

Wise Women Build Houses

*A model for the lifework of women
from Proverbs 9:1-6*

By Barbara Mouser

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Table of Contents

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	4
1. Building A Wisdom House Foundation, Pillars, and Roof	7
2. Serving in A Wisdom House Banquet, Guests, and Invitations	24
3. Ruling A Wisdom House The Ways of the House “Useful and Ready” Evaluation Sheet	35
4. The Wisdom House of Rahab the Harlot How a Canaanite brothel became a haven of salvation	47
5. The Wisdom House of Pharaoh’s Daughter How a heathen palace became a haven of life and education	57
6. The Wisdom House of Elizabeth Called Barren How a childless home became a haven greatest lives	63
Glossary	75
Notes on the Questions	77
Photo Credits	84

Introducing *Wise Women Build Houses*

Who is Woman?

As a young woman over thirty-five years ago, I pursued a through-the-Bible study on the nature of woman. The fruit of that study was *Five Aspects of Woman—a Biblical Theology of Femininity*. That course provides a framework for understanding woman's nature based on the Bible's definitive passages on womanhood.

What Is Her Work?

In recent years I have joined with other committed women who share the *Aspects* framework with me to form the Wisdom House Christian Mentoring Association. We are asking a second question. The question that logically follows "Who am I?" is "What am I to do?"

This short booklet and others in this series seek to answer this second question. How do women live productive and womanly lives? How do we work in harmony with our created design as women? By what wisdom can we arrive at God's throne as good and faithful servants, bringing Him fruit that remains? The *Aspects* course lays a foundation for understanding woman's identity. Now, our Wisdom House ministry seeks to build on that foundation a body of wisdom about woman's work.

Why Houses?

Wise women build houses; foolish ones tear them down (Prov. 14:1). Lady Wisdom builds her house (Prov. 9:1-6). The Proverbs 31 woman looks to her house (31:27). Christian wives manage their households (1 Tim. 5:14); older women teach them how to do it (Titus 2:3-5). There is a profound relationship between houses and women, even as there is between the inner domains of the female body and the soulful femininity created to abide in that body. The Bible provides scores of examples of women and their relationships to their houses, tents, palaces, and dynasties. The study of this theme will edify our godliness and our womanhood, enabling us to serve God in harmony with our basic created design.

What Is A Wisdom House?

I define a wisdom house as a physical or spiritual dwelling where God is glorified and people are served with skill and love. Each Christian life is created by God to be a dwelling place for Him in the Spirit. Our physical abiding places are by extension the expression of our spirits and the actual means by which we serve God.

Therefore, in this study of houses, it is desirable and even imperative that we think of both—the spiritual and the material dwellings that we inhabit and rule during our lifetimes. For this reason, in the second half of this booklet, we will turn to the study of three women in the Bible and the actual houses that they built, to see how they served there, and in what ways they glorified God.

How Can I Use This Booklet?

Wise Women Build Houses is a six-lesson Bible study that can be read through by an individual, used as a personal devotional guide, or studied by a group. Pertinent Scriptures are provided in the text with commentary, along with key definitions and questions. A Glossary and Notes at the back of the booklet provide further clarification and amplification.

Wise Women Build Houses is an excellent follow-up for those who have already completed *Five Aspects of Woman* and would like something shorter and less ambitious in scope. This study can also stand alone as an introduction to my work.

With prayers for wise women,

Barbara Mouser

April 2008



Lesson 1.

BUILDING A WISDOM HOUSE

Prov. 9:1—Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.

Prov. 14:1—The wisest of women builds her house,
but folly with her own hands tears it down.

Every Woman's Work

Building a wisdom house is the lifework of every woman in every station and season of life whether married or single, young or old, rich or poor. This lesson is offered as a meditation on and application of Proverbs 9:1 and 14:1a. These verses are defining passages on the lifework of woman and the feminine nature. We will consider the building of a wisdom house in three parts: its foundation, its pillars, and its roof.

lifework: the entire or principal work of one's lifetime; also a work extending over a lifetime.

wisdom house: a physical or spiritual dwelling where God is glorified and people are served with skill and love.

Foundation

1 Cor. 3:11—For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus *Christ*.

foundation: the base you choose for your life and lifework upon which you depend for support and stability; what you trust and put your weight on.



The Costly Christ

According to Scripture there is only one foundation adequate for life, and that foundation is Christ Himself. He is the rock, the base, and the cornerstone for all of life. Consider the following verses which describe the foundation stones of God. For focus, underline the many adjectives which describe these stones in the following verses.

Is. 28:16—therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:...”

1 Kin. 5:17—At the king’s command they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones.

1 Kin. 7:10—The foundation was of costly stones, huge stones, stones of eight and ten cubits.

Christ possesses every great characteristic of these foundation stones:

- 1) tested—He was tested in all points as we are.
- 2) precious/costly—He is the beloved son of God.
- 3) great—He is the eternal and almighty God.
- 4) dressed—Christ is dressed in white, complete in His righteousness.
- 5) huge—The glory of Christ fills the universe.

Perhaps you came to Christ in a time of great emotion or trauma, or perhaps your conversion was gradual and with little fanfare. The most important thing is not when or how your foundation in Christ was laid, *but that it is laid!*

The Rock of Christ or The Sand of The World

Matt. 7:24-27—“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

One of the best ways to know if your foundation is Christ is to see how your faith endures. The great storms of life will come. If the sins of others cause you to leave the faith, then your faith rested on them. If your own failures cause you to leave the faith, then your faith was in yourself. If your faith is shaken by dire events such as sickness, the death of a loved one, war, or poverty, then your faith was in good circumstances.

The Bible confirms and predicts that events like these will come. If leaders fail, Christ does not. If you fail, Christ will forgive you. If circumstances are difficult, heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s Word will not pass away. All these things confirm the truth of Christ and His Word. As a matter of fact, it is in the great storms of life that Christ shines more brightly, showing His greatness and our absolute need of Him.

Whether you are a young or old Christian, the veteran of many trials or few, the Bible promises that Christ is dependable. He is the sure foundation and the only one that can be laid.

Questions for Review, Thought, and Application

1. Do you know that Christ is the foundation of your life? If so, how?



2. Which foundations of sand do you think are most commonly chosen today? Which one do you find most tempting?

3. If you have already passed through a trial or storm in your Christian life, how did you come to understand Christ better as your sure foundation for having gone through this trial?



Pillars

Prov. 9:1—Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.

pillars: the virtues you build over time and with considerable effort which frame your building, make it habitable, and greatly enhance its beauty

After laying the one true foundation, the next step in building a wisdom house is to hew out pillars. Proverbs does not say what the seven pillars are. For purposes of this meditation, we are going to think about the pillars as the virtues that we build which give our houses strength, definition, and beauty. This is not an application chosen randomly.

The pillars are something Lady Wisdom hews out. While the foundation and covering are givens from God which we may choose or not, the pillars are different. Great labor must be invested to form them. Webster's defines *hew* this way:

hew: to cut with blows of a heavy cutting instrument; 2) to fell by blows of an ax; 3) to give form or shape to with or as if with heavy cutting blows.

Hewing pillars is a great and difficult labor, but very worthwhile because the pillars you hew will shape your house. The foundation supports the house and the roof protects the house, but the height and spacing of the pillars frames the house. Our work is not to form Christ our foundation, but to build on top of Him in a worthy way.

1 Cor. 3:10-13—According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

¹¹For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid,



one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

Materials

Just as we have a choice of foundations, either rock or sand, we also have a choice of building materials. In Paul's development of the building analogy, he lists six kinds of building material, three enduring, three not enduring. He exhorts us to "take care how we build" for our work will be individually tested by God for its worthiness.

What materials will you choose for your house? That which endures is done for God's glory in God's strength. The contrite heart, the widow's mite, and Mary's spikenard are all gifts for God given in love by faith. They are gold, silver, and precious stones; and they will endure forever. The sacrifice of Saul (1 Sam. 13:8-14), the long prayers of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:5), and the money of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) are all wood, hay, and stubble. Working in their own strength and for their own glory, these worshippers were rejected. Their works are condemned and will be burned up.

In review: To build a wisdom house we must choose the foundation of Christ the rock and reject sandy foundations. For our pillars, we must choose enduring materials by building in God's strength and for God's glory.

Pillars of Godward Virtues

How does one “hew a pillar?” Pillars are vertical by definition. They go up and down. Standing firmly on a strong foundation, they rise to support the superstructure of the building. They support the roof that you choose.

Simply put, your pillars must go up, or they are not pillars. If they go sideways, they might be a wall or a fence, but they will not be pillars. “Godward virtues” are aimed directly at God and lock into the covering refuge that He provides.

Seven examples of virtues that aim directly and exclusively at God are listed below. For a simple review of these great “pillars” match the virtues with the following verses which describe them.

- ____1. Fear of God—the beginning of wisdom
 - ____2. Love for God—the first and great commandment
 - ____3. Faith in God—without which it is impossible to please Him
 - ____4. Knowledge of God—what God desires more than sacrifice
 - ____5. Hope in God—a chief purpose of the Scriptures
 - ____6. Joy of the Lord—the source of our strength
 - ____7. Comfort of God—a chief means of our walk
- a. **Acts 9:3**—So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.
 - b. **Rom. 15:4**—For whatever was written in former days was

written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

- c. **Ps. 111:10**—The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.
- d. **Hos. 6:6**—For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
- e. **Neh. 8:10**—Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”
- f. **Matt. 22:37-38**—And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment.
- g. **Heb. 11:6**—And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Humanists build humanistic virtues which start in man and reach out to man. Honesty, kindness, and generosity may be formed of beautiful woods and elaborately thatched straw, but by themselves they will burn up because they are only from man and for man. You MUST have Godward virtues in your wisdom house or you will be an idolater and some variety of humanist. Manward virtues alone do not make a wisdom house.

The size of your pillars determines the strength of your house. The height and placement of your pillars determine the shape

and spaciousness of your house. The artistry of your pillars determines the beauty of your house.

Questions for Review, Thought, and Application

1. Consider the seven “Godward virtues” listed on page 12. Which of these have you already spent time “hewing?” Asked in another way, in what ways have you sought to make God your God?

2. Hewing is hard work. Prayer, meditation on Scripture, and obedience are primary means of hewing pillars. Explain how disciplining oneself in these activities, especially in times of temptation, will result in building pillars of character.

3. Consider what might be the opposite of each of the “Godward pillars” listed above. For example, rebellion is an opposite of the fear of the Lord. What are opposites for the other six pillars?

4. Has God ever led you into a situation that required you to cultivate a certain virtue or virtues that you would not have chosen for yourself? What was that situation? What were the virtues?

Roof of Refuge

Proverbs 9 does not explicitly mention the roof or covering of the wisdom house, but we will not err to say that what covers and protects us is God Himself.

Ps. 5:11—But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

Ruth 2:12—The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"

Our pillars we hew, but the covering of our house is like the foundation. We do not make it; we choose it. Ruth chose to leave Moab in order to take refuge under the God of Israel. The person or thing that we choose for our authority is also the person or thing we look to for our protection. To rebel against an authority is to forsake the protection of that authority. Jesus would have gathered Jerusalem under His care, but they would not (Matt. 23:37).

If you do not have the foundation which is Christ, your dwelling will not stand for you are not in God. If you do not have the pillars of faith and fear of the Lord you will not be under His authority. Therefore, you will not be in His refuge to enjoy His protection.

A Roof Designed by God

Proverbs 9 does not mention the roof of Wisdom's house, nor the details of its construction. However, in Exodus 26:1-14, God describes in detail a roof of His very own design. God designed the tabernacle of Moses and dictated every detail of its materials and construction.



The roof of the tabernacle was a fourfold covering.

First, on the inside of the tent was a covering of heavenly beauty—**linen** embroidered with cherubim in blue, purple and scarlet.

Next came curtains of **woven goats hair**, a covering providing warmth and insulation.

Third, **rams' skins dyed red**, a covering picturing Christ's substitution which protects from condemnation and guilt.

Finally a tarp of **goats' skins**, a covering for weatherproofing.

The roof of God which God designs is a *beautiful, insulated, and weatherproof protection*. If you have chosen God as your refuge, you will see His heavenly beauty above you. You will enjoy the warmth of woven wool and protection from the elements. You will also be covered by the “rams' skins dyed red” (NASB, Ex. 26:14) which pictures Christ who covers us and protects us from all condemnation.

Building a Wisdom House—Every Woman's Work

All of us will build houses in our lifetimes. We will choose the foundation rock of Christ or the sand of the world.

We will hew pillars of virtue rising up to God, or we will forge bars of vice imprisoning us in sin.

We will take cover in the refuge of God's authority and protection, or we will rebelliously refuse His overshadowing wings, and perish in the world.

