

# BUILDING HER HOUSE

*Commonsensical Wisdom for Christian Women*

Nancy Wilson

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Commonsensical Wisdom for Christian Women*  
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# Contents

## Part I: Service

The Table .....	3
Sabbath Feasting .....	7
Mac and Cheese .....	11
Perfectly Domestic .....	15
Loving Labor .....	19

## Part 2: Family Relationships

Courtship Blues .....	25
Mother-in-law .....	29
Daughter-in-law .....	33

## Part 3: Marriage

Young Wives .....	39
Submission .....	43
Big Stinking Tangles .....	47

## Part 4: Mothering

Family Stories .....	53
The Postpartum Mother .....	57
Your Baby Has a Soul .....	61
Mothers and Sons .....	65
Mothers and Daughters .....	69
Sons and Sports .....	73
Daughters and Sports .....	77
The Tomboy .....	81
Sons and Flattery .....	85

## Part 5: Attitudes

Pursuing Virtue .....	91
Chick Flicks .....	95
Contentious Women .....	99
Criticism That Kills .....	103
The Pricklies .....	107
Rainy-Day Blues .....	111

*Lovingly dedicated to my granddaughters Jemima,  
Belphoebe, Hero, Lucia, Ameera Margaret,  
Evangeline, and Daphne:*

*May you grow up to be mothers and grandmothers,  
ever trusting in the God of your own mothers and  
your own Nana.*

## Preface

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It was some time ago now—so long ago it makes me feel quite old—that my husband had one of my taped studies for women transcribed and put in a column titled “Femina.” When he brought it home for my perusal, I was of course appalled by the writing—reading transcriptions is a very humbling experience for a speaker! But I got to work and cleaned it up so it could appear in the pages of *Credenda/Agenda*. So this is all really my husband’s fault. He is the one who handed me that first column. He knew that if I saw it already on the page, even if it was in shabby condition, I would be far more inclined to think I could write a column for women. So I must thank him here for tricking me into writing.

Canon Press has kindly put together a collection of some of those essays, and here they are bound together. I have tried to arrange them under general headings, but I did not originally write them to organize in this way, so it is not a tight arrangement.

As we pray and labor for reformation in the church in America, we have to keep our eyes on the little things that are not as little as we think—things like feasting together around our tables, loving the little people in our families, and living sacrificially for one another. These seemingly “insignificant” duties are far more potent than we realize, for God sanctifies them and uses them to bless us, transform our communities, and bring glory to His name. It is my prayer that God might use these little essays to encourage faithfulness and joyfulness in the women who read them.

## **Part 1: Service**

## The Table

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IT'S SEEN some wear and tear. In fact, I don't know what caused all the nicks, scratches, dents, and dings; some are real mysteries, like the puddle of small imprints that have textured one corner. The big gashes are more memorable than the dozens of small scrapes, pokes, and pits. The big ones can usually be attributed to some particular mishap or other, but all the random little blemishes blend into the swirl of meals and memories, shaping the story of our household, told around our table.

When we bought a pine table instead of a fine hardwood, I knew it would gain "character" quickly. But I also knew I wouldn't be tempted to fret over it. You expect a soft wood like pine to chronicle every activity, and besides, it was a fraction of the cost a beautiful mahogany table would be. Its broad yellow surface, cheerful and inviting, stretched out in bright contrast to the dark, shiny wood floors in our new house.

It seemed so huge at the time, so wide and hefty, and with the leaf in it, positively gigantic—a vast expanse filling our dining room with promise. The rounded legs, like tree trunks, bore its weight seemingly effortlessly. We were so impressed and pleased. Now this was a serious table. And because at the time all the living room had to offer in the way of seating was the floor and a lone rocking chair, the dining room table gained even more prominence and dignity. It truly became the center of all.

Isn't it a lovely oddity that we gather around our big piece of wood nearly every evening, about the same time each day, and eat

a meal together? Sometimes it is an elegant meal. Sometimes it is very homely. But we are always there together, knife and fork in hand, doing our duty and rejoicing as we go. Oh, the hours of stories and jokes, questions and concerns (through courtships and pregnancies), prayers and discussions we have had around our aging table.

As the years have gone on, our table has shrunk. I don't know what happened. The living room filled up with furniture. Children married and began having babies. Though it seemed so roomy at first, now I'm wondering how we will all fit. Sometimes we squash five on each side and put two on each end. But just when it seems impossible to fit any more, we manage to slip six chairs on a side. We pull the high chair up to the corner. But soon one table won't be enough.

Disgraceful as it seems to the dignity of our table, we sometimes have to stoop to setting up a flimsy little card table off to the side. But who will sit there? No one wants to. Everyone wants to be at the big table. We've hauled a table up from the family room and arranged it in the living room, and we've put a table in the library. But this divides the festivities into two or three groups and causes longing looks from across the room.

One Easter we decided to make everyone happy, so we arranged one very long table downstairs. We borrowed folding tables and set them up the whole length of our family room. When the white tablecloths and candles and dishes and flowers and glasses were all arranged, it was quite spectacular. Everyone was pleased to be together, even if the conversation at one end was impossible to hear at the other. The picture of the One Table is deeply imbedded in us.

Since we managed to do it at Easter, we tried again for a Christmas family gathering we held on Boxing Day. Instead of putting the folding tables end to end, we grouped them so we had a long eight-foot wide table running the length of our family room. It was glorious. We filled the spacious middle section with fruit and candles and evergreen boughs. We hauled things up and down the



stairs for days before and after. But it was worth all the labor to be around one big grand table.

But still, the pine table upstairs is my preference. It is humble now, not nearly as glorious as it once was. My grandchildren color pictures and roll out Play-Doh cookies on it. Clothes are folded on it. Groceries bags are piled on it. But it still holds candlelight and glistening wine glasses every Sabbath dinner when the whole family squashes around it and welcomes newcomers to the table. The babies babble (or even holler) and we pass them around; the toddlers sing and recite their memory verses for us. Just yesterday four generations sat down for lunch around our big pine table.

Modern middle-class homes seldom have separate, big dining rooms like the grand old houses of generations past. It's "wasted square footage" or too expensive. Besides, families are small and fragmented now. I remember a high-school friend who gave me a tour of her not-so-middle-class home. She pushed open some doors to reveal a beautiful room filled with antiques and a long shining table, chairs pushed in all around it. "This is the forbidden room," she told me. "We aren't allowed to go in here." And I could see why. But still, the principle of a glorious dining room appealed to me—so long as it wasn't a forbidden room, but rather a room for the whole family, where all could sit down together, if not every night, at least once a week, for a Sabbath feast.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day, I often think of the One Table that has been prepared for us, seeing it by faith. And our yellow pine table, with all its spots and blemishes, faintly pictures that perfect Table spread with God's Feast for all of us.