INTRO.
-- Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
-- The lives of those who have followed Christ faithfully and devotedly can serve as helpful examples of what it looks like to be a disciple. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to study the lives of those who have gone before us and to learn from them. Indeed, two chapters earlier, in Hebrews 11, the writer reviews the lives of OT heroes of the faith to inspire us to live similar lives.
-- So on this Mother's Day I think it is appropriate for us to consider the life of one who was a devoted follower of Christ and a faithful wife and mother. Sarah Edwards lived 250 years ago, but her life still serves as a model for us who are seeking to be disciples today.

I. GROWING UP
-- Sarah was born in 1710. Her father was John Pierpont, a prominent pastor in New Haven, Connecticut, and a founder of Yale. Tutored by her well educated parents, Sarah was one of the better educated women in Colonial America, a fact that prepared her to become a marvelous companion for the husband that God would bring into her life, Jonathan Edwards, still widely considered to be the most brilliant, prolific, and influential theologian in the history of America.

II. COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE

A. DIFFERENT BUT ALIKE
1. Jonathan and Sarah possessed strikingly different personalities. Jonathan was introverted and shy. He entered college when he was just 13 years old and graduated as the valedictorian. Tall and unathletic, Jonathan was uneasy with making "small talk" and would have scored about a "0" on the social graces scale. Sarah, on the other hand, was quite at ease with people and was renowned for her hospitality and accomplished social skills.

2. Different as they were, they both shared the most important of qualities: a deep love for God. Indeed, it was Sara's reputation as a pious young lady that caught Jonathan's attention and interest.

B. COURTSHIP
-- Jonathan first heard about Sarah when she was just 13 years old, which was a young but marriageable age in Colonial times. Jonathan recorded this about the report given to him about Sarah: "They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is loved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this Great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight; and that she hardly cares for anything, except to meditate on Him...You could not persuade her to do any thing wrong or sinful, if you would give her all the world, lest she should offend this Great Being. She is of a wonderful sweetness, calmness, and universal benevolence of mind; especially after this Great God has manifested himself to her mind. She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly; and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure; She loves to be alone... and seems to have some one invisible always conversing with her."

C. MARRIAGE
-- Jonathan sought out this unusual young woman, and they began a courtship that would last 4 years. They married in 1727, when Jonathan was 24, and Sarah was 17. The Edwards lived in Northampton, Massachusetts, where Jonathan was an assistant in the parish pastored by his grandfather, Solomon
Stoddard, one of the most renowned pastors in Colonial America.

Two years later his grandfather died, and Jonathan became the pastor of one of the largest, wealthiest, and most prominent congregations in the state.

III. THE HELP-MATE HOMEMAKER

A. MOTHER

-- Sarah and Jonathan had 11 children (3 sons and 8 daughters). According to Noel Piper, six of the children were born on Sunday. It was a common belief that a child was born on the same day of the week that it had been conceived. There were even some pastors who refused to baptize a child born on Sunday, obviously looking on conceiving as an inappropriate Sabbath activity.

B. HOUSEWIFE

-- It's been said that if ever a marriage was 'made in heaven' it was that of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards. Sarah's ability to manage family affairs allowed Jonathan to concentrate on his preaching and theological work.

-- Since Jonathan spent close to 13 hours a day in study and usually just an hour a day with the children, almost all of the child-rearing and managing of the household duties fell on Sarah. Housewives like Sarah in Colonial times made the clothes for the family (a task that included weaving the cloth as well as sewing the clothes). They planted and tended the garden, and cooked everything from scratch. Having a chicken dinner meant first raising, killing, and plucking the chickens. All laundry was done by hand.

-- Once when Sarah was away and Jonathan was left in charge of the house and children, he wrote to her almost in a panic, "We've been without you almost as long as we know how to be."

-- But as busy as Sarah was, she was never too busy not to pray. She prayed unceasingly for her children, starting before they were born and continuing on for as long as she lived.

B. HOSPITABLE HOSTESS

-- The Edwards home was a place where many visited, where travelers frequently stayed overnight, and where some stayed much longer. For example, a young man named Samuel Hopkins showed up one day, hoping to meet and be mentored by Jonathan. Sarah, who already had seven children at the time, welcomed Samuel into her family and treated him like a son, giving him spiritual guidance and encouragement. It's likely that this young man, who went on to become an influential pastor, gained as much from Sarah as he did from Jonathan. Samuel Hopkins kept a diary during his time with the Edwards, and that diary is a source of valuable information about this unusual family. In his diary Hopkins describes Sarah's parenting style as one that promoted

"a filial respect and affection, and a mild tender treatment of each other. Quarreling and contention, which too frequently take place among children, were in her family unknown; She seldom punished them; but when she did it was in... gentle and pleasant words. When she had occasion to reprove; she would do it in a few words, without warmth and noise [i.e., losing her temper]; she would address herself to the reason of her children;"

-- Another frequent guest in the Edwards home was the great English preacher George Whitefield. He admired Sarah and wrote that knowing her had led him "to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that he would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife." He described her as "adorned with a meek and quiet spirit," but also noted that she could talk "solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband.

IV. A NEW TOUCH FROM GOD

-- During the 1730s and 1740s a spiritual renewal and revival known as the First Great Awakening swept across the colonies. The home base for that Awakening was Jonathan Edwards' church in Northampton. In 1742 Sarah herself was touched in a very personal and powerful way by that movement of God. Here's how Jonathan described her experience:

"The heart was swallowed up in a kind of glow of Christ's love coming down as a constant stream of sweet light, at the same time the soul all flowing out in love to him; so that there seemed to be a constant flowing and reflowing from heart to heart. The soul dwelt on high, was lost in God and seemed almost to leave the body."

-- Perhaps, this touch from God was a way of preparing Sarah and the family for the great hardship that would assault them.

V. A DECADE OF HARDSHIP
There was a growing conflict between Jonathan and the leaders of his church in Northampton over the issue of church membership. Traditionally, anyone duly baptized as an infant could enjoy the privileges of church membership, including admission to taking the Lord's Supper. Jonathan contended, however, that church membership and taking of the Lord's Supper should be reserved for those who were not only baptized but who also professed and showed evidence of conversion. Finally, the conflict culminated with the church voting to oust Edwards from the congregation that he had pastored for 20 years.

The Edwards family continued to live in Northampton for the next year seeking out where God would lead them next. It was a stressful time, financially and otherwise. Finally, God opened the door for them to move to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to become missionaries to the American Indians.

For a while life was good, but the Fall of 1757 brought the first of a series of tragic events. Their son-in-law Aaron Burr, married to their daughter Esther, died suddenly in September of that year. He was the President of the College of New Jersey (which later became Princeton). Esther was left a young widow with two small children. Princeton extended an invitation to Jonathan to become the next president, and Jonathan accepted. In January of 1758 Jonathan left Stockbridge and his family to travel to Princeton and take over the office of president of the college, and to render support to his daughter and granddaughters who still lived there. The plans were for Sarah and the children to join Jonathan in the Spring.

About the time that Jonathan arrived at Princeton, he received news that his father had died. A few weeks later Jonathan volunteered to receive a smallpox inoculation. It was a relatively new procedure at the time, but Jonathan had a great respect for the sciences and wanted to demonstrate his confidence in the procedure and set a model that would encourage others to be inoculated as well. Sadly, the inoculation was administered poorly and caused Jonathan to become seriously ill. He died on March 22, 1758. As he lay dying, he sent this message to Sarah:

&hellip; give my kindest regards to my dear wife, and tell her, that the uncommon union, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as [I] trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue for ever.

Later, Sarah wrote this to Esther:

"O my very Dear Child, What shall I say. A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may all kiss the rod and lay our hands on our mouths. The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness that we had him[Jonathan] so long. But my God lives and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband and your father has left us. We are all given to God and there I am and love to be."

But Esther never got to read these remarkable words. Esther got ill and died on April 2. In two weeks Sarah had lost a husband and a daughter.

Esther left behind two small children. In October Sarah went to New Jersey to get her orphaned grandchildren. As they were returning to Massachusetts, Sarah became ill with dysentery and died at the home of friends in Philadelphia. It was the fifth death in the family in just over a year.

VI. AN AMAZING LEGACY

Sarah was just 49 years old when she died, but she left an amazing legacy that bore fruit in the lives of her children. Jonathan and Sarah's 11 children would go on to make amazing contributions to society. A study conducted in 1900 showed that among their descendants there were:

- 13 college presidents,
- 65 professors,
- 100+ lawyers,
- 30 judges,
- 66 physicians,
- 80 holders of public office,

including 3 United States Senators, 3 mayors, 3 state governors,

- 1 controller of the United States Treasury,
- 1 vice president of the United States

In addition, numerous men entered the ministry, and 100+ family members served as overseas missionaries.