

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

March 15, 2026. "The Wisdom in Children's Stories. "*Charlotte's Web*"– sacrificial love and loyalty.

I Intro.

We're halfway through March. The worst cold is behind us...hopefully. Now we can look forward to warmer days...and lots of storms. We hope you're having a good year so far. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

Think about some of your favorite books from when you were young. It's amazing how something so simple, feels innocent, can be so profound, impacting. Many of the best, and most powerful lessons we learn are from children's books. Many children's books are like the parables of Jesus. A compelling story that weaves in powerful truths and wisdom.

The first week we did "*Pinocchio*" and the power of the process of transformation. We are all works in progress, will always be works in progress. So we live in a community of grace and challenge to be about that work. Last week it was the beautiful book; "*Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*" Learning about the power of practicing humility and generosity. Not performing.

Today it's the classic; "*Charlotte's Web*".

III Sunday.

Let's talk about friendship, or any kinds of relationships.

What are some important elements that make a good friendship?

Whether you're an introvert, and you're not a fan of big crowds or social events. Or you're an extrovert, and you always want to be the first to arrive and last to leave any social event. We all need people in our lives we can trust, depend on. They will always be straight up with us, but also will always have our back. We were intentionally designed to be in community.

One of the many amazing things contained in scripture is this verse from the second creation account in Genesis 2. **Genesis 2:18. "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."**

I want you to contemplate on this truth. Man had God, who we are often told is all we need. **But what did God say in this creation narrative?** Even if our relationship with God is tight, vibrant and active, it is not enough. "*It is not good to be alone.*" We were designed, built, created, to be in relationship with others. This will be the launching point for this message.

We're going to use one of the most famous and well known children's books. "**Charlotte's Web.**" This story forces us to accept one of the most difficult concepts to wrap our minds around. That hurdle is simply liking and finding sympathy for a spider. I practice catch and release. But if I'm not at home that spider gets squished. Then of course there's just the whole nature of a farm thing. But the real heart of this story forces us to wrap our mind around the dedication and sacrifice one being makes for another. And trying to figure out what this looks like in actual practice in our daily life in our world around us. I told this familiar story in the service. You can find it there.

This scripture will be a little more difficult to dig through because we have to pull from several places to paint a picture of this truth of sacrificial loyalty over a period of time. So, there's a lot of it. We'll be following the relationship of Jonathan, (son of the first king of Israel Saul) and his closest friend David, who would be the next king. This is such a beautiful and amazing picture of the elements that make up a significant relationship. The kind we need in our lives. We'll be hitting the highlights in three primary passages that will point out some truths, and then connect them to give us a bigger picture of sacrifice and loyalty. Will tie this story about Jonathan and David with the story of "**Charlotte's Web**".

This is the power and importance in relationships of interceding for others.

1 Samuel 19:1-7 *Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his strong affection for David, told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields. I'll ask my father to go out there with me, and I'll talk to him about you. Then I'll tell you everything I can find out."*

The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "The king must not sin against his servant David," Jonathan said. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the LORD brought a great victory to all Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!"

So Saul listened to Jonathan and vowed, "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be killed." Afterward Jonathan called David and told him what had happened. Then he brought David to Saul, and David served in the court as before.

Lay out the scenario. Saul simply wants David dead. Jonathan warns David to protect him. AND—speaks to his own father, the king, on David's behalf. Jonathan stood up to his dad, the king, constantly reminded his father his animosity, ill will directed towards David, is wrong. David has done nothing wrong, other than being fully himself. This part of the story is the importance of advocacy.

1. Being an advocate calls us to recognize and defend the sacred worth of every person.

Charlotte and Jonathan lived out this truth. EVERYONE is a child of God created in his image. This may even call us to stand up to power, to affirm the worth of another. Even if they 'feel' like an enemy. They may not be one of us, don't belong with us, they may feel like a threat to us. EVEN IF that other could be a competitor for what you want, and you might actually deserve. Jonathan was heir to the throne. God previously had anointed David as the next king. This put Jonathan in a difficult place. Being an advocate for others is speaking hard truths for the benefit of someone else. Who may have no power themselves. Risking other relationships to do the right thing.

In the book, Charlotte literally spoke words over Wilbur. She risks exposing herself, which is against her nature, testifying to his worthiness. "*Wilbur is more than what you can see*". Jonathan did this for

David. Basically said: **“Some Pig”**. **“Terrific”**. **“Radiant”**. This is the power of being an advocate for others. When silence would be safer. There are times we have to stand in those hard places WITH others. Even if you don't personally gain from it. We see this in the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. Stepping into a tough place, because no one else is standing on their behalf.

Wrestle with this truth in your own life.

Who has spoken for you on your behalf?

I want you to feel fully what you felt in that moment.

Who needs you to step into the gap and speak up on their behalf?

Be a Jonathan, and Charlotte in someone else's life, speaking on their behalf when those in power are seeking to oppress.

2. Relationships will often call us to bind, commit ourselves, WITH others.

Sometimes after speaking on the behalf of others, advocating for them, there comes a time when we just have to move beyond just speaking as an advocate for them. We are called to step into the gap and literally be there for them. To commit to a relationship with them. Saul hasn't stopped pursuing David, and David is still struggling against a greater foe, and isn't sure what to do.

1 Samuel 20:1-17 David now fled from Naioth in Ramah and found Jonathan. “What have I done?” he exclaimed. “What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?”

“That's not true!” Jonathan protested. “You're not going to die. He always tells me everything he's going to do, even the little things. I know my father wouldn't hide something like this from me. It just isn't so!”

Then David took an oath before Jonathan and said, “Your father knows perfectly well about our friendship, so he has said to himself, ‘I won't tell Jonathan—why should I hurt him?’ But I swear to you that I am only a step away from death! I swear it by the LORD and by your own soul!”

“Tell me what I can do to help you,” Jonathan exclaimed.

David replied, “Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. I've always eaten with the king on this occasion, but tomorrow I'll hide in the field and stay there until the evening of the third day. If your father asks where I am, tell him I asked permission to go home to Bethlehem for an annual family sacrifice. If he says, ‘Fine!’ you will know all is well. But if he is angry and loses his temper, you will know he is determined to kill me. Show me this loyalty as my sworn friend—for we made a solemn pact before the LORD—or kill me yourself if I have sinned against your father. But please don't betray me to him!”

“Never!” Jonathan exclaimed. “You know that if I had the slightest notion my father was planning to kill you, I would tell you at once.”

Then David asked, “How will I know whether or not your father is angry?”

“Come out to the field with me,” Jonathan replied. And they went out there together. Then Jonathan told David, “I promise by the LORD, the God of Israel, that by this time tomorrow, or the next day at the latest, I will talk to my father and let you know at once how he feels about you. If he speaks favorably about you, I will let you know. But if he is angry and wants you killed, may the LORD strike me and even kill me if I don't warn you so you can escape and live. May the LORD be with you as he used to be with my father. And may you treat me with the faithful love of the LORD as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even

when the LORD destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, saying, “May the LORD destroy all your enemies!” And Jonathan made David reaffirm his vow of friendship again, for Jonathan loved David as he loved himself.

Again, let’s lay out the scenario. David is afraid, confused, and can’t wrap his mind around Saul wanting him gone. Jonathan does like any friend should do in a situation like that. “You’re not crazy to feel that way.” He affirms how David is feeling. But something interesting happens in this passage. Jonathan says he’ll be there for David, but he wants there to be a spoken understanding between the two of them. An agreement. The O.T. calls this commitment; ‘hesed’ a covenant. An agreement of what I will do for you since we are really friends. (Blood brothers. The Sisterhood)

Charlotte and Wilbur made the same covenant. Charlotte said she would save Wilbur’s life using the abilities she had, if Wilbur promised to take her egg sac back to the farm and protect it. They made a covenant— a hesed of loyalty and love. This is what sacrifice and loyalty does in relationship. It moves from; “Hey we have some stuff in common” to “I promise this to you”. Sacrifice and loyalty isn’t just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It’s a promise to stick in there when it’s really difficult. One of the toughest truths from this passage is Jonathan putting David’s needs over his own. Charlotte did the same thing.

I wish I had some practical, doable, way to explain this. I’m a little stuck here ... even for myself. This is a really hard teaching and truth. But I do know this is what real sacrifice and loyalty looks like. Here are some small simple steps, practices that could grow this level of loyalty within us.

Three ways we can wrap our minds around this kind of covenantal commitment to someone.

1. This type of commitment to move into protecting someone else exists in an understood relationship. Not that it excuses us from not growing to be selfless in our relationships. Or we only stand in the gap for the people close to us. I honestly believe this is what real maturity and Christlikeness looks like. It does no good to beat you up if you’re not able to do this with everyone. A personal spiritual vision is God's picture of who you're becoming—one you'll spend a lifetime growing into. I know God has a lot of work to do within me to get me to this level of sacrifice. I want my care for all people to grow from posting online to step into the lives of others. But this means we do real work to continually grow our desire to stand in the gap of all of those who stand alone.

2. This type of commitment of sacrifice, loyalty, love for others means keep showing up the best you can in every moment. Sometimes you have it. Sometimes you kind of don't. You simply cannot generate this level of standing up for someone else out of the blue. I believe this is why Jesus often went off by himself. He was ‘peopled’ out and needed to refill. There are times you have to generate the ‘want to want to’. But one step is simply making the commitment to keep showing up, in the best way you can— in the moment you’re in. “Hesed”— a steadfast commitment to want to. Just take the one step you can. I may not be able to be all of what you need every time. To speak up when I need to. To stand in the gap for you in the way that would work. But I will show up.

3. This type of commitment calls us to hold loosely the things we currently value. Jonathan had to be able to let go of being king. Charlotte had to be able to let go of her natural tendency to stay hidden. To let go of what you feel you deserve. To show this type of sacrifice and loyalty, we have to see what we can let go of. This was one of the last times David and Jonathan would see each other. Charlotte was fully aware she wouldn’t see Wilbur or the farm ever again. But neither one of those affected their commitment to each other. They were able to let go of the things that they valued

(deeply in their nature) because the care of and for others called them to live sacrificially. Know none of us are fully there now. We continually do the inner work of figuring out what we're holding onto so that we can ask God to give us the discernment and courage to let go of.

Relationships will eventually call us to recognize the profound impact of commitment to love and loyalty.

The final song David sang after the death for the sacrifice Jonathan made.

2 Samuel 1:25-27. *Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies dead on the hills. How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan! Oh, how much I loved you! And your love for me was deep, deeper than the love of women! Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen! Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.*

Catching you up. Jonathan is killed in battle. Alongside his father Saul, and his brothers. It was a brutal and ugly death. But it paved a way for David to finally become king. This song was not a political tribute. This was personal. Jonathan is gone, but his life lives on through David. Charlotte never makes it back to the farm, but her life lives on through Wilbur. David becomes king and eventually takes in Jonathan's son who is disabled. Wilbur guards Charlotte's egg sac, and raises her offspring. **Anyone up for guarding a spider egg sac?** Wilbur tells her story and honors her memory.

IV Challenge.

Begin to put a bow on these stories. **What do these two stories tell us?**

A real relationship, commitment to others does not end with death.

A true covenant, "hesed", commitment to loyalty, love for others never dies.

Grief is such an odd thing. Lament, grieving, is always important, but we don't do it well. We don't sit well in the pain and heartache of deep, real, loss. But sometimes it's in those tough places, and losses, we remember the people who were there for us. A family member, friend, partner, co-worker, etc. Advocates speaking on our behalf. Standing in the gap with us. Both David and Wilbur were forever changed, by the words spoken over them, someone advocating for them, and then having that person stand in the gap for them. The relationship they had with the person in their life made them a different person. The truest expression of someone's sacrifice, loyalty is not how loudly love is expressed. But how those small acts of words and actions left an indelible mark. You will carry those with you for the rest of your life. And when you do that for others, how much you will be remembered, because you chose to intertwine your life with theirs.

Israel had one of their greatest kings ever in David. In spite of all of his flaws and awful sins, Israel remembered David forever. Jonathan was foundational in the formation of the good things in David. Wilbur never stopped caring for Charlotte's children, and became a great caregiver because he was taken care of so well. And told her offspring about her sacrifice and loyalty.

Love given away always multiplies way beyond the person who gives it. We have received love like that. And we GET to give love like that. Love leaves a mark.

So, let's end with some questions we began with.

Who has spoken for you on your behalf?

I want you to feel fully what you felt in that moment.

Who needs you to step into the gap and speak up on their behalf?

Be a Jonathan and a Charlotte in someone else's life.