

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROVERBS 14:1-35

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. OUR LIVES AND OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY MUST BE BUILT GOD'S WAY. IF WE BUILD ANY OTHER WAY, WE ARE DOOMED TO FAILURE.

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I think we can easily see that the challenge to live wisely is no easy task; it seems as if we have a natural bent towards foolishness. Yet the stakes are enormously high. The first verse is going to bring us back to the description of that struggle in chapter 9 where the poet described Lady Wisdom and Lady Seduction. If we hook up with Lady Wisdom we will find eternal life, but if we hook up with Lady Seduction, we will find death. So the stakes are high and this is a heavy-weight fight between Lady Wisdom and Lady Seduction for our attention.

We are the ones who will have to make a choice. In this morning's text, the poet will play on two themes. The first is being at home, we find out how to build our lives, and how to build the community of faith.

The second theme describes the foundation on which we build successful lives and a successful community: Fear of the Lord is the only legitimate foundation to build on.

So this passage is all about learning to be at home with ourselves and our community based on lives dedicated to pleasing God.

But once again, we seem to have our priorities mixed up. Our values seem to be skewed, and if we want to see how mixed up we really are, all we have to do is listen to, and observe our children.

One year, our daughter went away to camp for an extended period of time. When we picked her up, we asked her, “Didn’t you get homesick while you were away?” She shrugged her shoulders and said, “Not me, but some of the kids who have dogs did.”

I would like us to think about what our lives and this community we call Devon Church are built on.

I think that based on key words and recurring themes in this chapter, the main idea is this: **OUR LIVES AND OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY MUST BE BUILT GOD’S WAY. IF WE BUILD ANY OTHER WAY, WE ARE DOOMED TO FAILURE.** The passage is divided into two sections: Verse 1 starts out, “A wise woman builds her house,” and verse 16 starts out, “A wise man fears the Lord.” There will be several references to ‘house’ throughout the passage. The words, tent, presence, gates, fortress, refuge, population, people, neighbors, nation and house all have to do with places we live in individually, and in community. Keep this in mind: God’s personal covenant name is used throughout this passage; Jehovah, Yahweh is the God Who lives in the midst of His people. Remember, when the Israelites left Egypt and headed for the Promised Land, they journeyed through the wilderness. They set up the camp with three tribes camped on the north side, three on the south, three on the east, and three on the west. Then, in the middle of the camp, God’s Tent, The Tabernacle was set up. God’s presence was constantly with the Hebrews in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of cloud by night. Our God is a personal God Who chooses to live in the midst of His people.

When we become Christians, when we give our lives to Jesus in faith, He comes into our lives, and lives in us through the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus lives in our hearts.

And that brings us to the second major theme, the Fear of the LORD. I know that we try to soften this concept; we say that fear means awe, reverence, or respect. Let me again shatter that concept in the most graphic way. We are instructed to Fear God. That is shake in your boots, pee your pants, fall over like a dead person fear. Think about what kind of God we worship. Two of Aaron's sons, who were priests, thought it would be nice to improvise and make some different kind of incense to burn on the altar during worship. God struck them dead on the spot. When God came to meet Daniel, Daniel fell down on the ground and shook like a dog, he passed out. Isaiah cried out in fear when God approached him, he thought he was a dead man. In the New Testament Church, a couple decided they wanted a little extra recognition. So they sold some land, held some of the money back and brought the rest to church. When they got to church, they said that they were donating all the money they had made from the sale of their land. God struck them dead right on the spot. The Apostle Paul warned the church at Corinth that many of them were dying because they were taking communion with unrepentant hearts. And the God we worship will send people to Hell for an eternity. The God we worship is holy. He is pure and righteous. He cannot and will not tolerate sin, disobedience, and rebellion. I shake, even as I preach this. Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom. This fear of the **LORD** should influence the way we think, the way we speak, and the way we act.

I. BUILDING A HOME (Vs. 1-15)
WE MUST BUILD OUR LIVES ON A GOOD, SOLID, GODLY FOUNDATION.

Building a home is described in verses 1-15. Now keep in mind, this is poetry and it is not to be translated literally. The theme of these verses is this: **WE MUST BUILD OUR LIVES ON A GOOD, SOLID, GODLY FOUNDATION.** The home described here is our individual lives and the question we should be asking ourselves is this, “Who would feel more at home living in my heart, wisdom or folly; Jesus or the Devil?”

A. THE FOUNDATION (Vs. 1-3)

Verses 1-3 make it clear that the only foundation for a healthy life is God. I think this would be a good time to once again address the gender issue, especially in poetry. If you look carefully at verse 1, we will immediately be drawn back to chapter 9. In chapter 9, wisdom was described as a very classy and dignified lady. Folly was described as a flashy seductress. This has nothing to do with gender. Some people have tried to paint women as Lady Folly and I have heard people tell women that they have to choose; do they want to be Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly? That misses the whole point of the chapter: Women cannot become Lady Wisdom or Lady Folly. To simplify it all, Lady Wisdom represents God and Lady Folly represents Satan. As males and females, you and I are cast in the role of the young man that is confronted with making a choice between these two ladies. Now if we were to examine the nature of young men, we find that we are inclined to choose Lady Folly. Why? Because she is flashy, she is sexy and she promises a good and exciting time. Young men are not generally drawn to intelligent, classy, dignified ladies. So the message of chapter 9 is this: We as human beings have a nature and a bent to choose folly, we are easily drawn to the things of this world. So in chapter 9, we were all invited to put ourselves in the role of a young man.

Here in chapter 14, we are invited to put ourselves in the feminine role. In chapter 9, we saw Lady Wisdom build her house on the principles and character of God. She built a house where we could find love, joy, peace, fulfillment and eternal contentment. We saw Lady Seduction build her house on the glamour and seduction of the things of this world. At her house, we found some temporary excitement, but as the night went on, we found horror and death.

And now, it's our turn to build our house. Whose model will we follow? Let's look at the wise woman first: She builds her house on a way of life that demonstrates fear of God. She knows that God sees everything. She knows that He rewards those who seek Him, and He punishes those who ignore Him. She is careful about what she thinks, about what she does, and about what she says.

On the other hand, those who refuse to submit to God's way of life, simply self-destruct time and time again. The picture here is that those who insist on doing things their own way shoot themselves in the foot by the way they think, the way they act, and the way they speak.

I think that the reason most of us are not living dynamic Christian lives, is because we don't have a healthy fear of God. If we really believed that God knows everything we think, sees everything we do, and hears everything we say, and if we really believe that God hates sin and will punish sin, shouldn't we be shaking with fear?

B. RESPONSIBILITY TO ONESELF (Vs. 4-7)

And so, verses 4-7 go on to describe the responsibility to one and what personal responsibility do we have in pursuing a godly lifestyle? Verse 4 describes the direction of our lives. We have all heard the saying, "You have to spend money to make money,"

and “Success breeds success.” Success is circular, and so is failure. The manger is a feeding trough. The poet says, “Where there are no oxen, the feeding trough is empty.” The implication is that the barns are also empty. I cannot plant and harvest a field if I don’t have oxen, and so I don’t have wheat, corn, and other crops, and I certainly don’t have any food to spare to feed animals. If I don’t have money to buy oxen, I cannot plant and harvest a field. If I cannot plant and harvest a field, I cannot buy an ox.

But, if I have oxen, I can plant and harvest a field. When I sell the crop, I can buy food to feed the oxen and even buy more oxen. The more oxen I have, the more fields I can plant and harvest.

The idea here is that success breeds success and failure breeds’ failure. If I plant seeds of righteousness in what I think, how I act, and what I say, my life will become more righteous. The more righteous I become, the easier it is to think, act, and speak righteously. The more we submit to the Lordship of Jesus, the easier it is to submit to Him in the future.

Verses 5-6 describe the more truthfully we speak, the more discerning and wise we become. The more we mock things of God, the more stupid we become. I think this is something that I personally have to keep a close check on. It is my natural bent to talk stupid; I need to be very careful of that.

Verse 7 reminds us to stay away from stupid people. Since there is nothing worthwhile coming out of their mouths and nothing good happening in their lives, there is nothing to be gained by hanging around with them.

We are responsible to put ourselves in a position to succeed for Jesus. We are to be humble, honest, and modest. We are to fill our minds with the things of God by

reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible. We are to fill our minds with holy things and not the things of this world. Again, I'm speaking at least for me; I need to limit my time with television, magazines, radio, and all other forms of entertainment. I need to be careful what I allow to enter my mind. And then I have to monitor my words and behavior, remembering that God does not tolerate sin -- especially intentional sin; sin that I could easily avoid if I wasn't so lazy.

C. THE RESULTS (Vs. 8-15)

Which brings us to the results in verses 8-15: Look how this section begins and ends; verse 8 and verse 15 parallel one another. The wise, those who fear God, those who pursue holiness are wise. They make thoughtful decisions, and they live life according to God's principles. But fools, those who think they know it all, are in the end stupid. They believe anything. I hear this all the time; "It must be true. I saw it on the Internet, or I read it in a newspaper, or I saw it on television."

Look at verse 9; it kind of summarizes the life of a fool. They are not in the least interested in good relationships, they always need to be right and they are not likely to give anyone a sincere apology. On the other hand, godly people are interested in restored relationships; they are always willing to take responsibility to restore relationships, it's never about who's right or wrong. As believers, we are called to reconcile and restore broken relationships. But as we have said all along, that means we have to set our egos aside.

The stakes are high. Look at verse 11 and verse 14. The house of the wicked will be destroyed. The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways and the tent of the righteous will flourish and the good person will be rewarded.

Now if we look closely at verse 10, 12, and 13, we can see that this house we have been building or destroying is our own personal lives. In the end, we need to be able to live with ourselves. We can have all the friends in the world. We can have tons of friends with the gifts of encouragement and compassion. But we must ultimately be able to mourn and rejoice within ourselves. We must have the presence and love of God so deep within us, that when we go to bed each night, we experience the peace, joy, and contentment that only God can give. No other human being can do that for us. Yes we can share our joys and sorrows with one another, but ultimately we must experience the fullness of joy and sorrow alone.

And verse 12 reinforces what we have been saying throughout our study of Proverbs: We are good at self-deception. In other words, we are really good at crapping ourselves and we are great at justifying everything we do. We can even put a religious spin on it. Here is a good simple test: If we have to try and justify something we are doing, the chances are it's probably not good for us.

I think the message comes through loud and clear. If we want to follow the world and say, "I did it my way," that's fine. But know this; that way only ends in disaster. When the bottom falls out of life don't say, "Why me?" I know brilliant people who have not submitted their thinking to the word of God. They have become disoriented, confused, and muddled. I know people who are talented pastors and church leaders, but because of their pride or immorality, their lives are in shambles. There is no other way to make it through life: We must submit our thinking, our behavior, and our speech to the Word of God. I think that the modern day church has gone in the opposite direction, we take our thinking, our learning, our actions, and our speech, and then we go

to the Bible to find a way to justify them. If that's the case then we are simply tearing down our lives. Building up our lives means submitting to God. This is the poet's message in this first section: **WE MUST BUILD OUR LIVES ON A GOOD, SOLID, GODLY FOUNDATION.** We do that by studying the Bible, being involved with godly people who think differently from us, being humble enough to listen to the word preached and taught, and being humble enough to listen to and take good godly advice.

II. BUILDING A COMMUNITY (Vs. 16-35)
AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ALLOW GOD TO USE US IN BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY.

That's not only important for us as individuals, it's important for us as a church. Verses 16-35 describe building a community: **AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ALLOW GOD TO USE US IN BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**

This section starts out with; "A wise man fears and shuns evil." Now the NIV inserts "the LORD" here. I think that is a legitimate assumption since the rest of the chapter bears that thought out. The emphasis in this section is on community. It uses words like neighbor, friend, nation, people, and describes a healthy king and his kingdom.

A. THE FOUNDATION (Vs. 16-19)

Verses 16-19 describe the foundation for a healthy community. Again, a healthy community consists of people who fear God. They reject the world and sin. There is no way to have a healthy community when it is filled with hotheads, quick tempers, sneaky and stupid people. As I look at the state of our culture, our country, and the world, it shouldn't surprise me, but it always does. When I was growing up, our generation was sexually immoral and angry. Today, the world is not only sexually

immoral and angry; it has added perversion and violence to the mix. In the last week, we had some crazy, perverted soldier's torture prisoners. And in that same week we had some perverted, twisted, violent maniacs cut off a man's head and put it on television. I would like to say that these are isolated incidents and involve only a few, twisted, crazy people; but in this same week, a man coming from a baseball game, down the street here near Wrigley Field, took a bat and pounded it on a car. Somebody from the car got out and shot that man dead. If you were to look at MTV videos, you can see all sorts of violence directed at women, and the lyrics to songs are filled with violent messages. The generation I grew up in was immoral and angry, but this generation is perverted and violent. I want us to keep two truths in mind. First, this should not surprise us because Jesus said that Satan exists to steal, to kill, and destroy. So we should expect that our world continue to become more perverted and more violent as our culture continues to rebel against God.

Secondly, we have to remember this: Referring to the Holy Spirit, we are reminded that "Greater is He Who lives in us, than he who inhabits this world." If we are believers, and if we fear God and shun evil, and if we pursue the mission God has given us, not the world, not Satan, not even the Gates of Hell can stop us. We are not to live in fear and confusion. The trick is that we must let God inform our minds of what truth is, what is good, and what is right. So again, the foundation for a healthy community is the same as for a healthy individual. Fear of God is what puts us on the right path. We should be characterized as a community that is patient, gentle, loving, caring, and concerned to do good.

B. RESPONSIBILITY TO ONE ANOTHER (Vs. 20-27)

This fear of God and this desire to do good should inform us that we have a responsibility to one another as described in verses 20-27.

First, let me draw our attention to verses 26-27. They inform us that our security in life rests clearly in the hands of God. Holiness, not guns, not money, not doctors, not medicine, not power or fame, is what brings security to our lives. And don't miss this: This peace and security is passed down to the community and our children. If we truly want to feel safe and secure, then we must live lives of holiness. If you read through verses 20-27 we can see that they are focused on social justice. Verse 20 points out, in society, poor people are looked down on, ignored, and avoided; they really need a friend but can't seem to find one. On the other hand, rich people seem to be revered and have plenty of friends. Verse 21 reminds us of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus told us that anyone He brings into our lives, with a need, is our neighbor and we are to befriend the poor and be careful to make sure they are not neglected. But caring for the poor has to take place in the context of a community, it takes wisdom. Remember, we have all been conned at one time or another by the poor or the homeless. Now look at verse 23: we are not called on to just hand out money anytime someone asks for it. In the context of community we would be able to determine if people are authentically in need of help or just out to use us. People must be interested in getting their lives right, humbling themselves before God, submitting to God and His teaching.

And verse 25 reminds us that truthfulness is critical in dealing with social action and a healthy community. I'm not going to mention political activists or politicians by name, but if we were to carefully listen to what they say and what they support, we could see that they really don't want the people they represent to succeed or make peace. The

reason is that, if the people they represent succeed or if warring factions make peace, they will be out of a job. So, their very livelihood depends on keeping their constituency down or at war. If you think I'm wrong here, I would challenge you to just examine the policies and actions these leaders support. Truth is imperative in a community searching for social justice; truth to admit a wrong, and a dedication to correcting the wrong. I don't ever expect social justice to happen out there in society, but it ought to happen in the church. God will not look kindly on a church that bears His Name to be socially unjust in any way. Fear of the **LORD** should govern the policies, attitudes, actions, and words of our church community.

C. THE RESULTS (Vs. 28-35)

The results are described in terms of a king and his kingdom in verses 28-35. A king's success is often judged by how big it is in territory and in population. And look at the last verse; verse 35. How does he get to be successful; by having wise people and advisers in his Kingdom?

If you were to study through these verses you would easily see that what we said throughout this chapter is summarized here. In verses 29-30 we are reminded that people have to want to live in peace and get along with one another, which requires an attitude of humility. Look at our church; we have people from many different cultures, languages, races, and ethnicities. We come from very diverse backgrounds. Some are educated. Some are not. Some are rich. Some are poor. It takes humility and patience to love and understand one another. It takes courage to interact with one another.

And knowing one another reminds us why we have to get to know one another; we are to care for one another. Look at verse 31: God is our maker. In the church, He

has given us to one another for fellowship. We are responsible for the physical, spiritual, and emotional well being of one another. In order to fellowship with one another, we must first know one another and that takes courage, energy, and discipline. You cannot be a coward and a Christian. You cannot be a loner and be a Christian. You cannot be prejudiced and be a Christian. It takes courage and humility to be a Christian.

If we have the courage and the humility to be a Christian community, we will experience peace, joy, and contentment as a community. But if we don't, we can experience God's wrath and all the fear and confusion that comes as a result of that: **AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO ALLOW GOD TO USE US IN BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**

It's really interesting to me every time I study through a passage like this that Christianity is both an individual and a corporate religion. I am responsible to pursue holiness in my personal life. But by the very community nature of God, my pursuit of holiness has to do with others around me. We are called to pursue holiness as individuals, but we are called to pursue holiness together as well. The only way we can enjoy peace, joy and contentment as individuals and as a church family is to fear God and keep His commandments: **OUR LIVES AND OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY MUST BE BUILT GOD'S WAY. IF WE BUILD ANY OTHER WAY, WE ARE DOOMED TO FAILURE.** I think it is safe to say that as we have studied through the book of Proverbs, that obtaining wisdom isn't an easy task. It takes desire, commitment, hard work, and perseverance.

Listen to how Kent Hughes records the testimony of a young preacher from Zimbabwe.

“I’m part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit’s power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made: I’m a disciple of His! I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed; my present makes sense; my future is secure. I’m finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning’s, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, worldly talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I know life by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, am uplifted by prayer, and I labor with power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won’t give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go ‘til He comes, give ‘til I drop, preach ‘til all know and work ‘til He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. My banner will be clear.

If we dedicated ourselves to the cause of Christ like this young man did, can you imagine what powerful lives we would lead and what peace, joy, and contentment we would experience? What a vision for our individual lives.

If we all dedicated ourselves to the cause of Christ like this young man did, can you imagine what would happen to our church? Not even the gates of hell themselves could keep us back. What a vision for our church.”