

Week 1—The Friendship Pill

It may come as a surprise to some of you but I was an awkward kid, quite awkward. I was always the chubby kid. I was never really athletic or generally coordinated. My parents did not have a lot of money so I did not have expensive clothes. I was loved and provided for but just not with name brand items. To make matters worse, my mother decided to make me some clothes and she was not an amazing seamstress. My mom once made me a matching shirt/shorts outfit. She spent tons of time on it and was so proud to give it to me. I love my mother dearly and appreciate all she has done for me over the years but this time was tough. The material for my matching outfit was red and white stripes. I looked like a candy cane that swallowed a watermelon.

However, I still managed to make friends. I had one very good friend in particular. He was my bud. He was with me almost constantly. Oddly enough, he was quite popular, I guess as popular as he could be for that age. Most of the kids in school knew who he was. He had the coolest haircut. The coolest clothes. And in spite of me being pretty much his polar opposite, he was always there for me when I needed him. We were close. He'd even go on vacation with my family on occasion. He was such a great friend that on those really tough days, I would come home and already be there ready to snuggle. Man, I miss him.

I know I'm old and technology wasn't what it is now but we did have cameras and I happen to have some video of my friend. Check this out...(My Buddy commercial).

Fortunately for me, my life and friend making skills have vastly improved!

_____, how many friends do you have? I now have 2001 friends (Show screenshots)

Side note: as I was preparing this lesson, I added up 2002 friends. When I went to add the screenshots, I noticed I only had 2001 friends. In a day, I had lost a friend. I found myself wondering what I had done wrong. Although I will probably never be able to figure out who this person is, why did they stop being my friend (or following me)? These thoughts crossed my mind and I don't even keep up with how many friends I have on social media. I didn't know the number until I prepared this lesson. If I am having these thoughts, how does this situation affect those that diligently track their numbers?

So let's talk about this...do I really have 2001 friends? Are they real? Why? Why not?

What if I told you that all interactions between you and your friends must be virtual from now on?

Week 1—The Friendship Pill

The Friendship Pill-Today, we are going to talk about fake friends—not backstabbing-pretending-to-be-your-friends friends, that will be next week. This week we are talking about virtual friends. Did any of you have those little virtual pets when you were a kid? (show pic of Virtual Pets)

What if I told you I could give you a pill that would allow you to have the feelings you get when participating in your favorite hobby but you wouldn't really have to do it? (duck hunting, basketball, singing, dancing, band, etc) Would you take it? What about your favorite meal? (You guys remember Willy Wonka?) How about a friendship or boyfriend/girlfriend? You could experience a version of the feelings you would get—for the meal...your stomach might feel full, there may be some lingering aftertaste, maybe even a feeling of something stuck in your teeth. For the relationship...you might feel that nervousness of meeting a new person, maybe the excitement of finding out you have something in common, maybe the comfort in feeling accepted, maybe even that feeling in your stomach when you hear their name. Would you take the pill? Knowing it's not real, it even says so on the bottle—"This is virtual (virtual means not real)", would you take the pill?

But like any drug, it is not without side effects. (show side effects video)

Side effects of virtual relationships may include but are not limited to:

- Belief that everyone's life is better than yours
- Increased propensity to hide undesirable parts of your life and accentuate the desirable ones
- Impaired ability to form lasting relationships in real life
- Decreased vulnerability resulting lower probability of truly connecting with others
- Random feelings of loneliness
- Diminished verbal filter
- False sense of acceptance
- Hypersensitivity to rejection
- Lack of patience
- Impaired vision
- Neck, shoulder, and back pain
- Phantom Vibration Syndrome
- No Mo Phobia

Even knowing all this...Would you take this pill? Could you see yourself wanting the pill more and more? Even to the extent of preferring it over real life experiences? Could you see yourself becoming so dependent upon it that if it were to become unavailable, you would not know what to do with your life? Sadly, this scenario is not fiction. It is reality for many teenagers. (Video about social media and the brain)

Week 1—The Friendship Pill

The Test---Is this real? (Virtual friends can also be IRL friends but this will help you determine if they are only virtual friends) Virtual relationships should be an enhancement for your IRL relationships not a substitute.

If someone ends their “streak” with you, what do you do? How do you feel? Is your relationship dependent on what you get in return?

Proverbs 19:4 Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbor.

Proverbs 19:6-7 ⁶ Many seek favors from a ruler; everyone is the friend of a person who gives gifts! ⁷ The relatives of the poor despise them; how much more will their friends avoid them! Though the poor plead with them, their friends are gone.

What are we really looking for with virtual relationships? All the benefits without the work? Reduced risk of being hurt? Self-gratification, acceptance (or the feeling at least), pride, superiority, etc.? Scripture about good for others and not ourselves.

Philippians 2:3-5 ³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Which do you like better...your real life or your virtual life? My virtual personality is a lie, everyone's is a lie. Maybe not intentionally but it is unavoidable because it is shaped by our self-image, our self-made portrait. No one is so honest, humble, and forthcoming to present themselves in their entirety, flaws and all. Most of us do not even know all the flaws we have. The only way to truly get to know someone is in real life, real situations, real environments. Otherwise, you will only have partial information, biased by the giver of that information. So, have you ever met this friend in real life? If you haven't, you can never really know them. Even if you have met them briefly in real life, maybe someone who goes to school with you and you pass in the hallway on occasion, but do not interact on a regular basis, you still don't/can't know them. If they refuse to interact with you IRL, that is a problem. I can only assume one or more of a few options: they are embarrassed to be friends with you, they are hiding something about themselves, or they are addicted to virtual relationships and cannot process real ones. All of these situations do not make for good friends. The Psalmist talks about these types of friends.

Psalm 55:21 His words are as smooth as butter, but in his heart is war. His words are as soothing as lotion, but underneath are daggers!

Week 1—The Friendship Pill

Proverbs 27:5-6 ⁵ An open rebuke is better than hidden love! ⁶ Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

Will your virtual friends be there for you when you need them?

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another with brotherly love; prefer one another in honor,

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Why are IRL relationships important? Because they are important to God.

Relationships are a two-way street, at least real ones. Virtual relationships may feel like real relationships but lack two vital components, knowledge of one another and love. You can never truly know the other person without physical interaction. As a result, any love given or felt is under false pretenses. You are expressing love towards a fabricated idea and not a real person. Paul references this knowledge in Galatians 4 when speaking of our relationship with God through Christ.

Galatians 4:9 But now, after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how do you turn again to the weak and beggarly elemental forces to which you desire again to be in bondage?

Paul also makes reference to this knowledge in 1 Corinthians 8 telling us our relationship with God transcends the things of this world. He knows our heart.

1 Corinthians 8:3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

That being said, the only way for us to have a relationship with God is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Our relationship with God is not only based on knowledge but also love, His true love for us, in spite of knowing who we really are.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Week 1—The Friendship Pill

Jesus came in the flesh, IRL (In Real Life)

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We were designed to have IRL relationships with one another but most importantly, our Creator. That was the plan from the beginning when God said it was not good for man to be alone, physically alone. That relationship involves being fully known by our Creator and being unconditionally loved. This can only happen through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. His physical existence, death, and literal resurrection (not virtual as some were actually teaching in that day) made a way for this relationship.

Wrap up

Connecting with friends on social media is not inherently wrong. However, it can be very dangerous and destructive if it replaces IRL relationships. God designed us to be in relationships with one another and most importantly with Him. Although our connection with God, at times, may feel virtual, know that our relationship is built on the immovable foundation of a very in-real-life Savior that died for us. If we know Him and are known by Him, one day our reality will be so much more amazing than we could ever imagine.