

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

March 1, 2026. "The Wisdom in Children's Stories. Pinocchio. On becoming real."

I Intro.

It's now March. We're hoping most of winter is behind us. Hopefully now we can look forward to warmer days. 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 Sunday.

Since we're beginning a new series, as always we start with a question.

What were a couple of your favorite books when you were growing up?

Those books still stay with you don't they?

It's amazing how something so simple, innocent, can be so profound, and impacting. The power of children's books to show us things we just need to be reminded of. Many of the best, most powerful lessons we learn are from when we were young. Many children's books are like the parables of Jesus. A compelling story about a life journey that weaves in powerful truths and wisdom. And those stories, and hidden truths stick with us our entire life.

Our first story is grounded in my full on belief in the process of transformation. Spiritual formation towards maturity. The 'churchy' word is sanctification. Sanctification is the understanding, belief, and practice, that we are all unfinished. We are all works in progress, and will always be works in progress. So we live in a community of 'grace and challenge' to be about this work. We walk with, and help, each other on this journey of transformation.

I want to state our foundational truth right off the bat. **Maturity is forged not granted**. We tend to want growth, maturity, but often in gift form rather than produced. It's the classic 'praying for patience' truth. Patience is not downloaded into you. You will be put in situations where patience is required. And when you seek, the Spirit will mold and shape you to grow your ability to be patient. And especially to desire to actually want patience, and not just have the situation resolved. It's in this story we come face to face with the truth that IF we want to become real. To become the fullest of who God called us to be. It requires us to admit that we cannot make this happen in an instant. This life calls us to surrender to the truth that becoming real is a lifetime commitment to the process and the work of becoming real. We'll look at a teaching that is most likely the source for the truths in Pinocchio.

Pinocchio teaches us maturity is defined by honesty, courage, and selflessness. Even in the most difficult of times. There is a testing done in tough circumstances to see who we really are. And the

journey in becoming 'real' only will come through the practice of these traits. The process of transformation and sanctification. But for that to happen, we need to know these truths from the story, and the truths it shows us from scripture.

We have a passage that unpacks our book for the day. We're going to divide our overall passage into two parts. This first section will be the process that Pinocchio went through to become real.

James 1:2-4. *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

Here are the truths from this passage and from Pinocchio that will help us grow.

1. You were loved from the beginning, even before you began the journey to become real.

Pinocchio was always loved by Geppetto, but couldn't allow himself to feel or live in it. We also often don't believe or allow ourselves to be first loved by God. Before you can even want to be transformed, you have to know you have always been loved by God. This is the absolute beginning point.

All of Psalm 139 is David's song of experiencing God's love in every aspect of his life.

Psalm 139:13-16. *You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born.*

This was David's realization that even through all the mistakes he made, and would make. He had to come to an understanding who created him, and how he was formed. This truth can be pretty difficult to fully accept. You are lavishly, extravagantly, and in the words of Cory Asbury, "*recklessly loved*". I don't want to overplay the; "*You saw me before you were born*", in our modern day language about the therapeutic language of '*being seen*'. However, there does seem to be a more powerful understanding of this psalm that's much greater than just being visually identified. The foundational belief expressed in this song is God not only 'saw' David. But God designed and formed, made him worthy to be loved. He 'sees' David for all of who he is, and still deeply loves him. What got Pinocchio in trouble, caused him to lie, is deep down he didn't believe that Geppetto loved him. Despite the fact that Geppetto designed and formed him, that Pinocchio was made to receive Geppetto's affection, Pinocchio couldn't accept it. Pinocchio went looking elsewhere for love, and only found heartache. We get ourselves in trouble also because we don't believe and embrace that no matter what we've done, where we are in life, we were designed, formed by God, to be lavishly loved.

2. There is no shortcut in becoming real. Just as Pinocchio sought meaning from Pleasure Island, we often look for quick fixes, the easy way, the worldly way, to find the 'realness' we're looking for. We're so easily distracted, and prone to chasing shiny things. This is even more difficult for us in this day and age. Aaron had to gather all the gold jewelry, and melt it down to form an idol. Our idols are thrown at us from all directions. We like ease, maximum pleasure, entertainment, with the least amount of effort possible. On Demand streaming, (commercials are so painful), Door Dash, having our groceries delivered, same day Amazon delivery, etc. We have little patience for things that take time. A NYT recipe says. TOTAL prep time is over...what...30 minutes, we're not interested. An idol is anything that promises what God promises without the work and effort to receive them. To become real, we have to reprogram our mind AND our spirit, to live in the expectation that becoming real is a process, not a step, but it's also never ending. There is no shortcut or easy path to becoming real.

This speaks to the importance of friction in our lives. To be toughened and formed by simply having to make an effort for the things in our life. The sooner we accept and embrace becoming real is work, the sooner we can be on that path. It's found in an active connection, and sensitivity to the voice of the spirit. Grow your ability to sense the spirit, continually obey his voice, and do the work.

3. Suffering is not the enemy of faith– it's the foundry. (forging steel) Pinocchio discovered in being in the belly of the whale (we know what this is a reference to) suffering is what moved him to save Geppetto. Real growth is only produced through trial. This is one of the most derailing, painful facts of life. Struggling, and suffering is the path towards becoming real. We tend to personalize suffering. We add intent and purposeful harm to the bad things that happen to us. *"The gods are against me. God is out to get me. The universe is conspiring against me. Satan is throwing all sorts of evil my way."* But the real bad things in your life; Death of someone close, significant loss (house, job, relationship, finances), anything that turns your life upside down, are all very real, painful, and deep sources of grief. I want to honor those of you who have suffered great loss and horrible pain. But those things are not intentionally directed at you to punish you. Yes, they are moments of intense pain, struggle, and a source of genuine suffering. Give yourself permission to feel the pain of them. **BUT THESE BAD THINGS ARE NOT THE ENEMY OF FAITH.** In these moments and situations, if we lean into God, trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be forged into something beautiful, powerful, and very real. It's the Phoenix rising out of the ashes. Turning the difficulties in our life, the bad things that happen, into wisdom, growth. Becoming real. This is the real work of spiritual formation, allowing yourself to be forged into maturity.

4. Truth will lead you to the path of becoming real. Pinocchio had to quit believing the lies, quit lying to himself, chasing distractions, know he is truly loved, and listen to the truth to find his life. In the same way, we have to learn spiritual discernment to separate ourselves from the lies of the world. This is a truth that we know is one of the biggest of all truths, and yet we still will avoid it. What is the saying; *"The truth will set you free, but not until it is finished with you."* David Foster Wallace. You recognize Jesus from John 8. Truth leads to liberation from bondage. David Foster Wallace took it to what I believe is its logical conclusion. The most important word in this quote; *"until"*.

Honestly, do any of us believe on this side of life we will ever be "finished"?

Truth is not simply learning the right information. Truth is allowing that right information to do a good work within us. We are told the same thing in Philippians 1:6

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

What are the truths from this story and from James?

We practice selflessness over selfishness. We practice honesty over deception, we practice courage over fear.. Even when it's hard, we're in pain. The faithful practice of these leads us to becoming real.

5. Love and obedience to truth is what will make you real. Pinocchio learned after running from his creator, Geppetto, accepting the love of Geppetto is what would lead him to being obedient to him. Pinocchio began to be obedient when he finally embraced Geppetto's love for him. The truths of; **Moving towards selflessness**– it's not all about me and mine. An outwardly directed and focused life is what will lead us towards a virtuous honorable person. **Moving towards honesty**– we can trust God loves us. And that love calls us into what will lead us towards becoming a virtuous honorable

person. **Moving towards courage**– we can step into tough situations knowing we can trust God and he’s got us. There is a life of being transformed, becoming real, that comes from the exact practices we saw in Pinocchio. This is what becoming real is all about.

James hits those things in the next four verses that come after the ones we read. If you are struggling with figuring out what this life looks like in practice, here it is.

James 1:5-8. If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

This is such a simple truth, and we don’t practice it like we’re invited to.

Are there things you need to know? Are there things you want to do better?

Are you struggling to figure out what you need to do to do the process work of becoming real? Just ASK!!

III Challenge.

Pinocchio wasn’t trying to intentionally choose the worst or most selfish path. He was literally trying to find freedom, to experience everything the world had to offer, in an attempt to become real. But WITHOUT having to go through what really makes someone real. We need to identify that tendency within us. To want to become ‘real’ without having to do the actual work that it takes to become real. These were the temptations of Jesus.

We need to remember how and why we were created. And how we can live into the fullness of becoming real– just like God designed. We all have a divine presence woven inside of us, that is the seed to becoming real. We see this in **Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that “*God has placed eternity in our hearts*” so we would want to find him.**

But like Pinocchio, we look everywhere else for what can only come from God. God doesn’t want to punish or condemn us for doing that. God wants to save us from the pain and frustration that comes from chasing after everything else on our journey. When we wake up, realize this truth, finally embrace God fully loves us, then we can turn to him, and allow the Spirit to do the real work of making us real. Practice the deepest and purest of love. It’s in the most perfect obedience, do we find our real selves.

The Pinocchio transformation. God has been telling us how he wants to transform us into being real from the very beginning.

Ezekiel 36:26. “I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone, (wood), and give you a heart of flesh.”

This is the real PROCESS of becoming real. Geppetto never abandoned or gave up on Pinocchio. His dream was for Pinocchio to discover his true identity. Everything he did was towards that work and goal. And God wants to do the very same with us. God hasn’t and will never give up on you. We just have to stop looking for everything else around us to make us feel real, and turn to God. He is the only one that can do that for us.

It begins by accepting the love of God, and working those truths into our lives.