

Published based on [In the Barnyard](#)

# In the Barnyard

I have pondered lately on the definition of a friend. As I attempted to bring words to my understanding of what a friend really is, my mind went straight to the barnyard. I first experienced Charlotte's Web, a classic children's book written by E.B. White, in elementary school as my teacher read the story to us, day by day unfolding the story. Later, as my own children grew up, we often watched the movie rendition of the classic. I must say it is an absolute favorite of mine. It is one story I enjoyed so much that if my children were watching it, I had to sit down and enjoy it, slowing down from all the endless tasks that call to a mother and just relishing the story.

Perhaps you will find yourself in one of the characters as I attempt to bring terminology to what a friend is. You might identify others in your "barnyard". But more than anything, I hope you will be challenged by these simple lessons of friendship that have the potential to change you and others in your barnyard.

The story begins with the birth of a new litter of 11 piglets. The farmer, Mr. Zuckerman, must eliminate one of the piglets because he is a runt. The farmer gets his ax and then is stopped by his daughter, Fern. Fern cannot bear to think of the piglet being killed, so she convinces her father to allow her to raise the piglet. Fern begins to feed her new piglet and names him Wilbur. After Wilbur gets strong enough to be on his own, he is put into the barn across the road. In the new barn, he meets many different animals: cows, sheep, geese, a rat, a horse, and of course, a spider named Charlotte.

Let me give you a quick introduction to some of the characters in the barnyard.

Wilbur, the pig, is looking for ways to get to know everyone in the barnyard. He is friendly and has a simple trust about him. He feels very lonely because all the barnyard creatures are busy with their own agendas.

Templeton is the rat. He is always thinking about himself. He is selfish. He is constantly looking for a way he can profit from a situation and for a way to get more food for himself. He will help others only if there is something in it for him.

Charlotte, the spider, is unnoticed by all in the barnyard until Wilbur discovers her. Wilbur is amazed at Charlotte's beauty - something no one else in the barnyard has been able to see. They began to talk and enjoy relationship. Then Wilbur finds out that Charlotte has some nasty habits - she captures insects and drinks their blood, but he loves her anyway.

As the plot unfolds, Wilbur discovers through the sheep (who is a matter of fact animal to the point of being somewhat uncaring) that he is being fattened up to be slaughtered and turned into bacon. He is distraught. Charlotte then determines to save Wilbur's life. She develops an ingenious plan to write words in her web that describe what a wonderful pig Wilbur is and thus influence Mr. Zuckerman, the farmer, to save Wilbur's life.

So a series of words are written into Charlotte's web. Some pig. Terrific. Radiant. Humble. Wilbur is spared as Charlotte gives of her time, energy, and intelligence to care for him.

Wilbur is taken to the county fair. Charlotte and Templeton are with him. Take a peek into this exchange.

Wilbur: What's that?

Charlotte: This is my egg sac, my magnum opus, my great work, the finest thing I have ever made. Inside are my eggs, five hundred and fourteen of them. I counted them. I got started counting, so I kept on, just to keep my mind occupied. I guarantee it is strong. It's made out of the toughest material I have. It is also waterproof. The eggs are inside and will be warm and dry....

Wilbur: Charlotte, do you feel all right?

Charlotte: A little tired perhaps. But I feel peaceful. Your success in the ring today was to a small degree my success. Your future is assured.. You will live, secure and safe, Wilbur. Nothing can harm you now. You mean a great deal to Zuckerman and he will not harm you, ever.

Wilbur: Charlotte, why did you do this for me?

Charlotte: You're my friend, Wilbur. That in itself is a tremendous thing.

Wilbur: We're going home today. Aren't you anxious?

Charlotte: I will not be going back to the barn.

Wilbur: What?

Charlotte: I'm done for. In a day or two I'll be dead. I haven't strength enough to climb into the crate. I doubt if there is enough silk in my spinnerets to lower me to the ground.

Wilbur: Charlotte! No, Charlotte! My true friend.

Charlotte: Come now, let's not make a scene. Be quiet, Wilbur. Stop thrashing about.

Wilbur: But I can't stand it. I won't leave you here alone to die. I will stay with you.

Charlotte: You can't stay here. Zuckerman and Lurvy and the others will be back any minute to put you in the crate.

Narrator: Wilbur was in a panic. He raced around the pen. Suddenly he had an idea.

Wilbur: Where's Templeton?

Charlotte: He's in that corner, under the straw, asleep.

Wilbur: Templeton. Wake up. Pay attention!

Templeton: What kind of monkeyshine is this? Can't a rat catch a wink of sleep without being rudely popped out of bed?

Wilbur: Listen! Charlotte is very ill. She only has a short time to live. She cannot go home with us. So it is absolutely necessary that I take her egg sac with me. You are the only one who can get it. Please Templeton.

Templeton: So it's old Templeton to the rescue again, is it?

Wilbur: Please Templeton. Hurry.

Templeton: Why should I?

Wilbur: Templeton, if you get the egg sac for me, I will make you a promise. From now on, when Lurvy slops me, I will let you eat first. I will wait until you are all finished before I touch a bite in the trough.

Templeton: You mean that?

Wilbur: I promise. Cross my heart.

Templeton: All right. It's a deal.

So Wilbur is able to save Charlotte's egg sac and take it back to the barn with him. He watches over it with diligence. One morning, he noticed something move. He stepped closer and stared. A tiny spider crawled from the sac. It looked just like Charlotte. The little spider waved at him. Wilbur moved closer. Then more baby spiders crawled from the sac and waved. Charlotte's children were here at last!

Wilbur: Hello there!

Spiders: Hello.

Wilbur: I am an old friend of your mother. I'm so glad to see you. Are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?

Narrator: The young spiders just waved. There were so many of them. Wilbur tried to count them, but they kept moving and there were so many. Then one morning, as a warm wind blew softly over Zuckerman's farm, one tiny spider leaped away into the wind.

Spider 1: Goodbye!

Wilbur: Wait!

Narrator: Wilbur watched in horror as the little spider floated away on the wind. Then suddenly, another baby spider leaped into the wind as well and floated away. Then another and another.

Spiders: Goodbye!

Wilbur: Stop! Come back, children!

Spider 2: We're leaving on the warm updraft. This is our moment for setting forth. We are aeronauts and we are going out into the world to make webs for ourselves.

Wilbur: But where?

Spider 3: Wherever the wind takes us. High, low, near, far, east, west, north, south. We take to the breeze, we go as we please.

Wilbur: No. Please don't go. I'll be all alone. Your mother wouldn't want that to happen, I'm sure. Please don't go.

Narrator: Soon the sky was filled with baby spiders, floating away on the wind. Wilbur sank to the ground, crying, his heart broken once more. Then suddenly he heard a voice.

Joy: Salutations. Here I am.

Aranea: So am I.

Nellie: So am I. Three of us are staying. We like this place and we like you.

Wilbur: Really? You are staying here in the barn cellar with me. Am I really going to have three friends?

Joy: Yes, indeed.

Aranea: Indeed!

Nellie: Indeed!

Wilbur: What are your names please?

Joy: My name is Joy.

Aranea: And I'm Aranea.

Nellie: Just call me Nellie.

Wilbur: Joy! Aranea! Nellie! Welcome to the barn cellar. I am so happy you are here. Your mother was my very best friend. She saved my life, you know. To you, her daughters, I pledge my friendship forever.

Joy: I pledge mine.

Aranea: I do too.

Nellie: And so do I.

Narrator: It was a happy day for Wilbur. He and his new friends played together day after day. And Wilbur told them all the stories about their mother.

So how do we define "friend"? Jesus said a friend was one who would lay down their life for another. Perhaps, this simple children's story will challenge us all to evaluate our relationships. Are we like Templeton - it all about what we can gain out of a situation or relationship? Are we uncaring and uninvolved like the sheep? Or are we like Charlotte - who because she loved Wilbur- was willing to sacrifice of her energy and resources to care deeply for him. And then there is Wilbur, who returns Charlotte's love by caring for her egg sac and then reaps the benefit of his care by gaining three new friends. And of course there was Fern, who started it all. She loved Wilbur and made a way for him to live yet later grew up and fell in love. She moved onto a new stage of her life where she really didn't have time for Wilbur anymore. Some friendships are like that - intended for a season in our lives but always linking us to future and purpose.

So we find that the potential of discovery surrounds us many times but we fail to experience it. So it is with the discovery of friendship. The potential can surround us but we can miss it when we don't slow down enough to be attune to the opportunities to see the beauty in others. We race through life pursuing our own agendas with such fervency that we don't see the need to give of ourselves to others. We miss the beauty inside people and we miss the growth that comes in our own hearts as we interact with others and give of ourselves for the good of someone else.

You know, the smells of the barnyard aren't always pleasant; the food isn't always the greatest; the weather is not perfect, but the potential for life is a reality of the barnyard.

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