

Are you trying to survive on **Fantasy Relationships**

By Dave Batty

As a teen did you fall in love with someone special? You were so in love, this person was always on your mind. Even the thought of spending time with this person made your heart race! As you looked to the future, the two of you would always be in love. Ah, the beauty of true love!

You enjoyed each other's company, and this special person always did what you wanted them to do. They always treated you with kindness and respect. Their eyes always lit up when they saw you. You never had any fights—you lived in perfect harmony.

True love? The perfect relationship? No—it was pure fantasy.

There was a tiny problem—this was a romance in your mind. You had never talked to this special person. But in your mind, you had this incredibly beautiful romantic relationship.

❖ **How are fantasy relationships different from real relationships?**

❖ **What are the dangers of real relationships?**

❖ **What are the benefits of real relationships?**

Another expression of fantasy relationships knows no age boundaries. We have a close relationship with a movie star, a TV personality, a news reporter, a TV pastor, a music star, or someone with lots of money. We are best friends with them. We know all about them. Every time they are on TV or in a movie, we make

Does your greatest joy come in fantasy relationships?

sure our schedule is always open for them. Whenever we see that person on TV, we feel great!

They bring a real sense of joy into our day—but when the program is over, they are gone, and only the memory remains. It's a good memory in your life where the daily grind of reality is filled with frustrations.

Another world that is filled with fantasy relationships is found in the computer. Whether in cyberspace or in video games, we can create our own world of friends—whether it is one special person, or a whole bunch of new ones every day. It's a stimulating world, it's compelling, even addictive. You can spend all hours of the day or night, it's your source of joy.

Even though it feels good, it's not a real relationship. And fantasy relationships can never provide what a real relationship can bring into your life.

The benefits of a fantasy relationship

So what is the draw to fantasy relationships?

First, they are safe. They don't create a mess in your life. Talk to just about anyone and they can tell you stories where real people have betrayed them. Whether it be family or friends, the wounds have been deep. Those who should have loved them violated that trust.

In these fantasy relationships there are no surprises. No risks. You decide how intimate the relationship will be. You are in control.

This special person is really great! They have no flaws. Always beautiful. Never ugly. They have a wonderful sense of humor. You feel really comfortable when you are "with" them.

These fantasy relationships taste sweet, much like sugar. There is the instant pleasure of the first touch. We acquire a taste for sugar, but not because it provides the best nutrition our body needs. We become accustomed to the sweetness and confuse that with what is best for us.

The dangers of real relationships

Real relationships with real people are filled with risks. There is no guarantee the other person will like you. And even if they like you today, there's no guarantee about tomorrow.

From start to finish real relationships are filled with problems.

For some people, the search for genuine relationships has been nothing but frustration. Many of us are not very good at starting conversations, connecting to people. We'd like to skip over these messy bumps in the road and jump right into the perfect relationship where everything goes smoothly.

Real relationships put you in a place of being vulnerable—and that's a fearful place to be. When you try to reach out to someone, you have no control over their responses. You are

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at their mercy, and some have been merciless in their rejection of you.

Even if you have made the first connection in a relationship, and all seems to be going well, it often

explodes, leaving blood everywhere. Your blood.

The fear of rejection is like a tsunami wave that shows up without any warning—in an instant your whole world is turned upside down. All your dreams of a really great friendship have been dashed against the rocks.

It's so much easier to retreat into the world of fantasy relationships. They are not complicated. They are safe. You are in control.

Life to the full potential

No matter how good and safe we feel in our world of fantasy

The powerful pull of pornography

The images of pornography seem to have an overwhelming power in the lives of some people. What is at the heart of this power?

God created us with the desire to be in relationship with others. Pornography offers the opportunity to gratify our desire for intimacy with a minimum of risk.

Our brain cannot easily distinguish between the real and a well developed thought about the real. Viewing pornography can give our brain the illusion that we are experiencing the real.

But the fact remains, that photo or video is not a real relationship with a real person. It only offers the illusion of the real.

Harry Schaumburg in his book *False Intimacy* provides an in-depth analysis of how people are

attracted to false paths to intimacy. For many, pornography offers a safe way to experience intimacy. Those who struggle the most with pornography often find it difficult to develop real relationships with real people.

Often they have come from dysfunctional backgrounds or they experienced rejection or betrayal in their past. Some have been sexually abused in their childhood. The unresolved damage of their past hinders them from developing relationships with true intimacy.

The quick "high" that they experience through viewing pornography does not bring the true fulfillment of a real relationship.

If the person who views pornography is married, the revelation of this can often bring deep damage into the life of the married partner.

Rarely does the person viewing pornography see the potential damage this can bring into their marriage. By choosing a path of false intimacy, they often blind themselves to the destruction they are bringing into the life of their spouse.

So how does one break the powerful pull of porn? By pursuing the path to true intimacy in real relationships.

There also must be a deep commitment to break the pattern of viewing porn. This usually requires having a person who will hold them accountable for their actions, and check up on them regularly.

There must be a deep commitment to say "yes" to the real and "no" to the paths to false intimacy.

relationships, in the long run, they do not really satisfy. Those who have experienced the pain of betrayal and rejection with other people would quickly disagree. “Life sucks,” they would say. “The only safe place is with my ‘special relationships’ (the fantasy ones). They are the only things that bring real joy in my life.”

But that’s the lie of fantasy relationships. They give the illusion of joy, the illusion of satisfaction, the illusion of safety, the illusion of life to the full.

Fantasy relationships become a self-imposed prison to rob us of the benefits of freedom and life to the full only found in real relationships.

Benefits of real relationships

Real relationships bring real joy and fulfillment in life. The tragedy for many is they have grown up in a world with dysfunctional people who have modeled dysfunctional relationships. In spite of your past, God is able to bring into your life loving, caring people who can be true friends. With these relationships you can learn the hard work of developing balanced, healthy relationships, in sharp contrast to the dysfunctional relationships of your past.

God created us to be in real relationships with real people. God has not called us to a life of fantasy, but to a world of reality.

You will reach your full potential only through real relationships. According to God, the two greatest principles for having a great life both deal with relationships. First we are to have a loving relationship with God. Second we are to have loving relationships with other people. There is a power that comes from these relationships—a power that

enables us to face whatever problems and tragedies come our way.

But more than just helping you face problems, real relationships produce power in your life to reach your full potential in life.

If we try to make it through life on our own, surviving with fantasy relationships, we will end up with

You will reach your full potential in life only through real relationships.

unfulfilled dreams—like chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It looks beautiful, and promises us all we need, but always seems beyond our reach.

Because we were created to find fulfillment in real relationships, the pursuit of fantasy relationships leaves us with the illusion of fulfillment. The hunger for the real is the same hunger that attracts us to the fantasy.

The challenge of real relationships

Real relationships will be risky. And real relationships require you to live responsibly, even when the other person falls short of your expectations.

You may look at someone who has lots of friends and say, I wish that could be me. So what are you doing to build healthy relationships with healthy people?

It’s hard work for many of us to develop healthy relationships. We have to work through the complicated steps of building a solid foundation for a good friendship.

Sometimes our hunger for intimacy causes us to rush into a relationship. But real relationships often take time to develop, much like an oak tree that takes years to reach its full potential.

“I can’t wait that long,” you say, “I want it now!” OK, so what reaches maturity in one day? —a mushroom. And how long does it last? —a few days at best.

A real relationship can stand the test of time and problems. We need to take a careful look at the expectations

How do you find safe people?

In a world with so many dysfunctional people, how do you find safe people with whom to develop real relationships?

You can’t trust everyone. But to say, “I can’t trust anyone,” is a sign of your dysfunction.

We can’t skip over the challenging process of learning how to trust people. Look for people who demonstrate good character

and then seek to get to know them better.

Another key part of this process is focusing on your own character development, so others will find in you a safe person with whom they can have a real relationship. Trust comes through shared experiences where you demonstrate on a daily basis that you are a person who can be trusted.

we place on other people. If we demand perfection, the other person will always fall short. This is why the attraction of a fantasy relationship is so powerful—they can be “perfect.” But in reality all they offer is the illusion of perfection.

Real relationships call for you to be willing to forgive the other person when they fall short. You also have to be willing to admit when you have failed them, and be quick to take responsibility for your failures, and work to change, to become more responsible.

Will they last?

But will these relationships last? With so many examples of broken relationships, is there any hope that you can have real relationships that last for years—for a lifetime?

Real relationships have power to last. And what is the glue that holds real relationships together? Love—real love, the kind described in 1 Corinthians 13—it is patient, kind, not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It doesn't demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. (vs. 4,5,7 New Living Translation)

There are no simple magical steps to instant happiness, instant intimacy. But real relationships are possible, and can bring into your life a new level of fulfillment. Our culture is pulling us towards fantasy relationships with promises that will never be fulfilled.

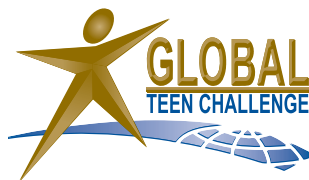
Don't settle for the illusion when the real is within your reach. Break free of the self imposed prison you have lived in, and take the risk of developing real relationships.

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Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Have you experienced breakups or betrayal by others? How have these failed relationships of the past impacted you? How have they affected your confidence in developing new relationships?
2. How big an issue is fear in developing new relationships with people?
3. How difficult has it been for you to develop a meaningful relationship with God?
4. Read Ephesians 3:16-19.
 - A. What are some of the key characteristics of a close personal relationship with God?
 - B. How would you describe your relationship with God based on how these verses describe this relationship?
5. Read Proverbs 2:1-8. How do these verses speak to the process of developing a real relationship with another person?
6. Read Proverbs 7:4-5 and & 24-27. How do these verses describe the damage of a dysfunctional relationship?
7. What is the greatest challenge you face in developing real relationships with others?



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