

Sermon 47, The Habits that Build a Home, Proverbs 14:1

Proposition: Be a wise woman and build your house!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I don't always preach a Mother's Day sermon. In fact, I have never done so before. But the text before us cried out for application specifically to the mothers in the room. It contains rebuke and encouragement for every mother, indeed, for every Christian, in its brief words about the wise woman and the foolish woman. The basic message is clear: Be a wise woman and build your house!

I. Mother's Day for the Wise Woman, v. 1a

We begin at the beginning, with the truth that the wise woman builds her house. What does this mean? Essentially, that any woman who is walking in wisdom, who is thinking and acting according to internalized wisdom, will create and sustain a beautiful home. This verse isn't saying that every wise woman is a contractor, putting 2x4s together to make a wooden frame house. It's saying that every wise woman is a homemaker, literally. She may work outside the home or not; she may have a husband or not, children or not; those things aren't the point, and are rarely mentioned in connection with the wise woman (or Lady Wisdom) except in ch. 31. The point is that a woman who acts wisely creates a home, and maintains and builds that home throughout her life. Every wise woman does this. It may be only her home; it may be the home she shares with her parents, or with her husband and children, or with her children after her husband leaves or dies. But the wise woman is known for building her home, for making it all that a home should be.

A. She rejoices in the house she built, Ecclesiastes 9:9

One major way in which most women will build their homes is by bearing and rearing children in them. Childrearing is absolutely not a detriment to homemaking; rather, it is one of the chief glories of a home. A home is not built by keeping the carpet pristine. And on this mother's day, moms, it is only appropriate to sit back in the fear of God and enjoy the work that you have been privileged to do as a wise woman building your house. "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun" (Ecc 9:9 ESV). Enjoy your life — enjoy especially the product of your ongoing labor to be wise and build your household, not just numerically but morally, intellectually, spiritually, nutritionally. Moms, we know that you do this work among us. And God tells you to rejoice in it and tells your spouse to rejoice in it.

But the text emphasizes, more than celebrating what's been achieved, the ongoing work of being a wise woman.

B. She embodies the habits that will build it further

You see, the wise woman not only enjoys the fruit of her wisdom; she also embodies the habits that will build her house farther. I think it's safe to look to ch. 9 of Proverbs for an extended discussion of these habits, because 14:1 is intentionally reminiscent of 9:1. "Wisdom has built her house," we heard — and now we see "every wise woman builds her house." Well, chapter 9 tells us more about how wisdom has built her house, and thus about how the wise woman ought to build hers.

1. She fears and knows God, 9:10

The beginning of living as a wise woman is to fear and know God. The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. This is the central point of ch. 9. This is the foundation for everything the wise woman does. Her character is shaped by the central attitude of fearing God and the central practice of knowing God. To know

Him is to understand; to fear Him is to be wise. Without these things, brothers and sisters, the other practices of the wise woman are pointless.

2. She builds on the seven-pillared foundation of God's Word, 9:1b

But with that background of knowing and fearing God, the practices of Lady Wisdom in her household are a model for every woman and every mother in hers. The first thing we are told about Lady Wisdom's house is that she has hewn out seven pillars. The seven pillars of wisdom, of course, are the seven sections of the book of Proverbs. The larger point here is that Lady Wisdom's house is supported and structured by the word of God, of which the book of Proverbs is one key part. The wise woman will build her house on the foundation of Scripture. This means reading it, knowing it, obeying it, and putting it into practice in how the household is run. Thus, a wise woman speaks truthfully rather than telling lies. She honors her parents and teaches her children to honor theirs. She worships God, and helps her husband and children to do so too.

3. She provides social, delicious food for her household, 9:2, 5

Well, Lady Wisdom not only builds on God's word; she also makes feeding her household with delicious food a very high priority. Here in our text, she is portrayed as slaughtering beasts, preparing meat, baking bread, mixing wine. She is a master of butchering, bartending, and baking.

Mothers, I know that you are also highly skilled in this art of food preparation. I have dined at many of the tables in this church, and I can safely say that you imitate Lady Wisdom in providing food for your households. Notice, though, that this food is prepared not merely for its own sake, but specifically to be enjoyed together. It is social food. Lady Wisdom serves prime rib, wine, and fresh, homemade bread. She does it with elegance, and she does it for people to eat together.

4. She exercises hospitality, 9:3-5

But this food is not just for her household. Lady Wisdom has set her table with many place settings, and she has dispatched her servant girls out into the city to issue invitations to anyone and everyone to come and dine with her. She calls the simple, the naive, the people who lack understanding, to come in and eat with her. In other words, she exercises hospitality. Hospitality means inviting people you don't know to come and share a meal with you. And that's what Lady Wisdom does. The wise woman builds her house. Every wise woman builds her house. And one way in which she builds it is by exercising hospitality!

Now, ladies, do you think of hospitality as building your household or tearing it down? I fear that the default assumption in Gillette, and in many other cities of our fair republic, is that sharing table fellowship with relative strangers is disastrous for the household — too much work, too hard, too scary, too dangerous, too negative for family time, and a whole parade of additional excuses. But sisters, and brothers too, I want you to hear this: A wise woman builds her house by exercising hospitality. Hospitality is required for leaders in the church; if you're going to be an elder, you need to be willing to have people over. If you're going to be a wise woman who builds her house, you're going to need to have people over. That's what Wisdom looks like. The

ultimate in wisdom is our Lord Jesus, who is actually planning to host all of us in His Father's mansion for eternity. Can we refuse to share our homes with others, then, knowing that our Jesus loves like that?

5. She encourages repentance and obedience, 9:6

But simply having people in and feeding them and her household is not enough for Lady Wisdom. She doesn't have them over for the sake of getting rid of extra food that will rot if no one eats it. Rather, she has them over for the sake of discipleship. She makes it her goal to instruct her guests in repentance and obedience. She tells them hard truths, calling on them to forsake their folly and live, and to walk in the way of understanding. Brothers and sisters, Lady Wisdom doesn't just offer physical food. She offers spiritual food, including the much-neglected spiritual food of rebuke.

Mothers, do you do this? I know you do. Every mother in this congregation daily calls on her children to forsake their folly and live. That's the glory of our mothers; they told us we were wrong! They led us in the way of understanding. And mothers, continue doing this. Don't grow weary. It's how a wise woman lives. It's how she builds her house. Whether to her guests or to her children, she is not afraid to offer life-giving words of reproof.

6. She offers life to those who listen to her, 9:6, 11

For that is what her words of rebuke bring: life. The wise woman speaks words that give life to anyone who listens to her.

What sort of words give life? We have talked about this over and over in Proverbs. Words that point people to personified Wisdom give life. Words that lead people to the one in whom is life give life. Words that draw the picture of the wise son, in the context of a pre-existing sonship, give life. Moms, simply proclaiming the law to children will only give death. Telling them what they have to do without pointing them to the Christ who gives them power to do it will destroy them, burdening them with regulations they can't keep on their own. But telling them how to follow Christ, telling them who He is and what He looks like — those words give life. Are those the words you speak? Do you build up your household and give it life by what you say?

And that is mother's day for the wise woman. It is a day on which she enjoys the home she's built in her calling as a homemaker, and a day on which she recommits herself to the practices by which a wise woman will continue to build her house.

II. Mother's Day for the Foolish Woman, v. 1b

Mother's day for the foolish woman is a different story.

A. She lives in the ruins of the house she tore down, Proverbs 10:15

You see, the foolish woman tears down her house. Solomon adds the detail that she tears it down with her hands to highlight the truth that the habits and activities of the foolish woman are the things that destroy her house. She is out there taking one stone off another, reducing her household to rubble bit by bit, day by day, through her activities.

Remember how we saw that the rich man's wealth is his strong city, but the poverty of the poor is their ruin? Poor people live in a ruined city, quite literally. Go to the ghetto. How good is the pavement? How well-kept are the buildings? In what kind of shape is the infrastructure? It's in terrible shape for the variety of reasons, primarily a complex interplay between the destructiveness of the residents, the poverty that makes them unable to focus on fixing up their living space, and the broader society's attempt to isolate the damage and confine it to a certain sector known as the ghetto.

Anyway, this truth is written on the very landscape of our cities: Poor people live in ruins, literally and figuratively. And relationally poor people, otherwise known as fools, live in ruins, literally and figuratively. Their houses will likely have leaky roofs, non-working faucets, broken appliances, and so on. And the relationships, the love that makes a house a home, will be a similar state of disrepair. The foolish woman actively works to achieve this destruction.

Now, this sounds ludicrous! Does the foolish woman actually rip the doors off their hinges, break the dishwasher, punch holes in the walls, and so on? In the worst cases, yes she does. When things are most advanced in the direction of folly, many a foolish woman (and foolish man) has literally torn apart her own home. But long before it comes to physical destruction, the foolish woman destroys her household's cohesion, integrity, and godliness by her own actions and habits.

B. She embodies the habits that will tear it down further

Let's look again at the portrait of Dame Folly in ch. 9 to see what the habits that tear down a household are.

1. Noise, 9:13a

The first of them is noise. This is the first quality of the foolish woman. She's loud. She's noisy. She brings a lot of sound with her wherever she goes. The word used here is used of the noise of the sea. She makes as much noise as the ocean. Perhaps in our day we could think of this not only as literal noise, but as long social media posts. A wife who is spending most of her time writing giant screeds and checking her messages is making noise rather than making a home.

2. Stupidity, 9:13b

Not only is she loud; she's stupid. She is naive at best, untaught, untrained. She has not yet committed her life to anything beyond herself.

3. Ignorance, 9:13c

Oh, and she doesn't know anything, either. She doesn't get it. She "does not know what."

4. Laziness, 9:14

And on top of her noise, stupidity, and ignorance, she is also lazy! She sits outside the door of her house on a big throne. She just sits there! Lady Wisdom builds, and works. Notice that all the descriptions of Lady Wisdom are verbs. The wise woman, the wise mom, works hard for her household. The foolish woman sits in front of the television, buries herself in her phone, checks out from her household and stops working.

Do you see how these things would tear down a household? When the one who's supposed to be building it is instead stupid, noisy, and lazy?

5. She offers stolen, basic, secretive food, 9:17

Notice, too the different food she offers. Lady Wisdom offered prime rib and wine; Dame Folly offers bread and water. The quality, in other words, is poor. And besides that, as we know from empirical observation, the most prominent home-destroying activity of them all is sexual infidelity. And that is exactly the overtone that we should hear in this invitation to stolen water and secret bread. Rather than the open, public meal provided by Lady Wisdom, Dame Folly and foolish women more generally offer illicit, stolen sexual pleasure. Ladies, you know this: Sleeping around is the best way to tear down your household. The foolish tears it down with her c**t.

6. She provides death to those who listen to her, 9:18

Well, the final activity of Dame Folly is to provide death for those who listen to her. And the ordinary foolish woman does this too. By training her children in unrighteousness, by failing to build her household, by offering sin instead of rebuke and wisdom, the foolish woman tears her house down with her own hands.

The foolish woman has little reason to celebrate mother's day. She's made a hash of her household. If you look at your life and see the reality that you've been the foolish woman, tearing your house down, what should you do? You should listen to Lady Wisdom's call today. Foolish women are invited to her banquet too, and there they can hear the call to forsake folly and live. If you recognize the foolish woman in yourself, I beg you to repent. Turn away from those foolish acts, and seek the Lord Jesus, the true Wisdom of God.

III. Mother's Day for the Church our Mother

You see, Mother's Day is not just for human mothers. It's also a day to celebrate the church our mother.

A. Christ will build the house of God, Matthew 16:18

Christ promises that as the fulfillment of divine wisdom, He will build His church. He is the wise son, building His house and thereby glorifying His Father. Every wise woman builds her house, and every wise son does so as well. If you listen to Lady Wisdom's call, you get to be part of the church; you get to be built up by Christ Himself.

B. He will build it through the wise woman's six habits

And do you know how Christ builds His church? He does it, in part, through how she acts. The church is a mother too. The church is called to be a wise woman too. And it behoves her to build her house by engaging in the wise woman's activities. Brothers and sisters, we as a church need to be fearing and knowing God. That is the basic element of our call. If the church doesn't do that, it does nothing right. But as we do that, we also need to build on the seven-pillared foundation of God's Word. If our church is fundamentally about something other than the word of God, preached, sung, prayed, and eaten, then we are not working to build the church along with Christ. Instead, we are tearing it down.

But though the elements of the word and the fear and knowledge of God are the *sine qua non* of the church, the church also needs to imitate Lady Wisdom in other ways. The church needs to provide social, delicious food for her household. We do that in sermons and hymns and at the Lord's Table, and we do it as well in our church potlucks and around our tables in our homes. The elders (of which I am one) are uniquely called to feed the sheep. That means spiritual food, yes — but biopsychosocial nourishment is just as important. Do we feed each other, spiritually and physically? Do we exercise hospitality, like Lady Wisdom? Do we encourage repentance and obedience for everyone who walks in our doors? And do we offer life to those who listen to what we say?

Sisters, celebrate Mother's Day by praying for the grace to be like Lady Wisdom, and rejoicing in the grace to be like her that our Father has already given you. Brothers and sisters alike, rejoice this Mother's Day in the church your mother, and work with me to make our church a wise lady who builds her house along with Christ, the master builder.

Happy Mother's Day, homemakers! Support and celebrate your mother, homedwellers! And do it all in wisdom. Amen.