of his wrath on the day of death,
and of the moment of vengeance when he turns away his face.

- 25 In the time of plenty think of the time of hunger;
in days of wealth think of poverty and need.

- 26 From morning to evening conditions change;
all things move swiftly before the Lord.

- 27 One who is wise is cautious in everything;
when sin is all around, one guards against wrongdoing.

- 28 Every intelligent person knows wisdom,
and praises the one who finds her.

- 29 Those who are skilled in words become wise themselves,
and pour forth apt proverbs.^a

SELF-CONTROL^b

- 30 Do not follow your base desires,
but restrain your appetites.

^a Other ancient authorities add *Better is confidence in the one Lord than clinging with a dead heart to a dead one.*

^b This heading is included in the Gk text.

- 31 If you allow your soul to take
pleasure in base desire,
it will make you the laughingstock
of your enemies.
- 32 Do not revel in great luxury,

- or you may become impoverished
by its expense.
- 33 Do not become a beggar by feasting
with borrowed money,
when you have nothing in your purse.^a

Read Sirach 19:4–17

The teacher advises confidentiality as an antidote to gossip. At the same time, we should be willing to admonish, not accuse others.

Reflect: How can it benefit you not to repeat and share everything you know? Why do you often wish to share everything you hear?

Pray: Ask for the grace to assume the best of another while preparing to admonish.

Act: Caution others not to share with you matters that should be kept secret.

- 19 The one who does this^b will not become rich;
one who despises small things will fail little by little.
- 2 Wine and women lead intelligent men astray,
and the man who consorts with prostitutes is reckless.
- 3 Decay and worms will take possession of him,
and the reckless person will be snatched away.

Against Loose Talk

- 4 One who trusts others too quickly has a shallow mind,
and one who sins does wrong to himself.
- 5 One who rejoices in wickedness^c will be condemned,^d
6 but one who hates gossip has less evil.
- 7 Never repeat a conversation,
and you will lose nothing at all.
- 8 With friend or foe do not report it,
and unless it would be a sin for you, do not reveal it;
- 9 for someone may have heard you and watched you,
and in time will hate you.
- 10 Have you heard something? Let it die with you.
Be brave, it will not make you burst!
- 11 Having heard something, the fool suffers birth pangs
like a woman in labor with a child.
- 12 Like an arrow stuck in a person's thigh,
so is gossip inside a fool.
- 13 Question a friend; perhaps he did not do it;
or if he did, so that he may not do it again.
- 14 Question a neighbor; perhaps he did not say it;
or if he said it, so that he may not repeat it.
- 15 Question a friend, for often it is slander;
so do not believe everything you hear.
- 16 A person may make a slip without intending it.
Who has not sinned with his tongue?
- 17 Question your neighbor before you threaten him;
and let the law of the Most High take its course.^e

^a Other ancient authorities add *for you will be plotting against your own life*

^b Heb: Gk *A worker who is a drunkard*

^c Other ancient authorities read *heart*

^d Other ancient authorities add *but one who withstands pleasures crowns his life.* ^e*One who controls the tongue will live without strife,*

^e Other ancient authorities add *and do not be angry.* ¹⁸*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of acceptance, and wisdom obtains his love.* ¹⁹*The knowledge of the Lord's commandments is life-giving discipline; and those who do what is pleasing to him enjoy the fruit of the tree of immortality.*

Read Sirach 19:20—20:31

There is a great difference between shrewdness or knowledge of wickedness and genuine wisdom, fearing the Lord. Great tact and wisdom are needed to determine when to be quiet and when to speak. Many are life's paradoxes and ironies, and myriad are the ways to harm others by speaking.

Reflect: Why would this teacher continue warning students about evils of the tongue?

Pray: Ask for the ability to grow in discernment of the real values your actions demonstrate.

Act: Curb all hurtful words, but increase those that build up others.

True and False Wisdom

- ²⁰ The whole of wisdom is fear of the Lord,
and in all wisdom there is the fulfillment of the law.^a
- ²² The knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom,
nor is there prudence in the counsel of sinners.
- ²³ There is a cleverness that is detestable,
and there is a fool who merely lacks wisdom.
- ²⁴ Better are the God-fearing who lack
understanding
than the highly intelligent who transgress the law.
- ²⁵ There is a cleverness that is exact but unjust,
and there are people who abuse favors to gain
a verdict.
- ²⁶ There is the villain bowed down in mourning,
but inwardly he is full of deceit.
- ²⁷ He hides his face and pretends not to hear,
but when no one notices, he will take
advantage of you.
- ²⁸ Even if lack of strength keeps him from sinning,
he will nevertheless do evil when he finds the
opportunity.
- ²⁹ A person is known by his appearance,
and a sensible person is known when first met,
face to face.
- ³⁰ A person's attire and hearty laughter,
and the way he walks, show what he is.

Silence and Speech

- 20** There is a rebuke that is untimely,
and there is the person who is wise enough to
keep silent.
- ² How much better it is to rebuke than to fume!
- ³ And the one who admits his fault will be kept
from failure.
- ⁴ Like a eunuch lusting to violate a girl
is the person who does right under compulsion.
- ⁵ Some people keep silent and are thought to be
wise,
while others are detested for being talkative.
- ⁶ Some people keep silent because they have
nothing to say,
while others keep silent because they know
when to speak.
- ⁷ The wise remain silent until the right moment,
but a boasting fool misses the right moment.
- ⁸ Whoever talks too much is detested,
and whoever pretends to authority is hated.^b

^a Other ancient authorities add *and the knowledge of his omnipotence*. ²¹When a slave says to his master, "I will not act as you wish," even if later he does it, he angers the one who supports him.

^b Other ancient authorities add *How good it is to show repentance when you are reproved, for so you will escape deliberate sin!*

Paradoxes

- 9 There may be good fortune for a person in adversity, and a windfall may result in a loss.
- 10 There is the gift that profits you nothing, and the gift to be paid back double.
- 11 There are losses for the sake of glory, and there are some who have raised their heads from humble circumstances.
- 12 Some buy much for little, but pay for it seven times over.
- 13 The wise make themselves beloved by only few words,^a but the courtesies of fools are wasted.
- 14 A fool's gift will profit you nothing,^b for he looks for recompense sevenfold.^c
- 15 He gives little and upbraids much; he opens his mouth like a town crier. Today he lends and tomorrow he asks it back; such a one is hateful to God and humans.^d
- 16 The fool says, "I have no friends, and I get no thanks for my good deeds. Those who eat my bread are evil-tongued."
- 17 How many will ridicule him, and how often!^e

Inappropriate Speech

- 18 A slip on the pavement is better than a slip of the tongue; the downfall of the wicked will occur just as speedily.
- 19 A coarse person is like an inappropriate story, continually on the lips of the ignorant.

- 20 A proverb from a fool's lips will be rejected, for he does not tell it at the proper time.
- 21 One may be prevented from sinning by poverty; so when he rests he feels no remorse.
- 22 One may lose his life through shame, or lose it because of human respect.^f
- 23 Another out of shame makes promises to a friend, and so makes an enemy for nothing.

Lying

- 24 A lie is an ugly blot on a person; it is continually on the lips of the ignorant.
- 25 A thief is preferable to a habitual liar, but the lot of both is ruin.
- 26 A liar's way leads to disgrace, and his shame is ever with him.

PROVERBIAL SAYINGS^g

- 27 The wise person advances himself by his words, and one who is sensible pleases the great.
- 28 Those who cultivate the soil heap up their harvest, and those who please the great atone for injustice.
- 29 Favors and gifts blind the eyes of the wise; like a muzzle on the mouth they stop reproofs.
- 30 Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure, of what value is either?
- 31 Better are those who hide their folly than those who hide their wisdom.^h

^a Heb: Gk by words

^b Other ancient authorities add *so it is with the envious who give under compulsion*

^c Syr: Gk *he has many eyes instead of one*

^d Other ancient authorities lack *to God and humans*

^e Other ancient authorities add *for he has not honestly received what he has, and what he does not have is unimportant to him*

^f Other ancient authorities read *his foolish look*

^g This heading is included in the Gk text.

^h Other ancient authorities add ³²*Unwearied endurance in seeking the Lord is better than a masterless charioteer of one's own life.*

Read Sirach 21:1–10

The teacher offers a further lesson on sin and its effects, comparing sin to a serpent, the teeth of a lion, a two-edged sword.

Reflect: What kinds of behavior mentioned here lead to harm of others?

Pray: Ponder prayerfully the fact that prayer from the lips of a poor person is heard, and justice is quickly granted (v. 5).

Act: Devise a strategy to flee from a sinful pattern that plagues you.

Various Sins

- 21** Have you sinned, my child? Do so no more,
but ask forgiveness for your past sins.
- ² Flee from sin as from a snake;
for if you approach sin, it will bite you.
Its teeth are lion's teeth,
and can destroy human lives.
- ³ All lawlessness is like a two-edged sword;
there is no healing for the wound it inflicts.
- ⁴ Panic and insolence will waste away riches;
thus the house of the proud will be laid waste.^a
- ⁵ The prayer of the poor goes from their lips to the
ears of God,^b
and his judgment comes speedily.
- ⁶ Those who hate reproof walk in the sinner's steps,
but those who fear the Lord repent in their
heart.
- ⁷ The mighty in speech are widely known;
when they slip, the sensible person knows it.
- ⁸ Whoever builds his house with other people's
money
is like one who gathers stones for his burial
mound.^c
- ⁹ An assembly of the wicked is like a bundle of tow,
and their end is a blazing fire.
- ¹⁰ The way of sinners is paved with smooth stones,
but at its end is the pit of Hades.

Wisdom and Foolishness

- ¹¹ Whoever keeps the law controls his thoughts,
and the fulfillment of the fear of the Lord is
wisdom.
- ¹² The one who is not clever cannot be taught,
but there is a cleverness that increases
bitterness.
- ¹³ The knowledge of the wise will increase like a flood,
and their counsel like a life-giving spring.
- ¹⁴ The mind^d of a fool is like a broken jar;
it can hold no knowledge.
- ¹⁵ When an intelligent person hears a wise saying,
he praises it and adds to it;
when a fool^e hears it, he laughs at^f it
and throws it behind his back.
- ¹⁶ A fool's chatter is like a burden on a journey,
but delight is found in the speech of the
intelligent.
- ¹⁷ The utterance of a sensible person is sought in
the assembly,
and they ponder his words in their minds.

^a Other ancient authorities read *uprooted*

^b Gk *his ears*

^c Other ancient authorities read *for the winter*

^d Syr Lat: Gk *entrails*

^e Syr: Gk *reveler*

^f Syr: Gk *dislikes*

Read Sirach 21:11—22:18

The teacher here discusses a wide variety of behaviors that lead either to folly or to wise action.

Reflect: As you read this section slowly, choose a few sayings that reflect your own experience, and ponder them. In 22:3–5 the judgment on a daughter seems harsher than that for a son; would this still be true today?

Pray: After reflecting on 21:11, pray that these observations may become part of your perfect fear of the Lord, as you learn to bond human wisdom with God's wisdom.

Act: Is there in this list an offensive behavior that you have manifested? If so, resolve to work on it.

- 18 Like a house in ruins is wisdom to a fool,
and to the ignorant, knowledge is talk that has
no meaning.
- 19 To a senseless person education is fetters on his
feet,
and like manacles on his right hand.
- 20 A fool raises his voice when he laughs,
but the wise^a smile quietly.
- 21 To the sensible person education is like a golden
ornament,
and like a bracelet on the right arm.
- 22 The foot of a fool rushes into a house,
but an experienced person waits respectfully
outside.
- 23 A boor peers into the house from the door,
but a cultivated person remains outside.
- 24 It is ill-mannered for a person to listen at a door;
the discreet would be grieved by the disgrace.
- 25 The lips of babblers speak of what is not their
concern,^b
but the words of the prudent are weighed in
the balance.
- 26 The mind of fools is in their mouth,
but the mouth of the wise is in^c their mind.
- 27 When an ungodly person curses an adversary,^d
he curses himself.
- 28 A whisperer degrades himself
and is hated in his neighborhood.

The Idler

- 22** The idler is like a filthy stone,
and every one hisses at his disgrace.
- 2 The idler is like the filth of dunghills;
anyone that picks it up will shake it off his hand.

Degenerate Children

- 3 It is a disgrace to be the father of an undisciplined
son,
and the birth of a daughter is a loss.
- 4 A sensible daughter obtains a husband of her own,
but one who acts shamefully is a grief to her
father.
- 5 An impudent daughter disgraces father and
husband,
and is despised by both.
- 6 Like music in time of mourning is ill-timed
conversation,
but a thrashing and discipline are at all times
wisdom.^e

^a Syr Lat: Gk *clever*

^b Other ancient authorities read *of strangers speak of these things*

^c Other ancient authorities omit *in*

^d Or *curses Satan*

^e Other ancient authorities add *7 Children who are brought up in a good life, conceal the lowly birth of their parents. 8 Children who are disdainfully and boorishly haughty stain the nobility of their kindred.*

Read Sirach 22:19–26

Here are further teachings on friendship. When a friendship exists, be careful not to take action that will harm or destroy it.

Reflect: Recall 6:5–17 and its counsel about finding a friend. What is required to maintain and build a friendship? What is required to heal a friendship when it has been injured?

Pray: Recall friends whom you have misjudged, and pray for them.

Act: Build friendships with those who are in poverty, in pain, in loss.

Wisdom and Folly

- ⁹ Whoever teaches a fool is like one who glues
potsherds together,
or who rouses a sleeper from deep slumber.
- ¹⁰ Whoever tells a story to a fool tells it to a drowsy
man;
and at the end he will say, “What is it?”
- ¹¹ Weep for the dead, for he has left the light behind;
and weep for the fool, for he has left
intelligence behind.
Weep less bitterly for the dead, for he is at rest;
but the life of the fool is worse than death.
- ¹² Mourning for the dead lasts seven days,
but for the foolish or the ungodly it lasts all the
days of their lives.
- ¹³ Do not talk much with a senseless person
or visit an unintelligent person.^a
Stay clear of him, or you may have trouble,
and be spattered when he shakes himself off.
Avoid him and you will find rest,
and you will never be wearied by his lack of sense.
- ¹⁴ What is heavier than lead?
And what is its name except “Fool”?
- ¹⁵ Sand, salt, and a piece of iron
are easier to bear than a stupid person.
- ¹⁶ A wooden beam firmly bonded into a building
is not loosened by an earthquake;
so the mind firmly resolved after due reflection
will not be afraid in a crisis.
- ¹⁷ A mind settled on an intelligent thought
is like stucco decoration that makes a wall smooth.
- ¹⁸ Fences^b set on a high place
will not stand firm against the wind;
so a timid mind with a fool’s resolve
will not stand firm against any fear.

The Preservation of Friendship

- ¹⁹ One who pricks the eye brings tears,
and one who pricks the heart makes clear its
feelings.
- ²⁰ One who throws a stone at birds scares them away,
and one who reviles a friend destroys a friendship.
- ²¹ Even if you draw your sword against a friend,
do not despair, for there is a way back.
- ²² If you open your mouth against your friend,
do not worry, for reconciliation is possible.
But as for reviling, arrogance, disclosure of
secrets, or a treacherous blow—
in these cases any friend will take to flight.

^a Other ancient authorities add *For being without sense he will despise everything about you*

^b Other ancient authorities read *Pebbles*

Read Sirach 22:27—23:6

Here are two Jewish prayers to God, asking for protection against sins of the tongue and against lustful thoughts and gluttony.

Reflect: Sirach addresses God with the extremely personal phrase, “Father and Master of my life.” How does this approach to prayer fit into the teaching context of this book?

Pray: Slowly recite the Lord’s Prayer, noting resonances with earlier Jewish prayers such as Sirach’s.

Act: Be attentive to other places in the Old Testament where God is addressed personally and as Father.

- 23 Gain the trust of your neighbor in his poverty,
so that you may rejoice with him in his
prosperity.
Stand by him in time of distress,
so that you may share with him in his
inheritance.^a
- 24 The vapor and smoke of the furnace precede the
fire;
so insults precede bloodshed.
- 25 I am not ashamed to shelter a friend,
and I will not hide from him.
- 26 But if harm should come to me because of him,
whoever hears of it will beware of him.

A Prayer for Help against Sinning

- 27 Who will set a guard over my mouth,
and an effective seal upon my lips,
so that I may not fall because of them,
and my tongue may not destroy me?
23 O Lord, Father and Master of my life,
do not abandon me to their designs,
and do not let me fall because of them!
- 2 Who will set whips over my thoughts,
and the discipline of wisdom over my mind,
so as not to spare me in my errors,
and not overlook my^b sins?
- 3 Otherwise my mistakes may be multiplied,
and my sins may abound,
and I may fall before my adversaries,
and my enemy may rejoice over me.^c
- 4 O Lord, Father and God of my life,
do not give me haughty eyes,
5 and remove evil desire from me.
- 6 Let neither gluttony nor lust overcome me,
and do not give me over to shameless
passion.

DISCIPLINE OF THE TONGUE^d

- 7 Listen, my children, to instruction concerning the
mouth;
the one who observes it will never be caught.
- 8 Sinners are overtaken through their lips;
by them the reviler and the arrogant are
tripped up.
- 9 Do not accustom your mouth to oaths,
nor habitually utter the name of the Holy One;
- 10 for as a servant who is constantly under scrutiny
will not lack bruises,
so also the person who always swears and utters
the Name
will never be cleansed^e from sin.

^a Other ancient authorities add *For one should not always despise restricted circumstances, or admire a rich person who is stupid.*

^b Gk *their*

^c Other ancient authorities add *From them the hope of your mercy is remote*

^d This heading is included in the Gk text.

^e Syr *be free*

Read Sirach 23:7–27

The teacher considers two distinct kinds of sin: sins of speech, especially foul language; and sexual sins, particularly adultery. The offenses of men and women are described differently, but both sin. For this writer, the sin of adultery is committed not only by a woman (as elsewhere), but also by a man.

Reflect: In v. 14 the teacher urges one tempted to lustful or scurrilous speech to keep “your father and mother” in mind. How effective would such advice have been in Sirach’s time? How effective would it be now?

Pray: Prayerfully imagine God observing all human affairs, the good and the bad.

Act: When facing trials and temptations, try to imagine the light and eyes of God, ten thousand times brighter than the sun (v. 19).

- 11 The one who swears many oaths is full of iniquity, and the scourge will not leave his house. If he swears in error, his sin remains on him, and if he disregards it, he sins doubly; if he swears a false oath, he will not be justified, for his house will be filled with calamities.

Foul Language

- 12 There is a manner of speaking comparable to death;^a may it never be found in the inheritance of Jacob! Such conduct will be far from the godly, and they will not wallow in sins.
- 13 Do not accustom your mouth to coarse, foul language, for it involves sinful speech.
- 14 Remember your father and mother when you sit among the great, or you may forget yourself in their presence, and behave like a fool through bad habit; then you will wish that you had never been born, and you will curse the day of your birth.
- 15 Those who are accustomed to using abusive language will never become disciplined as long as they live.

Concerning Sexual Sins

- 16 Two kinds of individuals multiply sins, and a third incurs wrath. Hot passion that blazes like a fire will not be quenched until it burns itself out; one who commits fornication with his near of kin will never cease until the fire burns him up.
- 17 To a fornicator all bread is sweet; he will never weary until he dies.
- 18 The one who sins against his marriage bed says to himself, “Who can see me? Darkness surrounds me, the walls hide me, and no one sees me. Why should I worry? The Most High will not remember sins.”
- 19 His fear is confined to human eyes and he does not realize that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun; they look upon every aspect of human behavior and see into hidden corners.
- 20 Before the universe was created, it was known to him, and so it is since its completion.
- 21 This man will be punished in the streets of the city, and where he least suspects it, he will be seized.

^a Other ancient authorities read *clothed about with death*

- 22 So it is with a woman who leaves
her husband
and presents him with an heir by
another man.
- 23 For first of all, she has disobeyed the
law of the Most High;
second, she has committed an
offense against her husband;
and third, through her fornication
she has committed adultery
and brought forth children by
another man.
- 24 She herself will be brought before
the assembly,
and her punishment will extend to
her children.
- 25 Her children will not take root,
and her branches will not bear
fruit.
- 26 She will leave behind an accursed
memory
and her disgrace will never be
blotted out.
- 27 Those who survive her will recognize
that nothing is better than the fear
of the Lord,
and nothing sweeter than to heed
the commandments of the Lord.^a

THE PRAISE OF WISDOM^b

- 24** Wisdom praises herself,
and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.
- 2 In the assembly of the Most High she opens her
mouth,
and in the presence of his hosts she tells of
her glory:
- 3 “I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,
and covered the earth like a mist.
- 4 I dwelt in the highest heavens,
and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.
- 5 Alone I compassed the vault of heaven
and traversed the depths of the abyss.
- 6 Over waves of the sea, over all the earth,
and over every people and nation I have held
sway.^c
- 7 Among all these I sought a resting place;
in whose territory should I abide?
- 8 “Then the Creator of all things gave me a
command,
and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.’
- 9 Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me,
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.
- 10 In the holy tent I ministered before him,
and so I was established in Zion.
- 11 Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting
place,
and in Jerusalem was my domain.
- 12 I took root in an honored people,
in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.
- 13 “I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon,
and like a cypress on the heights of Hermon.

Read Sirach 24

This centerpiece of the entire book contains a spectacular praise of wisdom. In first-person speech, a personified wisdom describes her origins in the heavens, her dwelling-place in Jacob (Israel), and her likeness to life-giving trees, especially a tree of life. She also invites her listeners to come to her, to be filled with her fruits (v. 18). In Sirach’s comments, we learn that wisdom is found in the covenant of God with Israel.

Reflect: In verses 1–22 can you “hear” echoes of the language of creation in Genesis 1–2? How does wisdom participate in the entire cosmos, within it, and outside it?

Pray: Reread verses 19–22 and then prayerfully read Matthew 11:28–30.

Act: Consider what the writer implies by equating Israel’s Torah (the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy) with wisdom.

^a Other ancient authorities add as verse 28, *It is a great honor to follow God, and to be received by him is long life.*

^b This heading is included in the GK text.

^c Other ancient authorities read *I have acquired a possession*

- 14 I grew tall like a palm tree in
En-gedi,^a
and like rosebushes in Jericho;
like a fair olive tree in the field,
and like a plane tree beside water^b
I grew tall.
- 15 Like cassia and camel's thorn I gave
forth perfume,
and like choice myrrh I spread my
fragrance,
like galbanum, onycha, and stacte,
and like the odor of incense in the
tent.
- 16 Like a terebinth I spread out my
branches,
and my branches are glorious and
graceful.
- 17 Like the vine I bud forth delights,
and my blossoms become
glorious and abundant fruit.^c
- 19 "Come to me, you who desire me,
and eat your fill of my fruits.
- 20 For the memory of me is sweeter
than honey,
and the possession of me sweeter
than the honeycomb.
- 21 Those who eat of me will hunger for
more,
and those who drink of me will
thirst for more.
- 22 Whoever obeys me will not be put to
shame,
and those who work with me will
not sin."
- as an inheritance for the
congregations of Jacob.^d
- 25 It overflows, like the Pishon, with
wisdom,
and like the Tigris at the time of
the first fruits.
- 26 It runs over, like the Euphrates, with
understanding,
and like the Jordan at harvest
time.
- 27 It pours forth instruction like the
Nile,^e
like the Gihon at the time of
vintage.
- 28 The first man did not know wisdom^f
fully,
nor will the last one fathom her.
- 29 For her thoughts are more abundant
than the sea,
and her counsel deeper than the
great abyss.
- 30 As for me, I was like a canal from a
river,
like a water channel into a garden.
- 31 I said, "I will water my garden
and drench my flower-beds."
And lo, my canal became a river,
and my river a sea.
- 32 I will again make instruction shine
forth like the dawn,
and I will make it clear from far
away.
- 33 I will again pour out teaching like
prophecy,
and leave it to all future
generations.
- 34 Observe that I have not labored for
myself alone,
but for all who seek wisdom.^f

Wisdom and the Law

- 23 All this is the book of the covenant
of the Most High God,
the law that Moses commanded us

^a Other ancient authorities read *on the beaches*

^b Other ancient authorities omit *beside water*

^c Other ancient authorities add as verse 18, *I am the mother of beautiful love, of fear, of knowledge, and of holy hope; being eternal, I am given to all my children, to those who are named by him.*

^d Other ancient authorities add as verse 24, *"Do not cease to be strong in the Lord, cling to him so that he may strengthen you; the Lord Almighty alone is God, and besides him there is no savior."*

^e Syr: *Gk It makes instruction shine forth like light*

^f *Gk her*

Read Sirach 25:1–11

A number of proverbs here provide thoughtful reflections on life, and especially on harmonious relations.

Reflect: How does the experience gained with age affect your understanding of life?

Pray: Ask that “fear of the Lord” may infuse all your experiences of and growth in wisdom.

Act: If possible, ask the opinion of an older person on some of these sayings.

Those Who Are Worthy of Praise

- 25** I take pleasure in three things,
and they are beautiful in the sight of God and
of mortals:^a
agreement among brothers and sisters,
friendship among neighbors,
and a wife and a husband who live in harmony.
- 2 I hate three kinds of people,
and I loathe their manner of life:
a pauper who boasts, a rich person who lies,
and an old fool who commits adultery.
- 3 If you gathered nothing in your youth,
how can you find anything in your old age?
- 4 How attractive is sound judgment in the
gray-haired,
and for the aged to possess good counsel!
- 5 How attractive is wisdom in the aged,
and understanding and counsel in the
venerable!
- 6 Rich experience is the crown of the aged,
and their boast is the fear of the Lord.
- 7 I can think of nine whom I would call blessed,
and a tenth my tongue proclaims:
a man who can rejoice in his children;
a man who lives to see the downfall of his foes.
- 8 Happy the man who lives with a sensible wife,
and the one who does not plow with ox and
ass together.^b
Happy is the one who does not sin with the
tongue,
and the one who has not served an inferior.
- 9 Happy is the one who finds a friend,^c
and the one who speaks to attentive listeners.
- 10 How great is the one who finds wisdom!
But none is superior to the one who fears the
Lord.
- 11 Fear of the Lord surpasses everything;
to whom can we compare the one who has it?^d

Some Extreme Forms of Evil

- 13 Any wound, but not a wound of the heart!
Any wickedness, but not the wickedness of a
woman!
- 14 Any suffering, but not suffering from those who
hate!
And any vengeance, but not the vengeance of
enemies!
- 15 There is no venom^e worse than a snake’s venom,^e
and no anger worse than a woman’s^f wrath.

^a Syr Lat: Gk *In three things I was beautiful and I stood in beauty before the Lord and mortals.*

^b Heb Syr: Gk lacks *and the one who does not plow with ox and ass together*

^c Lat Syr: Gk *good sense*

^d Other ancient authorities add as verse 12, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of love for him, and faith is the beginning of clinging to him.*

^e Syr: Gk *head*

^f Other ancient authorities read *an enemy’s*

Read Sirach 25:13—26:27

The teacher offers a lengthy reflection on women, good (ten couplets) and bad (twenty-five couplets). Included in this section is the first place in Jewish literature where there is a reference to sin beginning with a woman and leading us all to die (25:24).

Reflect: While pondering this section of teachings, consider how difficult and repugnant some of them are in our day, especially the notion of blaming sin on a woman. Consider whether it might be profitable to list in similar style the qualities of men/ husbands.

Pray: Ask that this list of qualities might help you in reflecting on your own life, rather than in judging others.

Act: In any way possible, take steps to reduce stereotyping in relationships, especially in marriage and family.

The Evil of a Wicked Woman

- 16 I would rather live with a lion and a dragon
than live with an evil woman.
- 17 A woman's wickedness changes her appearance,
and darkens her face like that of a bear.
- 18 Her husband sits^a among the neighbors,
and he cannot help sighing^b bitterly.
- 19 Any iniquity is small compared to a woman's
iniquity;
may a sinner's lot befall her!
- 20 A sandy ascent for the feet of the aged—
such is a garrulous wife to a quiet husband.
- 21 Do not be ensnared by a woman's beauty,
and do not desire a woman for her possessions.^c
- 22 There is wrath and impudence and great disgrace
when a wife supports her husband.
- 23 Dejected mind, gloomy face,
and wounded heart come from an evil wife.
Drooping hands and weak knees
come from the wife who does not make her
husband happy.
- 24 From a woman sin had its beginning,
and because of her we all die.
- 25 Allow no outlet to water,
and no boldness of speech to an evil wife.
- 26 If she does not go as you direct,
separate her from yourself.

The Joy of a Good Wife

- 26** Happy is the husband of a good wife;
the number of his days will be doubled.
- 2 A loyal wife brings joy to her husband,
and he will complete his years in peace.
- 3 A good wife is a great blessing;
she will be granted among the blessings of the
man who fears the Lord.
- 4 Whether rich or poor, his heart is content,
and at all times his face is cheerful.

The Worst of Evils: A Wicked Wife

- 5 Of three things my heart is frightened,
and of a fourth I am in great fear:^d
Slander in the city, the gathering of a mob,
and false accusation—all these are worse than
death.
- 6 But it is heartache and sorrow when a wife is
jealous of a rival,
and a tongue-lashing makes it known to all.
- 7 A bad wife is a chafing yoke;
taking hold of her is like grasping a scorpion.

^a Heb Syr: Gk *loses heart*

^b Other ancient authorities read *and listening*
he sighs

^c Heb Syr: Other Gk authorities read *for her*
beauty

^d Syr: Meaning of Gk uncertain

- 8 A drunken wife arouses great anger;
she cannot hide her shame.
- 9 The haughty stare betrays an unchaste wife;
her eyelids give her away.
- 10 Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
or else, when she finds liberty, she will make
use of it.
- 11 Be on guard against her impudent eye,
and do not be surprised if she sins against you.
- 12 As a thirsty traveler opens his mouth
and drinks from any water near him,
so she will sit in front of every tent peg
and open her quiver to the arrow.

The Blessing of a Good Wife

- 13 A wife's charm delights her husband,
and her skill puts flesh on his bones.
- 14 A silent wife is a gift from the Lord,
and nothing is so precious as her self-discipline.
- 15 A modest wife adds charm to charm,
and no scales can weigh the value of her chastity.
- 16 Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord,
so is the beauty of a good wife in her
well-ordered home.
- 17 Like the shining lamp on the holy lampstand,
so is a beautiful face on a stately figure.
- 18 Like golden pillars on silver bases,
so are shapely legs and steadfast feet.

Other ancient authorities add verses 19-27:

- 19 *My child, keep sound the bloom of your youth,
and do not give your strength to strangers.*
- 20 *Seek a fertile field within the whole plain,
and sow it with your own seed, trusting in
your fine stock.*
- 21 *So your offspring will prosper,
and, having confidence in their good descent,
will grow great.*
- 22 *A prostitute is regarded as spittle,
and a married woman as a tower of death to
her lovers.*
- 23 *A godless wife is given as a portion to a lawless
man,
but a pious wife is given to the man who fears
the Lord.*
- 24 *A shameless woman constantly acts disgracefully,
but a modest daughter will even be
embarrassed before her husband.*
- 25 *A headstrong wife is regarded as a dog,*

*but one who has a sense of
shame will fear the Lord.*

26 *A wife honoring her husband will
seem wise to all,
but if she dishonors him in her
pride she will be known to all
as ungodly.*

*Happy is the husband of a good
wife;
for the number of his years will
be doubled.*

27 *A loud-voiced and garrulous wife is
like a trumpet sounding the
charge,
and every person like this lives in
the anarchy of war.*

Three Depressing Things

28 At two things my heart is grieved,
and because of a third anger
comes over me:
a warrior in want through poverty,
intelligent men who are treated
contemptuously,
and a man who turns back from
righteousness to sin—
the Lord will prepare him for the
sword!

The Temptations of Commerce

29 A merchant can hardly keep from
wrongdoing,
nor is a tradesman innocent of sin.

Read Sirach 26:28—27:30

The teacher comments on issues of social morality and relationships, including honesty (especially in business), the betrayal of secrets (especially of friends) and the (often fatal) damage to a friendship. He also reflects on the way in which evil human behaviors tend to rebound to the offender, causing that person even greater damage.

Reflect: How pertinent in our own day is the teacher's advice about betrayal of friends by revealing secrets?

Pray: Ask for God's blessing on those who have felt betrayed by a breach of confidentiality.

Act: Reflect anew, personally and with others, on the significance and importance of confidential conversation and speech.

27 Many have committed sin for gain,^a
and those who seek to get rich will avert their
eyes.

- 2 As a stake is driven firmly into a fissure between
stones,
so sin is wedged in between selling and buying.
- 3 If a person is not steadfast in the fear of the Lord,
his house will be quickly overthrown.

Tests in Life

- 4 When a sieve is shaken, the refuse appears;
so do a person's faults when he speaks.
- 5 The kiln tests the potter's vessels;
so the test of a person is in his conversation.
- 6 Its fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree;
so a person's speech discloses the cultivation
of his mind.
- 7 Do not praise anyone before he speaks,
for this is the way people are tested.

Reward and Retribution

- 8 If you pursue justice, you will attain it
and wear it like a glorious robe.
- 9 Birds roost with their own kind,
so honesty comes home to those who
practice it.
- 10 A lion lies in wait for prey;
so does sin for evildoers.

Varieties of Speech

- 11 The conversation of the godly is always wise,
but the fool changes like the moon.

^a Other ancient authorities read a *trifle*

- 12 Among stupid people limit your time,
but among thoughtful people
linger on.
- 13 The talk of fools is offensive,
and their laughter is wantonly sinful.
- 14 Their cursing and swearing make
one's hair stand on end,
and their quarrels make others
stop their ears.
- 15 The strife of the proud leads to
bloodshed,
and their abuse is grievous to hear.

Betraying Secrets

- 16 Whoever betrays secrets destroys
confidence,
and will never find a congenial
friend.
- 17 Love your friend and keep faith with
him;
but if you betray his secrets, do
not follow after him.
- 18 For as a person destroys his enemy,
so you have destroyed the
friendship of your neighbor.
- 19 And as you allow a bird to escape
from your hand,
so you have let your neighbor go,
and will not catch him again.
- 20 Do not go after him, for he is too far
off,
and has escaped like a gazelle
from a snare.
- 21 For a wound may be bandaged,
and there is reconciliation after
abuse,
but whoever has betrayed secrets
is without hope.

Hypocrisy and Retribution

- 22 Whoever winks the eye plots mischief,
and those who know him will
keep their distance.
- 23 In your presence his mouth is all
sweetness,
and he admires your words;
but later he will twist his speech
and with your own words he will
trip you up.
- 24 I have hated many things, but him
above all;
even the Lord hates him.
- 25 Whoever throws a stone straight up
throws it on his own head,
and a treacherous blow opens up
many wounds.
- 26 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
and whoever sets a snare will be
caught in it.
- 27 If a person does evil, it will roll back
upon him,
and he will not know where it
came from.
- 28 Mockery and abuse issue from the
proud,
but vengeance lies in wait for
them like a lion.
- 29 Those who rejoice in the fall of the
godly will be caught in a snare,
and pain will consume them
before their death.

Anger and Vengeance

- 30 Anger and wrath, these also are
abominations,
yet a sinner holds on to them.

28 The vengeful will face the Lord's vengeance,
for he keeps a strict account of^a their sins.

² Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done,
and then your sins will be pardoned when you
pray.

³ Does anyone harbor anger against another,
and expect healing from the Lord?

⁴ If one has no mercy toward another like himself,
can he then seek pardon for his own sins?

⁵ If a mere mortal harbors wrath,
who will make an atoning sacrifice for his
sins?

^a Other ancient authorities read *for he firmly establishes*

Read Sirach 28:1–11

Teachings on vengeance (v. 1) and forgiveness (vv. 2–7) and on peace (vv. 8–11) constitute this section.

Reflect: This teaching on forgiveness was formulated by a second-century BC Jewish wisdom teacher, and it sounds very similar to some of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, in the Lord's Prayer and in Matthew's parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt 18:33).

Pray: Pray slowly the Lord's Prayer, especially the petition regarding forgiveness.

Act: Look in this book for other Jewish teachings that speak to your spirituality of forgiveness.

Read Sirach 28:12–26

Sirach offers here another lesson on the evils that can be committed by the tongue.

Reflect: Consider the destructive power of slander, of whispering and deceit. Consider how evil speech can function like a yoke around a person's neck.

Pray: Ask for the grace to be aware of someone you have hurt by what you have said. Then pray for that person and, if possible, seek his or her forgiveness.

Act: Pledge to yourself to think twice or three times before uttering words that you consider dubiously helpful, or possibly hurtful.

- 6 Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside;
remember corruption and death, and be true to the commandments.
- 7 Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbor;
remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.
- 8 Refrain from strife, and your sins will be fewer;
for the hot-tempered kindle strife,
- 9 and the sinner disrupts friendships
and sows discord among those who are at peace.
- 10 In proportion to the fuel, so will the fire burn,
and in proportion to the obstinacy, so will strife increase;^a
in proportion to a person's strength will be his anger,
and in proportion to his wealth he will increase his wrath.
- 11 A hasty quarrel kindles a fire,
and a hasty dispute sheds blood.

The Evil Tongue

- 12 If you blow on a spark, it will glow;
if you spit on it, it will be put out;
yet both come out of your mouth.
- 13 Curse the gossips and the double-tongued,
for they destroy the peace of many.
- 14 Slander^b has shaken many,
and scattered them from nation to nation;
it has destroyed strong cities,
and overturned the houses of the great.
- 15 Slander^b has driven virtuous women from their homes,
and deprived them of the fruit of their toil.
- 16 Those who pay heed to slander^c will not find rest,
nor will they settle down in peace.
- 17 The blow of a whip raises a welt,
but a blow of the tongue crushes the bones.
- 18 Many have fallen by the edge of the sword,
but not as many as have fallen because of the tongue.
- 19 Happy is the one who is protected from it,
who has not been exposed to its anger,
who has not borne its yoke,
and has not been bound with its fetters.
- 20 For its yoke is a yoke of iron,
and its fetters are fetters of bronze;
- 21 its death is an evil death,
and Hades is preferable to it.

^a Other ancient authorities read *burn*

^b Gk *A third tongue*

^c Gk *it*

- 22 It has no power over the godly;
they will not be burned in its
flame.
- 23 Those who forsake the Lord will fall
into its power;
it will burn among them and will
not be put out.
It will be sent out against them like a
lion;
like a leopard it will mangle them.

- 24a As you fence in your property with
thorns,
25b so make a door and a bolt for
your mouth.
24b As you lock up your silver and gold,
25a so make balances and scales for
your words.
26 Take care not to err with your
tongue,^a
and fall victim to one lying in wait.

Read Sirach 29

This section consists of many various teachings on the ways to manage material possessions (vv. 1–20) and on the beauty of simplicity of life (vv. 21–28). It includes poignant words on care for the poor (vv. 8–10) and on almsgiving (v. 12).

Reflect: Compare teachings here with 3:30–4:10, on care of the poor, where almsgiving “atones for sin” (3:30). Are there significant differences in the two notions of almsgiving?

Pray: Ask for the grace of being able to see the poor through God’s eyes.

Act: Do not continually depend on others for food and entertainment; rather, cultivate contentment with what you have been given.

On Lending and Borrowing

- 29** The merciful lend to their neighbors;
by holding out a helping hand they keep the
commandments.
- 2 Lend to your neighbor in his time of need;
repay your neighbor when a loan falls due.
 - 3 Keep your promise and be honest with him,
and on every occasion you will find what you
need.
 - 4 Many regard a loan as a windfall,
and cause trouble to those who help them.
 - 5 One kisses another’s hands until he gets a loan,
and is deferential in speaking of his neighbor’s
money;
but at the time for repayment he delays,
and pays back with empty promises,
and finds fault with the time.
 - 6 If he can pay, his creditor^b will hardly get back half,
and will regard that as a windfall.
If he cannot pay, the borrower^b has robbed the
other of his money,
and he has needlessly made him an enemy;
he will repay him with curses and reproaches,
and instead of glory will repay him with
dishonor.
 - 7 Many refuse to lend, not because of meanness,
but from fear^c of being defrauded needlessly.
 - 8 Nevertheless, be patient with someone in
humble circumstances,
and do not keep him waiting for your alms.
 - 9 Help the poor for the commandment’s sake,
and in their need do not send them away
empty-handed.
 - 10 Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a
friend,
and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost.
 - 11 Lay up your treasure according to the
commandments of the Most High,
and it will profit you more than gold.

^a Gk with it

^b Gk he

^c Other ancient authorities read *many refuse to lend, therefore, because of such meanness; they are afraid*

- 12 Store up almsgiving in your treasury,
and it will rescue you from every
disaster;
13 better than a stout shield and a
sturdy spear,
it will fight for you against the
enemy.

On Guaranteeing Debts

- 14 A good person will be surety for his
neighbor,
but the one who has lost all sense
of shame will fail him.
15 Do not forget the kindness of your
guarantor,
for he has given his life for you.
16 A sinner wastes the property of his
guarantor,
17 and the ungrateful person
abandons his rescuer.
18 Being surety has ruined many who
were prosperous,
and has tossed them about like
waves of the sea;
it has driven the influential into
exile,
and they have wandered among
foreign nations.
19 The sinner comes to grief through
surety;
his pursuit of gain involves him in
lawsuits.

- 20 Assist your neighbor to the best of
your ability,
but be careful not to fall yourself.

Home and Hospitality

- 21 The necessities of life are water,
bread, and clothing,
and also a house to assure privacy.
22 Better is the life of the poor under
their own crude roof
than sumptuous food in the house
of others.
23 Be content with little or much,
and you will hear no reproach for
being a guest.^a
24 It is a miserable life to go from
house to house;
as a guest you should not open
your mouth;
25 you will play the host and provide
drink without being thanked,
and besides this you will hear
rude words like these:
26 "Come here, stranger, prepare the table;
let me eat what you have there."
27 "Be off, stranger, for an honored
guest is here;
my brother has come for a visit,
and I need the guest-room."
28 It is hard for a sensible person to bear
scolding about lodging^b and the
insults of the moneylender.

CONCERNING CHILDREN^c

- 30** He who loves his son will whip him often,
so that he may rejoice at the way he turns out.
2 He who disciplines his son will profit by him,
and will boast of him among acquaintances.
3 He who teaches his son will make his enemies
envious,
and will glory in him among his friends.
4 When the father dies he will not seem to be dead,
for he has left behind him one like himself,
5 whom in his life he looked upon with joy
and at death, without grief.
6 He has left behind him an avenger against his
enemies,
and one to repay the kindness of his friends.
7 Whoever spoils his son will bind up his wounds,
and will suffer heartache at every cry.

^a Lat: Gk *reproach from your family*; other ancient authorities lack this line

^b Or *scolding from the household*

^c This heading is included in the Gk text.

Read Sirach 30:1–13

Here the teacher gives a lesson on how to raise one's sons, often suggesting actions that seem severe and harsh today. In verses 4–5 he intimates that one lives on in one's children.

Reflect: Can you find some wisdom in these views of child-rearing?

Pray: Consider your children or other young people with whom you have a connection, and ask for the grace to envision and be able to provide what they truly do need.

Act: Cultivate within yourself a holistic vision of discipline.

Read Sirach 30:14—31:11

The teaching on the limitations of riches (31:1–11) is prefaced by more general teaching: health, well-being, and contentment are more precious than gold or other costly stones.

Reflect: What does it mean to suggest that a joyful heart is better than all else?

Pray: Ask for greater freedom regarding the possessions you have.

Act: Begin gradually to simplify some aspect of your lifestyle.

- 8 An unbroken horse turns out stubborn,
and an unchecked son turns out headstrong.
- 9 Pamper a child, and he will terrorize you;
play with him, and he will grieve you.
- 10 Do not laugh with him, or you will have sorrow
with him,
and in the end you will gnash your teeth.
- 11 Give him no freedom in his youth,
and do not ignore his errors.
- 12 Bow down his neck in his youth,^a
and beat his sides while he is young,
or else he will become stubborn and disobey you,
and you will have sorrow of soul from him.^b
- 13 Discipline your son and make his yoke heavy,^c
so that you may not be offended by his
shamelessness.
- 14 Better off poor, healthy, and fit
than rich and afflicted in body.
- 15 Health and fitness are better than any gold,
and a robust body than countless riches.
- 16 There is no wealth better than health of body,
and no gladness above joy of heart.
- 17 Death is better than a life of misery,
and eternal sleep^d than chronic sickness.

CONCERNING FOODS^e

- 18 Good things poured out upon a mouth that is
closed
are like offerings of food placed upon a grave.
- 19 Of what use to an idol is a sacrifice?
For it can neither eat nor smell.
So is the one punished by the Lord;
- 20 he sees with his eyes and groans
as a eunuch groans when embracing a girl.^f
- 21 Do not give yourself over to sorrow,
and do not distress yourself deliberately.
- 22 A joyful heart is life itself,
and rejoicing lengthens one's life span.
- 23 Indulge yourself^g and take comfort,
and remove sorrow far from you,
for sorrow has destroyed many,
and no advantage ever comes from it.
- 24 Jealousy and anger shorten life,
and anxiety brings on premature old age.
- 25 Those who are cheerful and merry at table
will benefit from their food.

^a Other ancient authorities lack this line and the preceding line

^b Other ancient authorities lack this line

^c Heb: Ck take pains with him

^d Other ancient authorities lack *eternal sleep*

^e This heading is included in the Ck text; other ancient authorities place the heading before verse 16

^f Other ancient authorities add *So is the person who does right under compulsion*

^g Other ancient authorities read *Beguide yourself*

Read Sirach 31:12—32:13

This is surely the only extended presentation of table manners in the Bible! It includes reflections on greed and gluttony, the proper place of wine in dining and in life, moderation and excess.

Reflect: Does Sirach help you understand the ways in which human relationships are at the core of the sharing of meals?

Pray: “But above all bless your Maker, who fills you with his good gifts” (32:13).

Act: In matters of dining, avoid sins of pride and self-centeredness.

Right Attitude toward Riches

- 31** Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one’s flesh,
and anxiety about it drives away sleep.
- 2 Wakeful anxiety prevents slumber,
and a severe illness carries off sleep.^a
- 3 The rich person toils to amass a fortune,
and when he rests he fills himself with his dainties.
- 4 The poor person toils to make a meager living,
and if ever he rests he becomes needy.
- 5 One who loves gold will not be justified;
one who pursues money will be led astray^b
by it.
- 6 Many have come to ruin because of gold,
and their destruction has met them face to face.
- 7 It is a stumbling block to those who are avid for it,
and every fool will be taken captive by it.
- 8 Blessed is the rich person who is found blameless,
and who does not go after gold.
- 9 Who is he, that we may praise him?
For he has done wonders among his people.
- 10 Who has been tested by it and been found perfect?
Let it be for him a ground for boasting.
Who has had the power to transgress and did not transgress,
and to do evil and did not do it?
- 11 His prosperity will be established,^c
and the assembly will proclaim his acts of charity.

Table Etiquette

- 12 Are you seated at the table of the great?^d
Do not be greedy at it,
and do not say, “How much food there is here!”
- 13 Remember that a greedy eye is a bad thing.
What has been created more greedy than the eye?
Therefore it sheds tears for any reason.
- 14 Do not reach out your hand for everything you see,
and do not crowd your neighbor^e at the dish.
- 15 Judge your neighbor’s feelings by your own,
and in every matter be thoughtful.
- 16 Eat what is set before you like a well brought-up person,^f
and do not chew greedily, or you will give offense.
- 17 Be the first to stop, as befits good manners,
and do not be insatiable, or you will give offense.

^a Other ancient authorities read *sleep carries off a severe illness*

^b Heb Syr: Gk *pursues destruction will be filled*

^c Other ancient authorities add *because of this*

^d Heb Syr: Gk *at a great table*

^e Gk *him*

^f Heb: Gk *like a human being*

- 18 If you are seated among many persons,
do not help yourself^a before they do.
- 19 How ample a little is for a well-disciplined person!
He does not breathe heavily when in bed.
- 20 Healthy sleep depends on moderate eating;
he rises early, and feels fit.
The distress of sleeplessness and of nausea
and colic are with the glutton.
- 21 If you are overstuffed with food,
get up to vomit, and you will have relief.
- 22 Listen to me, my child, and do not disregard me,
and in the end you will appreciate my words.
In everything you do be moderate,^b
and no sickness will overtake you.
- 23 People bless the one who is liberal with food,
and their testimony to his generosity is trustworthy.
- 24 The city complains of the one who is stingy with food,
and their testimony to his stinginess is accurate.

Temperance in Drinking Wine

- 25 Do not try to prove your strength by wine-drinking,
for wine has destroyed many.
- 26 As the furnace tests the work of the smith,^c
so wine tests hearts when the insolent quarrel.
- 27 Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation.
What is life to one who is without wine?
It has been created to make people happy.
- 28 Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation
is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul.
- 29 Wine drunk to excess leads to bitterness of spirit,
to quarrels and stumbling.
- 30 Drunkenness increases the anger of a fool to his own hurt,
reducing his strength and adding wounds.
- 31 Do not reprove your neighbor at a banquet of wine,
and do not despise him in his merrymaking;
speak no word of reproach to him,
and do not distress him by making demands of him.

Etiquette at a Banquet

32 If they make you master of the feast, do not exalt yourself;

be among them as one of their number.

Take care of them first and then sit down;

2 when you have fulfilled all your duties, take your place,

so that you may be merry along with them and receive a wreath for your excellent leadership.

3 Speak, you who are older, for it is your right, but with accurate knowledge, and do not interrupt the music.

4 Where there is entertainment, do not pour out talk; do not display your cleverness at the wrong time.

5 A ruby seal in a setting of gold is a concert of music at a banquet of wine.

^a Gk reach out your hand

^b Heb Syr: Gk industrious

^c Heb: Gk tests the hardening of steel by dipping

Read Sirach 32:14—33:6

Sirach comes back to the theme of right ordering, prudence in planning one's life. Included here are several images of the wise person (32:24—33:4).

Reflect: What is your attitude toward the law (33:2–3)?

Pray: Trust in the Lord, even as you prepare your thoughts, your words, your way.

Act: Do nothing without deliberation; do not be overconfident when the way seems smooth.

- 6 A seal of emerald in a rich setting of gold is the melody of music with good wine.
- 7 Speak, you who are young, if you are obliged to, but no more than twice, and only if asked.
- 8 Be brief; say much in few words; be as one who knows and can still hold his tongue.
- 9 Among the great do not act as their equal; and when another is speaking, do not babble.
- 10 Lightning travels ahead of the thunder, and approval goes before one who is modest.
- 11 Leave in good time and do not be the last; go home quickly and do not linger.
- 12 Amuse yourself there to your heart's content, but do not sin through proud speech.
- 13 But above all bless your Maker, who fills you with his good gifts.

The Providence of God

- 14 The one who seeks God^a will accept his discipline, and those who rise early to seek him^b will find favor.
- 15 The one who seeks the law will be filled with it, but the hypocrite will stumble at it.
- 16 Those who fear the Lord will form true judgments, and they will kindle righteous deeds like a light.
- 17 The sinner will shun reproof, and will find a decision according to his liking.
- 18 A sensible person will not overlook a thoughtful suggestion; an insolent^c and proud person will not be deterred by fear.^d
- 19 Do nothing without deliberation, but when you have acted, do not regret it.
- 20 Do not go on a path full of hazards, and do not stumble at an obstacle twice.^e
- 21 Do not be overconfident on a smooth^f road, and give good heed to your paths.^g
- 22
- 23 Guard^h yourself in every act, for this is the keeping of the commandments.
- 24 The one who keeps the law preserves himself,ⁱ and the one who trusts the Lord will not suffer loss.

33 No evil will befall the one who fears the Lord, but in trials such a one will be rescued again and again.

- 2 The wise will not hate the law, but the one who is hypocritical about it is like a boat in a storm.

^a Heb: Gk *who fears the Lord*

^b Other ancient authorities lack to seek him

^c Heb: Gk *alien*

^d Meaning of Gk uncertain. Other ancient authorities add *and after acting, with him, without deliberation*

^e Heb: Gk *stumble on stony ground*

^f Or *an unexplored*

^g Heb Syr: Gk *and beware of your children*

^h Heb Syr: Gk *Trust*

ⁱ Heb: Gk *who believes the law heeds the commandments*

Read Sirach 33:7–15

To give a partial answer to the question of evil, the teacher proposes a notion of pairs (good and evil, life and death, sinner and good) created by God. This theory accounts for the Jewish calendar, with appointed days and feasts and sabbaths and the ordinary days (vv. 7–9). Human beings present another example of differences, created so by God (vv. 10–13).

Reflect: Does this teaching on humans amount to a predetermination, or to a vision of variety created by God?

Pray: Ask to see how God's design works its way through so many differences.

Act: Work to see the hand and shaping of the potter (v. 13) in different human beings.

Read Sirach 33:16–19

Sirach gives an autobiographical note about his own process of gleaning and articulating wisdom sayings. It reads like an ending to a book.

Reflect: How does Sirach's work resemble that of the grape picker, or the gleaner?

Pray: Praise God for all the ways in which you have excelled, grown in wisdom.

Act: Determine that your efforts at wisdom will be undertaken to profit others.

- 3 The sensible person will trust in the law;
for such a one the law is as dependable as a
divine oracle.
- 4 Prepare what to say, and then you will be
listened to;
draw upon your training, and give your answer.
- 5 The heart of a fool is like a cart wheel,
and his thoughts like a turning axle.
- 6 A mocking friend is like a stallion
that neighs no matter who the rider is.

Differences in Nature and in Humankind

- 7 Why is one day more important than another,
when all the daylight in the year is from the
sun?
- 8 By the Lord's wisdom they were distinguished,
and he appointed the different seasons and
festivals.
- 9 Some days he exalted and hallowed,
and some he made ordinary days.
- 10 All human beings come from the ground,
and humankind^a was created out of the dust.
- 11 In the fullness of his knowledge the Lord
distinguished them
and appointed their different ways.
- 12 Some he blessed and exalted,
and some he made holy and brought near to
himself;
but some he cursed and brought low,
and turned them out of their place.
- 13 Like clay in the hand of the potter,
to be molded as he pleases,
so all are in the hand of their Maker,
to be given whatever he decides.
- 14 Good is the opposite of evil,
and life the opposite of death;
so the sinner is the opposite of the godly.
- 15 Look at all the works of the Most High;
they come in pairs, one the opposite of the
other.
- 16 Now I was the last to keep vigil;
I was like a gleaner following the grape-pickers;
- 17 by the blessing of the Lord I arrived first,
and like a grape-picker I filled my wine press.
- 18 Consider that I have not labored for myself alone,
but for all who seek instruction.
- 19 Hear me, you who are great among the people,
and you leaders of the congregation, pay heed!

^a Heb: Gk Adam

Read Sirach 33:20–33

This passage contains advice for a householder concerning property and servants.

Reflect: Sirach advises humane treatment of servants, but does not condemn slavery, much like some New Testament texts (Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:21—4:1; Philem 16). How should we “hear” such texts today?

Pray: Ask God to help you understand the various forms of slavery (economic, political, social) today.

Act: Work for the eradication of all forms of slavery in our world today.

The Advantage of Independence

- ²⁰ To son or wife, to brother or friend,
do not give power over yourself, as long as
you live;
and do not give your property to another,
in case you change your mind and must ask
for it.
- ²¹ While you are still alive and have breath in you,
do not let anyone take your place.
- ²² For it is better that your children should ask from
you
than that you should look to the hand of your
children.
- ²³ Excel in all that you do;
bring no stain upon your honor.
- ²⁴ At the time when you end the days of your life,
in the hour of death, distribute your
inheritance.

The Treatment of Slaves

- ²⁵ Fodder and a stick and burdens for a donkey;
bread and discipline and work for a slave.
- ²⁶ Set your slave to work, and you will find rest;
leave his hands idle, and he will seek liberty.
- ²⁷ Yoke and thong will bow the neck,
and for a wicked slave there are racks and
tortures.
- ²⁸ Put him to work, in order that he may not be idle,
²⁹ for idleness teaches much evil.
- ³⁰ Set him to work, as is fitting for him,
and if he does not obey, make his fetters heavy.
Do not be overbearing toward anyone,
and do nothing unjust.
- ³¹ If you have but one slave, treat him like yourself,
because you have bought him with blood.
If you have but one slave, treat him like a
brother,
for you will need him as you need your life.
- ³² If you ill-treat him, and he leaves you and runs
away,
³³ which way will you go to seek him?

Dreams Mean Nothing

34 The senseless have vain and false hopes,
and dreams give wings to fools.

² As one who catches at a shadow and pursues
the wind,

so is anyone who believes in^a dreams.

³ What is seen in dreams is but a reflection,
the likeness of a face looking at itself.

^a Syr: Gk *pays heed to*

Read Sirach 34:1–20

This section on the sources of wisdom suggests that it generally does not come from dreams but from reflecting on experience and from education in God's law.

Reflect: Consider the positive view of dreams as conveying God's wisdom in various biblical passages: Jacob, Joseph in Egypt, Joseph and Mary, the magi.

Pray: Ask to discover deeper riches of wisdom.

Act: Attend to some of your dreams and discern their message carefully, to test them.

- 4 From an unclean thing what can be clean?
And from something false what can be true?
5 Divinations and omens and dreams are unreal,
and like a woman in labor, the mind has fantasies.
6 Unless they are sent by intervention from the
Most High,
pay no attention to them.
7 For dreams have deceived many,
and those who put their hope in them have
perished.
8 Without such deceptions the law will be fulfilled,
and wisdom is complete in the mouth of the
faithful.

Experience as a Teacher

- 9 An educated^a person knows many things,
and one with much experience knows what he
is talking about.
10 An inexperienced person knows few things,
11 but he that has traveled acquires much
cleverness.
12 I have seen many things in my travels,
and I understand more than I can express.
13 I have often been in danger of death,
but have escaped because of these experiences.

Fear the Lord

- 14 The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live,
15 for their hope is in him who saves them.
16 Those who fear the Lord will not be timid,
or play the coward, for he is their hope.
17 Happy is the soul that fears the Lord!
18 To whom does he look? And who is his support?
19 The eyes of the Lord are on those who love him,
a mighty shield and strong support,
a shelter from scorching wind and a shade from
noonday sun,
a guard against stumbling and a help against
falling.
20 He lifts up the soul and makes the eyes sparkle;
he gives health and life and blessing.

Offering Sacrifices

- 21 If one sacrifices ill-gotten goods, the offering is
blemished;^b
22 the gifts^c of the lawless are not acceptable.
23 The Most High is not pleased with the offerings
of the ungodly,
nor for a multitude of sacrifices does he forgive
sins.

^a Other ancient authorities read *A traveled*

^b Other ancient authorities read *is made in mockery*

^c Other ancient authorities read *mockeries*

Read Sirach 34:21—35:26

Sirach presents here very detailed descriptions of worship in various phases and contexts.

Reflect: Which is easier for you: to fulfill religious obligations, or to respond to the everyday and ordinary demands of justice for the poor and suffering?

Pray: Beg God for a sincere heart of mercy.

Act: Identify one issue of social justice that you are in danger of ignoring.

- 24 Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes
is the person who offers a sacrifice from the
property of the poor.
- 25 The bread of the needy is the life of the poor;
whoever deprives them of it is a murderer.
- 26 To take away a neighbor's living is to commit
murder;
- 27 to deprive an employee of wages is to shed
blood.
- 28 When one builds and another tears down,
what do they gain but hard work?
- 29 When one prays and another curses,
to whose voice will the Lord listen?
- 30 If one washes after touching a corpse, and
touches it again,
what has been gained by washing?
- 31 So if one fasts for his sins,
and goes again and does the same things,
who will listen to his prayer?
And what has he gained by humbling himself?

The Law and Sacrifices

- 35** The one who keeps the law makes many
offerings;
- 2 one who heeds the commandments makes an
offering of well-being.
- 3 The one who returns a kindness offers choice
flour,
- 4 and one who gives alms sacrifices a thank
offering.
- 5 To keep from wickedness is pleasing to the Lord,
and to forsake unrighteousness is an
atonement.
- 6 Do not appear before the Lord empty-handed,
7 for all that you offer is in fulfillment of the
commandment.
- 8 The offering of the righteous enriches the altar,
and its pleasing odor rises before the Most High.
- 9 The sacrifice of the righteous is acceptable,
and it will never be forgotten.
- 10 Be generous when you worship the Lord,
and do not stint the first fruits of your hands.
- 11 With every gift show a cheerful face,
and dedicate your tithe with gladness.
- 12 Give to the Most High as he has given to you,
and as generously as you can afford.
- 13 For the Lord is the one who repays,
and he will repay you sevenfold.

Divine Justice

- 14 Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it;
 15 and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice;
 for the Lord is the judge,
 and with him there is no partiality.
- 16 He will not show partiality to the poor;
 but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged.
- 17 He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
 or the widow when she pours out her complaint.
- 18 Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek
 19 as she cries out against the one who causes them to fall?
- 20 The one whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted,
 and his prayer will reach to the clouds.
- 21 The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,
 and it will not rest until it reaches its goal;
 it will not desist until the Most High responds
- 22 and does justice for the righteous,
 and executes judgment.
 Indeed, the Lord will not delay,
 and like a warrior^a will not be patient
 until he crushes the loins of the unmerciful
- 23 and repays vengeance on the nations;
 until he destroys the multitude of the insolent,
 and breaks the scepters of the unrighteous;
- 24 until he repays mortals according to their deeds,
 and the works of all according to their thoughts;
- 25 until he judges the case of his people
 and makes them rejoice in his mercy.
- 26 His mercy is as welcome in time of distress
 as clouds of rain in time of drought.

A Prayer for God's People

- 36** Have mercy upon us, O God^b of all,
² and put all the nations in fear of you.
³ Lift up your hand against foreign nations
 and let them see your might.
- ⁴ As you have used us to show your holiness to them,
 so use them to show your glory to us.
- ⁵ Then they will know,^c as we have known,
 that there is no God but you, O Lord.
- ⁶ Give new signs, and work other wonders;
⁷ make your hand and right arm glorious.
- ⁸ Rouse your anger and pour out your wrath;
⁹ destroy the adversary and wipe out the enemy.
- ¹⁰ Hasten the day, and remember the appointed time,^d
 and let people recount your mighty deeds.
- ¹¹ Let survivors be consumed in the fiery wrath,
 and may those who harm your people meet destruction.
- ¹² Crush the heads of hostile rulers
 who say, "There is no one but ourselves."
- ¹³ Gather all the tribes of Jacob,^e
¹⁶ and give them their inheritance, as at the beginning.

^a Heb: Gk *and with them*

^b Heb: Gk *O Master, the God*

^c Heb: Gk *And let them know you*

^d Other ancient authorities read *remember your oath*

^e Owing to a dislocation in the Greek Mss of Sirach, the verse numbers 14 and 15 are not used in chapter 36, though no text is missing.

Read Sirach 36:1–22

This prayer of petition for God's saving power to be shown to Israel begins with language reminiscent of Psalm 118:25: "Save us, we beseech you, O LORD."

Reflect: What motives does Sirach propose to God (vv. 21–22)?

Pray: Ask God to show mercy to peoples who are oppressed, whom God created, and who are now endangered.

Act: Pay close and particular attention to the outcries of people who need your help today.

Read Sirach 36:23–37:26

The teacher gives a series of instructions about how to make important decisions regarding the choice of a wife, a friend, a counselor.

Reflect: Each section notes certain bad qualities that should direct one away from choosing a particular person. Which of these qualities stands out for you?

Pray: Ask for the wisdom to make appropriate, honest, and loving choices regarding the people in your life.

Act: Examine your own life patterns to learn whether you embody any of the characteristics you would avoid in others.

- 17 Have mercy, O Lord, on the people called by your name,
on Israel, whom you have named^a your firstborn,
- 18 Have pity on the city of your sanctuary,^b
Jerusalem, the place of your dwelling.^c
- 19 Fill Zion with your majesty,^d
and your temple^e with your glory.
- 20 Bear witness to those whom you created in the beginning,
and fulfill the prophecies spoken in your name.
- 21 Reward those who wait for you
and let your prophets be found trustworthy.
- 22 Hear, O Lord, the prayer of your servants,
according to your goodwill toward^f your people,
and all who are on the earth will know
that you are the Lord, the God of the ages.

Concerning Discrimination

- 23 The stomach will take any food,
yet one food is better than another.
- 24 As the palate tastes the kinds of game,
so an intelligent mind detects false words.
- 25 A perverse mind will cause grief,
but a person with experience will pay him back.
- 26 A woman will accept any man as a husband,
but one girl is preferable to another.
- 27 A woman's beauty lights up a man's face,
and there is nothing he desires more.
- 28 If kindness and humility mark her speech,
her husband is more fortunate than other men.
- 29 He who acquires a wife gets his best possession,^g
a helper fit for him and a pillar of support.^h
- 30 Where there is no fence, the property will be plundered;
and where there is no wife, a man will become a fugitive and a wanderer.ⁱ
- 31 For who will trust a nimble robber
that skips from city to city?
So who will trust a man that has no nest,
but lodges wherever night overtakes him?

False Friends

- 37** Every friend says, "I too am a friend";
but some friends are friends only in name.
- 2 Is it not a sorrow like that for death itself
when a dear friend turns into an enemy?
- 3 O inclination to evil, why were you formed
to cover the land with deceit?

^a Other ancient authorities read *you have likened to*

^b Or *on your holy city*

^c Heb: Gk *your rest*

^d Heb Syr: Gk *the celebration of your wondrous deeds*

^e Heb Syr: Gk Lat *people*

^f Heb and two Gk witnesses: Lat and most Gk witnesses read *according to the blessing of Aaron for*

^g Heb: Gk *enters upon a possession*

^h Heb: Gk *rest*

ⁱ Heb: Gk *wander about and sigh*

- 4 Some companions rejoice in the happiness of a friend, but in time of trouble they are against him.
- 5 Some companions help a friend for their stomachs' sake, yet in battle they will carry his shield.
- 6 Do not forget a friend during the battle,^a and do not be unmindful of him when you distribute your spoils.^b

Caution in Taking Advice

- 7 All counselors praise the counsel they give, but some give counsel in their own interest.
- 8 Be wary of a counselor, and learn first what is his interest, for he will take thought for himself. He may cast the lot against you
- 9 and tell you, "Your way is good," and then stand aside to see what happens to you.
- 10 Do not consult the one who regards you with suspicion; hide your intentions from those who are jealous of you.
- 11 Do not consult with a woman about her rival or with a coward about war, with a merchant about business or with a buyer about selling, with a miser about generosity^c or with the merciless about kindness, with an idler about any work or with a seasonal laborer about completing his work, with a lazy servant about a big task— pay no attention to any advice they give.
- 12 But associate with a godly person whom you know to be a keeper of the commandments,

who is like-minded with yourself, and who will grieve with you if you fail.

- 13 And heed^d the counsel of your own heart, for no one is more faithful to you than it is.
- 14 For our own mind sometimes keeps us better informed than seven sentinels sitting high on a watchtower.
- 15 But above all pray to the Most High that he may direct your way in truth.

True and False Wisdom

- 16 Discussion is the beginning of every work, and counsel precedes every undertaking.
- 17 The mind is the root of all conduct;
- 18 it sprouts four branches,^e good and evil, life and death; and it is the tongue that continually rules them.
- 19 Some people may be clever enough to teach many, and yet be useless to themselves.
- 20 A skillful speaker may be hated; he will be destitute of all food,
- 21 for the Lord has withheld the gift of charm, since he is lacking in all wisdom.
- 22 If a person is wise to his own advantage, the fruits of his good sense will be praiseworthy.^f
- 23 A wise person instructs his own people, and the fruits of his good sense will endure.
- 24 A wise person will have praise heaped upon him, and all who see him will call him happy.
- 25 The days of a person's life are numbered,

^a Heb: Gk *in your heart*

^b Heb: Gk *him in your wealth*

^c Heb: Gk *gratitude*

^d Heb: Gk *establish*

^e Heb: Gk *As a clue to changes of heart four kinds of destiny appear*

^f Other ancient witnesses read *trustworthy*

but the days of Israel are without number.

- ²⁶ One who is wise among his people will inherit honor,^a and his name will live forever.

Concerning Moderation

- ²⁷ My child, test yourself while you live; see what is bad for you and do not give in to it.

- ²⁸ For not everything is good for everyone, and no one enjoys everything.
²⁹ Do not be greedy for every delicacy, and do not eat without restraint;
³⁰ for overeating brings sickness, and gluttony leads to nausea.
³¹ Many have died of gluttony, but the one who guards against it prolongs his life.

Read Sirach 37:27—38:23

This section contains instructions on maintaining temperance (especially by avoiding gluttony) and how to deal with illness and death.

Reflect: What basic reasons does Sirach offer for respecting physicians and pharmacists?

Pray: Take time to pray, by name, for those whom you know to be sick, and for care-givers.

Act: Consider some ways to help enhance the image of those involved in healing professions and ministries.

Concerning Physicians and Health

- 38** Honor physicians for their services, for the Lord created them;
² for their gift of healing comes from the Most High, and they are rewarded by the king.
³ The skill of physicians makes them distinguished, and in the presence of the great they are admired.
⁴ The Lord created medicines out of the earth, and the sensible will not despise them.
⁵ Was not water made sweet with a tree in order that its^b power might be known?
⁶ And he gave skill to human beings that he^c might be glorified in his marvelous works.
⁷ By them the physician^d heals and takes away pain;
⁸ the pharmacist makes a mixture from them. God's^e works will never be finished; and from him health^f spreads over all the earth.
⁹ My child, when you are ill, do not delay, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you.
¹⁰ Give up your faults and direct your hands rightly, and cleanse your heart from all sin.
¹¹ Offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice, and a memorial portion of choice flour, and pour oil on your offering, as much as you can afford.^g
¹² Then give the physician his place, for the Lord created him; do not let him leave you, for you need him.
¹³ There may come a time when recovery lies in the hands of physicians,^h
¹⁴ for they too pray to the Lord that he grant them success in diagnosisⁱ and in healing, for the sake of preserving life.
¹⁵ He who sins against his Maker, will be defiant toward the physician.^j

^a Other ancient authorities read *confidence*

^b Or *his*

^c Or *they*

^d Heb: Gk *he*

^e Gk *His*

^f Or *peace*

^g Heb: Lat lacks *as much as you can afford*; Meaning of Gk uncertain

^h Gk *in their hands*

ⁱ Heb: Gk *rest*

^j Heb: Gk *may he fall into the hands of the physician*

Read Sirach 38:24—39:11

Attention turns to human occupations. Sirach contrasts the life of tradespersons (38:25–34) with that of scribes (39:1–11).

Reflect: What is the basic difference between the work of scribes and that of others? Is leisure a requirement for the work of scribes? Consider that the prayer of workers may consist of the practice of their trade.

Pray: Test out the style of prayer recommended for scribes (39:5–8).

Act: Consider ways to assign value and worth to all kinds of work.

On Mourning for the Dead

- 16 My child, let your tears fall for the dead,
and as one in great pain begin the lament.
Lay out the body with due ceremony,
and do not neglect the burial.
- 17 Let your weeping be bitter and your wailing
fervent;
make your mourning worthy of the departed,
for one day, or two, to avoid criticism;
then be comforted for your grief.
- 18 For grief may result in death,
and a sorrowful heart saps one's strength.
- 19 When a person is taken away, sorrow is over;
but the life of the poor weighs down the heart.
- 20 Do not give your heart to grief;
drive it away, and remember your own end.
- 21 Do not forget, there is no coming back;
you do the dead^a no good, and you injure
yourself.
- 22 Remember his^b fate, for yours is like it;
yesterday it was his,^c and today it is yours.
- 23 When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance
rest too,
and be comforted for him when his spirit has
departed.

Trades and Crafts

- 24 The wisdom of the scribe depends on the
opportunity of leisure;
only the one who has little business can
become wise.
- 25 How can one become wise who handles the plow,
and who glories in the shaft of a goad,
who drives oxen and is occupied with their work,
and whose talk is about bulls?
- 26 He sets his heart on plowing furrows,
and he is careful about fodder for the heifers.
- 27 So it is with every artisan and master artisan
who labors by night as well as by day;
those who cut the signets of seals,
each is diligent in making a great variety;
they set their heart on painting a lifelike image,
and they are careful to finish their work.
- 28 So it is with the smith, sitting by the anvil,
intent on his iron-work;
the breath of the fire melts his flesh,
and he struggles with the heat of the furnace;
the sound of the hammer deafens his ears,^d
and his eyes are on the pattern of the object.
He sets his heart on finishing his handiwork,
and he is careful to complete its decoration.

^a Gk *him*

^b Heb: Gk *my*

^c Heb: Gk *mine*

^d Cn: Gk *renews his ear*

- 29 So it is with the potter sitting at his work
and turning the wheel with his feet;
he is always deeply concerned over his products,
and he produces them in quantity.
- 30 He molds the clay with his arm
and makes it pliable with his feet;
he sets his heart to finish the glazing,
and he takes care in firing^a the kiln.
- 31 All these rely on their hands,
and all are skillful in their own work.
- 32 Without them no city can be inhabited,
and wherever they live, they will not go hungry.^b
Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people,^c

- 33 nor do they attain eminence in the public assembly.
They do not sit in the judge's seat,
nor do they understand the decisions of the courts;
they cannot expound discipline or judgment,
and they are not found among the rulers.^d
- 34 But they maintain the fabric of the world,
and their concern is for^e the exercise of their trade.

The Activity of the Scribe

How different the one who devotes himself
to the study of the law of the Most High!

- 39** He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,
and is concerned with prophecies;
2 he preserves the sayings of the famous
and penetrates the subtleties of parables;
3 he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs
and is at home with the obscurities of parables.
- 4 He serves among the great
and appears before rulers;
he travels in foreign lands
and learns what is good and evil in the human lot.
- 5 He sets his heart to rise early
to seek the Lord who made him,
and to petition the Most High;
he opens his mouth in prayer
and asks pardon for his sins.
- 6 If the great Lord is willing,
he will be filled with the spirit of understanding;
he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own
and give thanks to the Lord in prayer.
- 7 The Lord^f will direct his counsel and knowledge,
as he meditates on his mysteries.
- 8 He will show the wisdom of what he has learned,
and will glory in the law of the Lord's covenant.
- 9 Many will praise his understanding;
it will never be blotted out.
His memory will not disappear,
and his name will live through all generations.
- 10 Nations will speak of his wisdom,
and the congregation will proclaim his praise.

^a Cn: Gk *cleaning*

^b Syr: Gk *and people can neither live nor walk there*

^c Most ancient authorities lack this line

^d Cn: Gk *among parables*

^e Syr: Gk *prayer is in*

^f Gk *He himself*

Read Sirach 39:12–35

This hymn of praise includes an introductory call to praise (vv. 12–15) and a listing of the many reasons to praise God (vv. 16–35).

Reflect: Consider the power of God’s word in creation (vv. 17, 18, 31, 33).

Pray: Praise God for all the works that are mentioned in this passage.

Act: Take opportunities to discourse on the wisdom and beauty in creation.

- 11 If he lives long, he will leave a name greater than a thousand,
and if he goes to rest, it is enough^a for him.

A Hymn of Praise to God

- 12 I have more on my mind to express;
I am full like the full moon.
- 13 Listen to me, my faithful children, and blossom like a rose growing by a stream of water.
- 14 Send out fragrance like incense,
and put forth blossoms like a lily.
Scatter the fragrance, and sing a hymn of praise;
bless the Lord for all his works.
- 15 Ascribe majesty to his name
and give thanks to him with praise,
with songs on your lips, and with harps;
this is what you shall say in thanksgiving:
- 16 “All the works of the Lord are very good,
and whatever he commands will be done at the appointed time.
- 17 No one can say, ‘What is this?’ or ‘Why is that?’—
for at the appointed time all such questions will be answered.
At his word the waters stood in a heap,
and the reservoirs of water at the word of his mouth.
- 18 When he commands, his every purpose is fulfilled,
and none can limit his saving power.
- 19 The works of all are before him,
and nothing can be hidden from his eyes.
- 20 From the beginning to the end of time he can see everything,
and nothing is too marvelous for him.
- 21 No one can say, ‘What is this?’ or ‘Why is that?’—
for everything has been created for its own purpose.
- 22 “His blessing covers the dry land like a river,
and drenches it like a flood.
- 23 But his wrath drives out the nations,
as when he turned a watered land into salt.
- 24 To the faithful his ways are straight,
but full of pitfalls for the wicked.
- 25 From the beginning good things were created for the good,
but for sinners good things and bad.^b
- 26 The basic necessities of human life are water and fire and iron and salt
and wheat flour and milk and honey,
the blood of the grape and oil and clothing.

^a Cn: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Heb Lat: Gk *sinners bad things*

- 27 All these are good for the godly,
but for sinners they turn into evils.
- 28 “There are winds created for
vengeance,
and in their anger they can
dislodge mountains;^a
on the day of reckoning they will
pour out their strength
and calm the anger of their Maker.
- 29 Fire and hail and famine and
pestilence,
all these have been created for
vengeance;
- 30 the fangs of wild animals and
scorpions and vipers,
and the sword that punishes the
ungodly with destruction.
- 31 They take delight in doing his bidding,

always ready for his service on
earth;
and when their time comes they
never disobey his command.”

- 32 So from the beginning I have been
convinced of all this
and have thought it out and left it
in writing:
- 33 All the works of the Lord are good,
and he will supply every need in
its time.
- 34 No one can say, “This is not as good
as that,”
for everything proves good in its
appointed time.
- 35 So now sing praise with all your
heart and voice,
and bless the name of the Lord.

Read Sirach 40

This collection of sayings on the joy and sadness of human life includes sections on the general human condition, on just actions and confidence in life, on the joys of simply being alive, and on the sadness of begging.

Reflect: Examine thoughtfully the different effects of holding riches, almsgiving, and begging.

Pray: Contemplate the power of fear of God, which is stronger than any other human experience.

Act: Compare some of the psychic anxieties (vv. 5–7) of Sirach’s day with contemporary worries and situations that harm people.

Human Wretchedness

40 Hard work was created for everyone,
and a heavy yoke is laid on the children of Adam,
from the day they come forth from their
mother’s womb
until the day they return to^b the mother of all
the living.^c

- 2 Perplexities and fear of heart are theirs,
and anxious thought of the day of their death.
- 3 From the one who sits on a splendid throne
to the one who grovels in dust and ashes,
4 from the one who wears purple and a crown
to the one who is clothed in burlap,
5 there is anger and envy and trouble and unrest,
and fear of death, and fury and strife.
And when one rests upon his bed,
his sleep at night confuses his mind.
- 6 He gets little or no rest;
he struggles in his sleep as he did by day.^d
He is troubled by the visions of his mind
like one who has escaped from the battlefield.
- 7 At the moment he reaches safety he wakes up,
astonished that his fears were groundless.
- 8 To all creatures, human and animal,
but to sinners seven times more,
9 come death and bloodshed and strife and sword,
calamities and famine and ruin and plague.
- 10 All these were created for the wicked,
and on their account the flood came.
- 11 All that is of earth returns to earth,
and what is from above returns above.^e

^a Heb Syr: Gk *can scourge mightily*

^b Other Gk and Lat authorities read *are buried in*

^c Heb: Gk of *all*

^d Arm: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^e Heb Syr: Gk Lat *from the waters returns to the sea*

Injustice Will Not Prosper

- 12 All bribery and injustice will be blotted out,
but good faith will last forever.
- 13 The wealth of the unjust will dry up like a river,
and crash like a loud clap of thunder in a storm.
- 14 As a generous person has cause to rejoice,
so lawbreakers will utterly fail.
- 15 The children of the ungodly put out few branches;
they are unhealthy roots on sheer rock.
- 16 The reeds by any water or river bank are plucked up before any grass;
17 but kindness is like a garden of blessings,
and almsgiving endures forever.

The Joys of Life

- 18 Wealth and wages make life sweet,^a
but better than either is finding a treasure.
- 19 Children and the building of a city establish one's name,
but better than either is the one who finds wisdom.
Cattle and orchards make one prosperous;^b
but a blameless wife is accounted better than either.
- 20 Wine and music gladden the heart,
but the love of friends^c is better than either.
- 21 The flute and the harp make sweet melody,
but a pleasant voice is better than either.
- 22 The eye desires grace and beauty,

- but the green shoots of grain more than either.
- 23 A friend or companion is always welcome,
but a sensible wife^d is better than either.
- 24 Kindred and helpers are for a time of trouble,
but almsgiving rescues better than either.
- 25 Gold and silver make one stand firm,
but good counsel is esteemed more than either.
- 26 Riches and strength build up confidence,
but the fear of the Lord is better than either.
There is no want in the fear of the Lord,
and with it there is no need to seek for help.
- 27 The fear of the Lord is like a garden of blessing,
and covers a person better than any glory.

The Disgrace of Begging

- 28 My child, do not lead the life of a beggar;
it is better to die than to beg.
- 29 When one looks to the table of another,
one's way of life cannot be considered a life.
One loses self-respect with another person's food,
but one who is intelligent and well instructed guards against that.
- 30 In the mouth of the shameless begging is sweet,
but it kindles a fire inside him.

Concerning Death

41 O death, how bitter is the thought of you to the one at peace among possessions, who has nothing to worry about and is prosperous in everything,
and still is vigorous enough to enjoy food!

- 2 O death, how welcome is your sentence to one who is needy and failing in strength,

^a Heb: Gk *Life is sweet for the self-reliant worker*

^b Heb Syr: Gk lacks *but better...prosperous*

^c Heb: Gk *wisdom*

^d Heb Compare Syr: Gk *wife with her husband*

Read Sirach 41:1—42:14

Here are listed various things that should cause a wise person to worry or to be ashamed: death, frightening to some but welcome to others (41:1–4); the fact that the offspring of sinners are reprobates and suffer disgrace (41:5–13); issues that should and should not shame one (41:14—42:8); worry over a daughter (42:9–14).

Reflect: The section on daughters is colored by fear of women (at best); do you think it reflects more on the cultural situation or on the author?

Pray: Ask for the fear of God when evaluating various kinds of behaviors.

Act: Determine when and how to move beyond established (and biased) social structures.

- worn down by age and anxious about everything;
to one who is contrary, and has lost all patience!
- 3 Do not fear death's decree for you;
remember those who went before you and
those who will come after.
- 4 This is the Lord's decree for all flesh;
why then should you reject the will of the Most
High?
Whether life lasts for ten years or a hundred or a
thousand,
there are no questions asked in Hades.

The Fate of the Wicked

- 5 The children of sinners are abominable children,
and they frequent the haunts of the ungodly.
- 6 The inheritance of the children of sinners will
perish,
and on their offspring will be a perpetual
disgrace.
- 7 Children will blame an ungodly father,
for they suffer disgrace because of him.
- 8 Woe to you, the ungodly,
who have forsaken the law of the Most High God!
- 9 If you have children, calamity will be theirs;
you will beget them only for groaning.
When you stumble, there is lasting joy;^a
and when you die, a curse is your lot.
- 10 Whatever comes from earth returns to earth;
so the ungodly go from curse to destruction.
- 11 The human body is a fleeting thing,
but a virtuous name will never be blotted out.^b
- 12 Have regard for your name, since it will outlive you
longer than a thousand hoards of gold.
- 13 The days of a good life are numbered,
but a good name lasts forever.
- 14 My children, be true to your training and be at
peace;
hidden wisdom and unseen treasure—
of what value is either?

A Series of Contrasts

- 15 Better are those who hide their folly
than those who hide their wisdom.
- 16 Therefore show respect for my words;
for it is not good to feel shame in every
circumstance,
nor is every kind of abashment to be approved.^c
- 17 Be ashamed of sexual immorality, before your
father or mother;

^a Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Heb: Gk *People grieve over the death of the body, but the bad name of sinners will be blotted out*

^c Heb: Gk *and not everything is confidently esteemed by everyone*

- and of a lie, before a prince or a ruler;
 18 of a crime, before a judge or magistrate;
 and of a breach of the law, before the congregation and the people;
 of unjust dealing, before your partner or your friend;
 19 and of theft, in the place where you live.
 Be ashamed of breaking an oath or agreement,^a
 and of leaning on your elbow at meals;
 of surliness in receiving or giving,
 20 and of silence, before those who greet you;
 of looking at a prostitute,
 21 and of rejecting the appeal of a relative;
 of taking away someone's portion or gift,
 and of gazing at another man's wife;
 22 of meddling with his servant-girl—
 and do not approach her bed;
 of abusive words, before friends—
 and do not be insulting after making a gift.

42 Be ashamed of repeating what you hear, and of betraying secrets.

Then you will show proper shame,
 and will find favor with everyone.

Of the following things do not be ashamed,
 and do not sin to save face:

- 2 Do not be ashamed of the law of the Most High
 and his covenant,
 and of rendering judgment to acquit the
 ungodly;
- 3 of keeping accounts with a partner or with
 traveling companions,
 and of dividing the inheritance of friends;
- 4 of accuracy with scales and weights,
 and of acquiring much or little;
- 5 of profit from dealing with merchants,
 and of frequent disciplining of children,
 and of drawing blood from the back of a
 wicked slave.
- 6 Where there is an untrustworthy wife, a seal is a
 good thing;
 and where there are many hands, lock
 things up.
- 7 When you make a deposit, be sure it is counted
 and weighed,
 and when you give or receive, put it all in
 writing.
- 8 Do not be ashamed to correct the stupid or foolish
 or the aged who are guilty of sexual immorality.
 Then you will show your sound training,
 and will be approved by all.

Daughters and Fathers

- 9 A daughter is a secret anxiety to her father,
 and worry over her robs him of sleep;

^a Heb: Gk before the truth of God and the covenant

Read Sirach 42:15—43:33

This section begins with a lovely reflection on God's wisdom in creation, effected by God's word, which leads to a vision of divine power and beauty (42:15–25). There follows a description of the wonders of the sky and the ocean (43:1–26). The section concludes with a summons to praise God the creator (43:27–33).

Reflect: How many wonders of creation can you discover in this listing? How inclusive is this list?

Pray: Reflect meditatively on God's acting for good of all in nature, even in our own day.

Act: Plan a course of action that strengthens appreciation and protection of nature, focusing on finding and praising God in all things.

- when she is young, for fear she may not marry,
 or if married, for fear she may be disliked;
 10 while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced
 and become pregnant in her father's house;
 or having a husband, for fear she may go astray,
 or, though married, for fear she may be barren.
 11 Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
 or she may make you a laughingstock to your
 enemies,
 a byword in the city and the assembly of^a the
 people,
 and put you to shame in public gatherings.^b
 See that there is no lattice in her room,
 no spot that overlooks the approaches to the
 house.^c
 12 Do not let her parade her beauty before any man,
 or spend her time among married women;^a
 13 for from garments comes the moth,
 and from a woman comes woman's wickedness.
 14 Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman
 who does good;
 it is woman who brings shame and disgrace.

The Works of God in Nature

- 15 I will now call to mind the works of the Lord,
 and will declare what I have seen.
 By the word of the Lord his works are made;
 and all his creatures do his will.^d
 16 The sun looks down on everything with its light,
 and the work of the Lord is full of his glory.
 17 The Lord has not empowered even his holy ones
 to recount all his marvelous works,
 which the Lord the Almighty has established
 so that the universe may stand firm in his glory.
 18 He searches out the abyss and the human heart;
 he understands their innermost secrets.
 For the Most High knows all that may be known;
 he sees from of old the things that are to come.^e
 19 He discloses what has been and what is to be,
 and he reveals the traces of hidden things.
 20 No thought escapes him,
 and nothing is hidden from him.
 21 He has set in order the splendors of his wisdom;
 he is from all eternity one and the same.
 Nothing can be added or taken away,
 and he needs no one to be his counselor.
 22 How desirable are all his works,
 and how sparkling they are to see!^f
 23 All these things live and remain forever;
 each creature is preserved to meet a
 particular need.^g

^a Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Heb: Gk *to shame before the great multitude*

^c Heb: Gk lacks *See...house*

^d Syr Compare Heb: most Gk witnesses lack *and all...will*

^e Heb: Gk *he sees the sign(s) of the age*

^f Meaning of Gk uncertain

^g Heb: Gk *forever for every need, and all are obedient*

24 All things come in pairs, one
opposite the other,
and he has made nothing
incomplete.

25 Each supplements the virtues of the
other.
Who could ever tire of seeing his
glory?

The Splendor of the Sun

43 The pride of the higher realms is the clear
vault of the sky,
as glorious to behold as the sight of the
heavens.

2 The sun, when it appears, proclaims as it rises
what a marvelous instrument it is, the work of
the Most High.

3 At noon it parches the land,
and who can withstand its burning heat?

4 A man tending^a a furnace works in burning heat,
but three times as hot is the sun scorching the
mountains;
it breathes out fiery vapors,
and its bright rays blind the eyes.

5 Great is the Lord who made it;
at his orders it hurries on its course.

The Splendor of the Moon

6 It is the moon that marks the changing
seasons,^b
governing the times, their everlasting sign.

7 From the moon comes the sign for festal days,
a light that wanes when it completes its course.

8 The new moon, as its name suggests, renews
itself;^c
how marvelous it is in this change,
a beacon to the hosts on high,
shining in the vault of the heavens!

The Glory of the Stars and the Rainbow

9 The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven,
a glittering array in the heights of the Lord.

10 On the orders of the Holy One they stand in their
appointed places;
they never relax in their watches.

11 Look at the rainbow, and praise him who made it;
it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness.

12 It encircles the sky with its glorious arc;
the hands of the Most High have stretched it
out.

The Marvels of Nature

13 By his command he sends the driving snow
and speeds the lightnings of his judgment.

^a Other ancient authorities read *blowing upon*

^b Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^c Heb: Gk *The month is named after the moon*

- 14 Therefore the storehouses are opened,
and the clouds fly out like birds.
- 15 In his majesty he gives the clouds
their strength,
and the hailstones are broken in
pieces.
- 17^a The voice of his thunder rebukes the
earth;
- 16 when he appears, the mountains
shake.
At his will the south wind blows;
17^b so do the storm from the north
and the whirlwind.
He scatters the snow like birds flying
down,
and its descent is like locusts
alighting.
- 18 The eye is dazzled by the beauty of
its whiteness,
and the mind is amazed as it falls.
- 19 He pours frost over the earth like salt,
and icicles form like pointed
thorns.
- 20 The cold north wind blows,
and ice freezes on the water;
it settles on every pool of water,
and the water puts it on like a
breastplate.
- 21 He consumes the mountains and
burns up the wilderness,
and withers the tender grass like fire.
- 22 A mist quickly heals all things;
the falling dew gives refreshment
from the heat.
- 23 By his plan he stilled the deep
and planted islands in it.
- 24 Those who sail the sea tell of its
dangers,
and we marvel at what we hear.
- 25 In it are strange and marvelous
creatures,
all kinds of living things, and huge
sea-monsters.
- 26 Because of him each of his
messengers succeeds,
and by his word all things hold
together.
- 27 We could say more but could never
say enough;
let the final word be: "He is the all."
- 28 Where can we find the strength to
praise him?
For he is greater than all his works.
- 29 Awesome is the Lord and very great,
and marvelous is his power.
- 30 Glorify the Lord and exalt him as
much as you can,
for he surpasses even that.
When you exalt him, summon all
your strength,
and do not grow weary, for you
cannot praise him enough.
- 31 Who has seen him and can describe
him?
Or who can extol him as he is?
- 32 Many things greater than these lie
hidden,
for I^a have seen but few of his
works.
- 33 For the Lord has made all things,
and to the godly he has given
wisdom.

HYMN IN HONOR OF OUR ANCESTORS^b

- 44** Let us now sing the praises of famous men,
our ancestors in their generations.
- 2 The Lord apportioned to them^c great glory,
his majesty from the beginning.
- 3 There were those who ruled in their kingdoms,
and made a name for themselves by their valor;
those who gave counsel because they were
intelligent;
those who spoke in prophetic oracles;
- 4 those who led the people by their counsels
and by their knowledge of the people's lore;
they were wise in their words of instruction;

^a Heb: Gk we

^b This title is included in the Gk text.

^c Heb: Gk created

Read Sirach 44

In chapters 44–50, the author praises the fidelity of the great leaders of Israel through the centuries. He begins by showing they were renowned in every imaginable way. Above all, he says, they are remembered for their good deeds in life and their faithfulness to God's covenant and law. He then gives examples up to the great patriarchs of old, all of whom handed on love of the covenant to their posterity.

Reflect: Sirach clearly praises the wisdom of Israel's great leaders from Noah to Jacob because they made the right decision to obey with humility and faithfulness the commands given by God and taught their descendants to do the same.

Pray: Ask that God will strengthen us to always give good example to our families, especially our children, as well as to our friends and co-workers.

Act: Consider behaviors of yours that you would not want others to imitate and seek ways to change these behaviors.

Note on Sirach 44: This chapter reflects stories and information found in the book of Genesis. In Sirach 49, the author has a small section (vv. 14–16) that belongs with this chapter; the section has references to Enoch (Gen 5), Joseph (Gen 37–50), and Shem, Seth, and Enosh (Gen 4:25–26).

- 5 those who composed musical tunes,
or put verses in writing;
- 6 rich men endowed with resources,
living peacefully in their homes—
- 7 all these were honored in their generations,
and were the pride of their times.
- 8 Some of them have left behind a name,
so that others declare their praise.
- 9 But of others there is no memory;
they have perished as though they had never
existed;
they have become as though they had never
been born,
they and their children after them.
- 10 But these also were godly men,
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;
- 11 their wealth will remain with their descendants,
and their inheritance with their children's
children.^a
- 12 Their descendants stand by the covenants;
their children also, for their sake.
- 13 Their offspring will continue forever,
and their glory will never be blotted out.
- 14 Their bodies are buried in peace,
but their name lives on generation after generation.
- 15 The assembly declares^b their wisdom,
and the congregation proclaims their praise.

Enoch

- 16 Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up,
an example of repentance to all generations.

Noah

- 17 Noah was found perfect and righteous;
in the time of wrath he kept the race alive;^c
therefore a remnant was left on the earth
when the flood came.
- 18 Everlasting covenants were made with him
that all flesh should never again be blotted out
by a flood.

Abraham

- 19 Abraham was the great father of a multitude of
nations,
and no one has been found like him in glory.
- 20 He kept the law of the Most High,
and entered into a covenant with him;
he certified the covenant in his flesh,
and when he was tested he proved faithful.
- 21 Therefore the Lord^d assured him with an oath
that the nations would be blessed through his
offspring;

^a Heb Compare Lat Syr: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^b Heb: Gk *Peoples declare*

^c Heb: Gk *was taken in exchange*

^d Gk *he*

that he would make him as numerous
as the dust of the earth,
and exalt his offspring like the stars,
and give them an inheritance from
sea to sea
and from the Euphrates^a to the ends
of the earth.

Isaac and Jacob

²² To Isaac also he gave the same
assurance

for the sake of his father
Abraham.
The blessing of all people and the
covenant
²³ he made to rest on the head of Jacob;
he acknowledged him with his
blessings,
and gave him his inheritance;
he divided his portions,
and distributed them among
twelve tribes.

Read Sirach 45

The heroes in this chapter come from the exodus: Moses, Aaron, and Phinehas. Since Moses gets only five verses, praise is given largely to Aaron and Phinehas for their priestly office. Sirach sees wisdom above all as the law given by God to Israel, and the priests as the teachers and protectors of that law.

Reflect: Moses is remembered for the great authority and special relationship God gave to him to hand over the law to Israel. Aaron is praised for being the faithful teacher of that law. Because of their loyalty, God blessed and favored them.

Pray: Ask that we might be as faithful and zealous in doing God's will as were Moses and Aaron, and especially that we might imitate the love and devotion for God himself that moved them to such zeal.

Act: We often claim to be faithful in prayer and observant to honor God above all else, but we should examine ourselves to see how careless we often are in the practice of prayer and worship.

Moses

From his descendants the Lord^b
brought forth a godly man,
45 who found favor in the sight of all
¹ and was beloved by God and people,
Moses, whose memory is blessed.
² He made him equal in glory to the holy ones,
and made him great, to the terror of his enemies.
³ By his words he performed swift miracles;^c
the Lord^b glorified him in the presence of kings.
He gave him commandments for his people,
and revealed to him his glory.
⁴ For his faithfulness and meekness he
consecrated him,
choosing him out of all humankind.
⁵ He allowed him to hear his voice,
and led him into the dark cloud,
and gave him the commandments face to face,
the law of life and knowledge,
so that he might teach Jacob the covenant,
and Israel his decrees.

Aaron

⁶ He exalted Aaron, a holy man like Moses^d
who was his brother, of the tribe of Levi.
⁷ He made an everlasting covenant with him,
and gave him the priesthood of the people.
He blessed him with stateliness,
and put a glorious robe on him.
⁸ He clothed him in perfect splendor,
and strengthened him with the symbols of
authority,
the linen undergarments, the long robe, and the
ephod.
⁹ And he encircled him with pomegranates,
with many golden bells all around,
to send forth a sound as he walked,
to make their ringing heard in the temple
as a reminder to his people;

^a Syr: Heb Gk River

^b Gk he

^c Heb: Gk caused signs to cease

^d Gk him

Note on Sirach 45: Sources for the references to Moses in this chapter can be found in Exodus 2, 11, and 33 and in Numbers 12; The incidents about Aaron can be found in Exodus 28–29 and in Numbers 16–18; and the story of Phinehas comes from Numbers 25. The reference to David giving an inheritance to one son alone reflects 2 Samuel 7.

- 10 with the sacred vestment, of gold and violet
and purple, the work of an embroiderer;
with the oracle of judgment, Urim and Thummim;
- 11 with twisted crimson, the work of an artisan;
with precious stones engraved like seals,
in a setting of gold, the work of a jeweler,
to commemorate in engraved letters
each of the tribes of Israel;
- 12 with a gold crown upon his turban,
inscribed like a seal with “Holiness,”
a distinction to be prized, the work of an expert,
a delight to the eyes, richly adorned.
- 13 Before him such beautiful things did not exist.
No outsider ever put them on,
but only his sons
and his descendants in perpetuity.
- 14 His sacrifices shall be wholly burned
twice every day continually.
- 15 Moses ordained him,
and anointed him with holy oil;
it was an everlasting covenant for him
and for his descendants as long as the
heavens endure,
to minister to the Lord^a and serve as priest
and bless his people in his name.
- 16 He chose him out of all the living
to offer sacrifice to the Lord,
incense and a pleasing odor as a memorial portion,
to make atonement for the^b people.
- 17 In his commandments he gave him
authority and statutes and^c judgments,
to teach Jacob the testimonies,
and to enlighten Israel with his law.
- 18 Outsiders conspired against him,
and envied him in the wilderness,
Dathan and Abiram and their followers
and the company of Korah, in wrath and anger.
- 19 The Lord saw it and was not pleased,
and in the heat of his anger they were destroyed;
he performed wonders against them
to consume them in flaming fire.
- 20 He added glory to Aaron
and gave him a heritage;
he allotted to him the best of the first fruits,
and prepared bread of first fruits in abundance;
- 21 for they eat the sacrifices of the Lord,
which he gave to him and his descendants.
- 22 But in the land of the people he has no
inheritance,
and he has no portion among the people;
for the Lord^d himself is his^e portion and inheritance.

^a Gk *him*

^b Other ancient authorities read *his* or *your*

^c Heb: Gk *authority in covenants of*

^d Gk *he*

^e Other ancient authorities read *your*

Phinehas

- 23 Phinehas son of Eleazar ranks third
in glory
for being zealous in the fear of the
Lord,
and standing firm, when the people
turned away,
in the noble courage of his soul;
and he made atonement for Israel.
- 24 Therefore a covenant of friendship
was established with him,
that he should be leader of the
sanctuary and of his people,
that he and his descendants should
have
the dignity of the priesthood forever.

- 25 Just as a covenant was established
with David
son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah,
that the king's heritage passes only
from son to son,
so the heritage of Aaron is for his
descendants alone.
- 26 And now bless the Lord
who has crowned you with glory.^a
May the Lord^b grant you wisdom of
mind
to judge his people with justice,
so that their prosperity may not
vanish,
and that their glory may endure
through all their generations.

Read Sirach 46

This chapter extols Joshua, Caleb, the judges, and the prophet Samuel who lived between 1250 and 1050 BC. Each of these loyal servants of God is praised for his loyalty to the Lord, a loyalty rewarded by the great power they wielded through God's help.

Reflect: Joshua was a famous warrior who conquered the Holy Land, but Sirach praises him for his devotion to God's cause. The same is true of Caleb, the judges, and especially Samuel, who excelled in both war and in teaching the law. He was trustworthy and a man of consistent integrity.

Pray: Let us seek the gift of perseverance in hard times and in struggle, knowing that God will be our help and support in all our efforts, as he was to these leaders in Israel's most perilous times.

Act: Take inventory of the areas of life in which you want to do what is right but often give up easily or let your convictions slide; resolve to persevere in your efforts.

Joshua and Caleb

- 46** Joshua son of Nun was mighty in war,
and was the successor of Moses in the
prophetic office.
He became, as his name implies,
a great savior of God's^c elect,
to take vengeance on the enemies that rose
against them,
so that he might give Israel its inheritance.
- 2 How glorious he was when he lifted his hands
and brandished his sword against the cities!
- 3 Who before him ever stood so firm?
For he waged the wars of the Lord.
- 4 Was it not through him that the sun stood still
and one day became as long as two?
- 5 He called upon the Most High, the Mighty One,
when enemies pressed him on every side,
and the great Lord answered him
with hailstones of mighty power.
- 6 He overwhelmed that nation in battle,
and on the slope he destroyed his opponents,
so that the nations might know his armament,
that he was fighting in the sight of the Lord;
for he was a devoted follower of the Mighty One.
- 7 And in the days of Moses he proved his loyalty,
he and Caleb son of Jephunneh:
they opposed the congregation,^d
restrained the people from sin,
and stilled their wicked grumbling.
- 8 And these two alone were spared
out of six hundred thousand infantry,
to lead the people^e into their inheritance,
the land flowing with milk and honey.

^a Heb: Gk lacks *And...glory*

^b Gk *he*

^c Gk *his*

^d Other ancient authorities read *the enemy*

^e Gk *them*

Note on Sirach 46: Joshua's exploits are described in Exodus 17, Numbers 27, and Deuteronomy 34, as well as in the book of Joshua; Caleb can be found in Numbers 13–14 and Judges 1. The stories of the rest of the judges are in the book of Judges and Samuel's deeds are narrated in 1 Samuel 1–16.

Read Sirach 47

David and Solomon represent the next stage of God's blessings to Israel in the tenth century BC. Under them the kingdom reached its highest glory. David is remembered both for his prowess in battle and for the psalms he wrote; Solomon is remembered for building the temple and for his wisdom, which was known to all nations.

Reflect: Both David and Solomon achieved great fame for their achievements, but both also sinned gravely. David repented and grew in his love for God, while Solomon gradually drifted away from God in his love for foreign wives.

Pray: Let us pray that we may make generous use of the gifts we have received from God without losing sight of the giver.

Act: As with the man who received ten talents and made ten more, we need to identify the gifts God gave us and ask how we as God's servants are using them for others.

Note on Sirach 47: The story of David is related in 1 Samuel 16–31 and 2 Samuel; Nathan the prophet plays an important role in 2 Samuel 12 and 1 Kings 1–2. Solomon's career is treated in 1 Kings 3–11, and that of Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12–13.

- 9 The Lord gave Caleb strength,
which remained with him in his old age,
so that he went up to the hill country,
and his children obtained it for an inheritance,
10 so that all the Israelites might see
how good it is to follow the Lord.

The Judges

- 11 The judges also, with their respective names,
whose hearts did not fall into idolatry
and who did not turn away from the Lord—
may their memory be blessed!
12 May their bones send forth new life from where
they lie,
and may the names of those who have been
honored
live again in their children!
13 Samuel was beloved by his Lord;
a prophet of the Lord, he established the kingdom
and anointed rulers over his people.
14 By the law of the Lord he judged the congregation,
and the Lord watched over Jacob.
15 By his faithfulness he was proved to be a prophet,
and by his words he became known as a
trustworthy seer.
16 He called upon the Lord, the Mighty One,
when his enemies pressed him on every side,
and he offered in sacrifice a suckling lamb.
17 Then the Lord thundered from heaven,
and made his voice heard with a mighty sound;
18 he subdued the leaders of the enemy^a
and all the rulers of the Philistines.
19 Before the time of his eternal sleep,
Samuel^b bore witness before the Lord and his
anointed:
“No property, not so much as a pair of shoes,
have I taken from anyone!”
And no one accused him.
20 Even after he had fallen asleep, he prophesied
and made known to the king his death,
and lifted up his voice from the ground
in prophecy, to blot out the wickedness of the
people.

Nathan

47 After him Nathan rose up
to prophesy in the days of David.

David

- ² As the fat is set apart from the offering of
well-being,

^a Heb: Gk *leaders of the people of Tyre*

^b Gk *he*

- so David was set apart from the Israelites.
- 3 He played with lions as though they were young goats, and with bears as though they were lambs of the flock.
- 4 In his youth did he not kill a giant, and take away the people's disgrace, when he whirled the stone in the sling and struck down the boasting Goliath?
- 5 For he called on the Lord, the Most High, and he gave strength to his right arm to strike down a mighty warrior, and to exalt the power^a of his people.
- 6 So they glorified him for the tens of thousands he conquered, and praised him for the blessings bestowed by the Lord, when the glorious diadem was given to him.
- 7 For he wiped out his enemies on every side, and annihilated his adversaries the Philistines; he crushed their power^a to our own day.
- 8 In all that he did he gave thanks to the Holy One, the Most High, proclaiming his glory; he sang praise with all his heart, and he loved his Maker.
- 9 He placed singers before the altar, to make sweet melody with their voices.^b
- 10 He gave beauty to the festivals, and arranged their times throughout the year,^c while they praised God's^d holy name, and the sanctuary resounded from early morning.
- 11 The Lord took away his sins,

and exalted his power^a forever; he gave him a covenant of kingship and a glorious throne in Israel.

Solomon

- 12 After him a wise son rose up who because of him lived in security:^e
- 13 Solomon reigned in an age of peace, because God made all his borders tranquil, so that he might build a house in his name and provide a sanctuary to stand forever.
- 14 How wise you were when you were young! You overflowed like the Nile^f with understanding.
- 15 Your influence spread throughout the earth, and you filled it with proverbs having deep meaning.
- 16 Your fame reached to far-off islands, and you were loved for your peaceful reign.
- 17 Your songs, proverbs, and parables, and the answers you gave astounded the nations.
- 18 In the name of the Lord God, who is called the God of Israel, you gathered gold like tin and amassed silver like lead.
- 19 But you brought in women to lie at your side, and through your body you were brought into subjection.
- 20 You stained your honor, and defiled your family line, so that you brought wrath upon your children, and they were grieved^g at your folly,
- 21 because the sovereignty was divided and a rebel kingdom arose out of Ephraim.

^a Gk horn

^b Other ancient authorities add *and daily they sing his praises*

^c Gk to completion

^d Gk his

^e Heb: Gk in a broad place

^f Heb: Gk a river

^g Other ancient authorities read *I was grieved*

- 22 But the Lord will never give up his mercy,
 or cause any of his works to perish;
 he will never blot out the
 descendants of his chosen one,
 or destroy the family line of him
 who loved him.
 So he gave a remnant to Jacob,
 and to David a root from his own
 family.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam

- 23 Solomon rested with his ancestors,

and left behind him one of his sons,
 broad in^a folly and lacking in sense,
 Rehoboam, whose policy drove
 the people to revolt.

Then Jeroboam son of Nebat led
 Israel into sin
 and started Ephraim on its sinful
 ways.

- 24 Their sins increased more and more,
 until they were exiled from their land.

- 25 For they sought out every kind of
 wickedness,
 until vengeance came upon them.

Elijah

48

Then Elijah arose, a prophet like fire,
 and his word burned like a torch.

- 2 He brought a famine upon them,
 and by his zeal he made them few in number.
 3 By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens,
 and also three times brought down fire.
 4 How glorious you were, Elijah, in your wondrous
 deeds!
 Whose glory is equal to yours?
 5 You raised a corpse from death
 and from Hades, by the word of the Most High.
 6 You sent kings down to destruction,
 and famous men, from their sickbeds.
 7 You heard rebuke at Sinai
 and judgments of vengeance at Horeb.
 8 You anointed kings to inflict retribution,
 and prophets to succeed you.^b
 9 You were taken up by a whirlwind of fire,
 in a chariot with horses of fire.
 10 At the appointed time, it is written, you are
 destined^c
 to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out
 in fury,
 to turn the hearts of parents to their children,
 and to restore the tribes of Jacob.
 11 Happy are those who saw you
 and were adorned^d with your love!
 For we also shall surely live.^e

Elisha

- 12 When Elijah was enveloped in the whirlwind,
 Elisha was filled with his spirit.
 He performed twice as many signs,
 and marvels with every utterance of his
 mouth.^f

^a Heb (with a play on the name Rehoboam)

Syr: Gk *the people's*

^b Heb: Gk *him*

^c Heb: Gk *are for reproofs*

^d Other ancient authorities read *and have died*

^e Text and meaning of Gk uncertain

^f Heb: Gk lacks *He performed...mouth*

Read Sirach 48

The author turns to praising three great prophets, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah, mostly for the great power of miracles that God granted them. Elijah and Elisha are also lauded for the judgment they gave against kings and people alike. Isaiah is linked to King Hezekiah and his trust that God would save the people from the Assyrians, as well as foreseeing the end to the Babylonian exile.

Reflect: Sirach clearly remembers the importance of these prophets of old because God worked miracles through them that were able to change the hearts and minds of the people. When all had forgotten or abandoned their faith, these valiant servants of God stood unflinching before threats and dangers to defend the one God.

Pray: Ask that God may give us the strength of our convictions to stand up for what we believe against the belittling of religion and faith that is so common today.

Act: Do we ever speak up strongly for what we believe in or express our joy in our faith? How many might discover God if we were to give witness to that which gives us purpose and peace?

- Never in his lifetime did he tremble before any ruler,
nor could anyone intimidate him at all.
- 13 Nothing was too hard for him,
and when he was dead, his body prophesied.
- 14 In his life he did wonders,
and in death his deeds were marvelous.
- 15 Despite all this the people did not repent,
nor did they forsake their sins,
until they were carried off as plunder from their land,
and were scattered over all the earth.
The people were left very few in number,
but with a ruler from the house of David.
- 16 Some of them did what was right,
but others sinned more and more.

Hezekiah

- 17 Hezekiah fortified his city,
and brought water into its midst;
he tunneled the rock with iron tools,
and built cisterns for the water.
- 18 In his days Sennacherib invaded the country;
he sent his commander^a and departed;
he shook his fist against Zion,
and made great boasts in his arrogance.
- 19 Then their hearts were shaken and their hands trembled,
and they were in anguish, like women in labor.
- 20 But they called upon the Lord who is merciful,
spreading out their hands toward him.
The Holy One quickly heard them from heaven,
and delivered them through Isaiah.
- 21 The Lord^b struck down the camp of the Assyrians,
and his angel wiped them out.
- 22 For Hezekiah did what was pleasing to the Lord,
and he kept firmly to the ways of his ancestor David,
as he was commanded by the prophet Isaiah,
who was great and trustworthy in his visions.

Isaiah

- 23 In Isaiah's^c days the sun went backward,
and he prolonged the life of the king.
- 24 By his dauntless spirit he saw the future,
and comforted the mourners in Zion.
- 25 He revealed what was to occur to the end of time,
and the hidden things before they happened.

^a Other ancient authorities add *from Lachish*

^b Gk *He*

^c Gk *his*

Read Sirach 49

Sirach continues with the next period of Israel's history, focusing on the heroes of the exile: Josiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the minor prophets, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and Nehemiah. Three are prophets, three are kings or governors, one is a priest. All received special inspiration from God to guide the people through the trials of the loss of Jerusalem and its rebuilding eighty years later.

Reflect: The seventh to fifth centuries BC were times of severe trial and loss and often disappointment for Judah, the remnant of once greater Israel. These leaders had strong faith and experience of God's favor and presence that they communicated to the people.

Pray: Let us seek the gift of hope from God, that he may grant us each a strong awareness of his compassionate presence with us in our times of difficulty and uncertainty.

Act: Hope radiates its strength to those around us who are suffering doubt and fear and uncertainty in their lives. By reaffirming our trust that God stands near us in times of trial, we can help others as well to have patience and inner peace in difficult moments.

Note on Sirach 49: Josiah's reign is recorded in 2 Kings 22–23. In Jewish reckoning, there are four books of prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve." This latter includes all the prophets from Hosea to Malachi in our Bibles. Together they form a book of the same length as the first three. The stories of Zerubbabel and Jeshua are found in Ezra 3, Haggai, and Zechariah. The final three verses belong properly with chapter 44.

Josiah and Other Worthies

- 49** The name^a of Josiah is like blended incense prepared by the skill of the perfumer; his memory^b is as sweet as honey to every mouth,
and like music at a banquet of wine.
- 2 He did what was right by reforming the people, and removing the wicked abominations.
- 3 He kept his heart fixed on the Lord; in lawless times he made godliness prevail.
- 4 Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them were great sinners, for they abandoned the law of the Most High; the kings of Judah came to an end.
- 5 They^c gave their power to others, and their glory to a foreign nation,
- 6 who set fire to the chosen city of the sanctuary, and made its streets desolate, as Jeremiah had foretold.^d
- 7 For they had mistreated him, who even in the womb had been consecrated a prophet, to pluck up and ruin and destroy, and likewise to build and to plant.
- 8 It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of glory, which God^e showed him above the chariot of the cherubim.
- 9 For God^f also mentioned Job who held fast to all the ways of justice.^g
- 10 May the bones of the Twelve Prophets send forth new life from where they lie, for they comforted the people of Jacob and delivered them with confident hope.
- 11 How shall we magnify Zerubbabel? He was like a signet ring on the right hand,
- 12 and so was Jeshua son of Jozadak; in their days they built the house and raised a temple^h holy to the Lord, destined for everlasting glory.
- 13 The memory of Nehemiah also is lasting; he raised our fallen walls, and set up gates and bars, and rebuilt our ruined houses.

Retrospect

- 14 Few haveⁱ ever been created on earth like Enoch, for he was taken up from the earth.

^a Heb: Gk *memory*

^b Heb: Gk *it*

^c Heb *He*

^d Gk *by the hand of Jeremiah*

^e Gk *He*

^f Gk *he*

^g Heb Compare Syr: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^h Other ancient authorities read *people*

ⁱ Heb Syr: Gk *No one has*

15 Nor was anyone ever born like Joseph;^a
even his bones were cared
for.

16 Shem and Seth and Enosh were
honored,^b
but above every other created
living being was Adam.

Read Sirach 50:1–24

Here the teacher offers an extended description and praise of Simeon, the high priest from 219 to 196 BC, who lived shortly before this book was written and accomplished important building projects in Jerusalem. The focus here is more on his leadership of the worship ceremony at the Jerusalem temple (vv. 5–21), and the passage concludes with a lovely blessing prayer directed to God (vv. 22–24).

Reflect: Can you imagine the words and actions which are described (vv. 11–21) in this portion of text? Part of the experience of worship has to do with the beauty of the gestures and words and setting: How does Sirach invite you into this aesthetic experience?

Pray: Use the blessing prayer (vv. 22–24) as a way to pray for your family or community.

Act: Taking this text as an example, try to deepen your appreciation of a worship ceremony or liturgy in which you participate.

Simon Son of Onias

50 The leader of his brothers and the pride of his people^c
was the high priest, Simon son of Onias,
who in his life repaired the house,
and in his time fortified the temple.
2 He laid the foundations for the high double walls,
the high retaining walls for the temple
enclosure.
3 In his days a water cistern was dug,^d
a reservoir like the sea in circumference.
4 He considered how to save his people from ruin,
and fortified the city against siege.
5 How glorious he was, surrounded by the people,
as he came out of the house of the curtain.
6 Like the morning star among the clouds,
like the full moon at the festal season;^d
7 like the sun shining on the temple of the Most
High,
like the rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds;
8 like roses in the days of first fruits,
like lilies by a spring of water,
like a green shoot on Lebanon on a summer day;
9 like fire and incense in the censer,
like a vessel of hammered gold
studded with all kinds of precious stones;
10 like an olive tree laden with fruit,
and like a cypress towering in the clouds.
11 When he put on his glorious robe
and clothed himself in perfect splendor,
when he went up to the holy altar,
he made the court of the sanctuary glorious.
12 When he received the portions from the hands of
the priests,
as he stood by the hearth of the altar
with a garland of brothers around him,
he was like a young cedar on Lebanon
surrounded by the trunks of palm trees.
13 All the sons of Aaron in their splendor
held the Lord's offering in their hands
before the whole congregation of Israel.
14 Finishing the service at the altars,^e
and arranging the offering to the Most High,
the Almighty,
15 he held out his hand for the cup

^a Heb Syr: Gk adds *the leader of his brothers, the support of the people*

^b Heb: Gk *Shem and Seth were honored by people*

^c Heb Syr: Gk lacks this line. Compare 49.15

^d Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^e Other ancient authorities read *altar*

Read Sirach 50:25–29

This “epilogue” contains a numerical proverb featuring nations that had done great harm to Judah in the past (vv. 25–26). The writer also gives his name, Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach, and his intent in this book of offering instruction for understanding and knowledge.

Reflect: Does it matter that you know the name of the author of this book, since it was so unusual to know the name of a writer of a biblical book?

Pray: Ask the grace to put into practice some of the most useful wisdom sayings in this book.

Act: Consider a process for reviewing these materials.

- and poured a drink offering of the blood of the grape;
 he poured it out at the foot of the altar,
 a pleasing odor to the Most High, the king of all.
 16 Then the sons of Aaron shouted;
 they blew their trumpets of hammered metal;
 they sounded a mighty fanfare
 as a reminder before the Most High.
 17 Then all the people together quickly
 fell to the ground on their faces
 to worship their Lord,
 the Almighty, God Most High.
 18 Then the singers praised him with their voices
 in sweet and full-toned melody.^a
 19 And the people of the Lord Most High offered
 their prayers before the Merciful One,
 until the order of worship of the Lord was ended,
 and they completed his ritual.
 20 Then Simon^b came down and raised his hands
 over the whole congregation of Israelites,
 to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with his lips,
 and to glory in his name;
 21 and they bowed down in worship a second time,
 to receive the blessing from the Most High.

A Benediction

- 22 And now bless the God of all,
 who everywhere works great wonders,
 who fosters our growth from birth,
 and deals with us according to his mercy.
 23 May he give us^c gladness of heart,
 and may there be peace in our^d days
 in Israel, as in the days of old.
 24 May he entrust to us his mercy,
 and may he deliver us in our^e days!

Epilogue

- 25 Two nations my soul detests,
 and the third is not even a people:
 26 Those who live in Seir,^f and the Philistines,
 and the foolish people that live in Shechem.
 27 Instruction in understanding and knowledge
 I have written in this book,
 Jesus son of Eleazar son of Sirach^g of
 Jerusalem,
 whose mind poured forth wisdom.
 28 Happy are those who concern themselves with
 these things,
 and those who lay them to heart will become
 wise.

^a Other ancient authorities read *in sweet melody throughout the house*

^b Gk *he*

^c Other ancient authorities read *you*

^d Other ancient authorities read *your*

^e Other ancient authorities read *his*

^f Heb Compare Lat: Gk *on the mountain of Samaria*

^g Heb: Meaning of Gk uncertain

29 For if they put them into practice,
they will be equal to anything,

for the fear^a of the Lord is their
path.

Read Sirach 51:1–12

This prayer of thanksgiving refers to a critical experience of suffering and near-death from which God saved the one who called out in need. The psalmist remembered God's past mercies (v. 8) and called out to God (v. 10).

Reflect: Can you imagine a reason for including this thanksgiving "psalm" at the conclusion of this book?

Pray: Much of the instruction in this book concerns the experience of pain and suffering, but here we are given the opportunity to use our own memories and imagination.

Act: Compose a prayer of thanksgiving appropriate to your contemporary situation.

PRAYER OF JESUS SON OF SIRACH^b

51 I give you thanks, O Lord and King,
and praise you, O God my Savior.
I give thanks to your name,
2 for you have been my protector and helper
and have delivered me from destruction
and from the trap laid by a slanderous tongue,
from lips that fabricate lies.
In the face of my adversaries
you have been my helper³ and delivered me,
in the greatness of your mercy and of your
name,
from grinding teeth about to devour me,
from the hand of those seeking my life,
from the many troubles I endured,
4 from choking fire on every side,
and from the midst of fire that I had not kindled,
5 from the deep belly of Hades,
from an unclean tongue and lying words—
6 the slander of an unrighteous tongue to the king.
My soul drew near to death,
and my life was on the brink of Hades below.
7 They surrounded me on every side,
and there was no one to help me;
I looked for human assistance,
and there was none.
8 Then I remembered your mercy, O Lord,
and your kindness^c from of old,
for you rescue those who wait for you
and save them from the hand of their enemies.
9 And I sent up my prayer from the earth,
and begged for rescue from death.
10 I cried out, "Lord, you are my Father;^d
do not forsake me in the days of trouble,
when there is no help against the proud.
11 I will praise your name continually,
and will sing hymns of thanksgiving."
My prayer was heard,
12 for you saved me from destruction
and rescued me in time of trouble.
For this reason I thank you and praise you,
and I bless the name of the Lord.

^a Heb: Other ancient authorities read *light*

^b This title is included in the Gk text.

^c Other ancient authorities read *work*

^d Heb: Gk *the Father of my lord*

Heb adds:

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

Read Sirach 51:13–30

Sirach concludes with a poem that describes the way he sought wisdom, and found it, and then invited other students to join his school for learning.

Reflect: Why do you think this author describes his search for wisdom as a relationship, as a type of falling in love?

Pray: Let yourself rejoice in God's mercy and don't be ashamed to praise God.

Act: Find ways to thank God for the growth in wisdom you have received, and then share it with others!

*Give thanks to the God of praises,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the guardian of Israel,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who formed all things,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the redeemer of Israel,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who gathers the dispersed of
Israel,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who rebuilt his city and his
sanctuary,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who makes a horn to sprout
for the house of David,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who has chosen the sons of
Zadok to be priests,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the shield of Abraham,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the rock of Isaac,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the mighty one of Jacob,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to him who has chosen Zion,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*Give thanks to the King of the kings of kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;*

*He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his loyal ones.*

*For the children of Israel, the people close to him.
Praise the LORD!*

Autobiographical Poem on Wisdom

- 13 While I was still young, before I went on my travels,
I sought wisdom openly in my prayer.
- 14 Before the temple I asked for her,
and I will search for her until the end.
- 15 From the first blossom to the ripening grape
my heart delighted in her;

- my foot walked on the straight path;
from my youth I followed her steps.
- 16 I inclined my ear a little and
received her,
and I found for myself much
instruction.
- 17 I made progress in her;
to him who gives wisdom I will
give glory.
- 18 For I resolved to live according to
wisdom,^a
and I was zealous for the good,
and I shall never be disappointed.
- 19 My soul grappled with wisdom,^a
and in my conduct I was strict;^b
- I spread out my hands to the
heavens,
and lamented my ignorance of her.
- 20 I directed my soul to her,
and in purity I found her.
- With her I gained understanding
from the first;
therefore I will never be forsaken.
- 21 My heart was stirred to seek her;
therefore I have gained a prize
possession.
- 22 The Lord gave me my tongue as a
reward,
and I will praise him with it.
- 23 Draw near to me, you who are
uneducated,
and lodge in the house of
instruction.
- 24 Why do you say you are lacking in
these things,^c
and why do you endure such
great thirst?
- 25 I opened my mouth and said,
Acquire wisdom^d for yourselves
without money.
- 26 Put your neck under her^e yoke,
and let your souls receive
instruction;
it is to be found close by.
- 27 See with your own eyes that I have
labored but little
and found for myself much
serenity.
- 28 Hear but a little of my instruction,
and through me you will acquire
silver and gold.^f
- 29 May your soul rejoice in God's^g
mercy,
and may you never be ashamed
to praise him.
- 30 Do your work in good time,
and in his own time God^h will
give you your reward.

^a Gk *her*

^b Meaning of Gk uncertain

^c Cn Compare Heb Syr: Meaning of Gk uncertain

^d Heb: Gk lacks *wisdom*

^e Heb: other ancient authorities read *the*

^f Syr Compare Heb: Gk *Get instruction with a large sum of silver, and you will gain by it much gold.*

^g Gk *his*

^h Gk *he*