

Going Offline

Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Corinthians 13:12

AT A GLANCE

Artificial intimacy does not merely fail to satisfy — it actively rewires the appetite for the friction that makes real relationships formative. The preacher argues that AI companionship trains users to expect frictionless, always-agreeable connection, making genuine human presence feel unbearable by comparison, and that Jesus's invitation to shared-yoke power is the only offer that restores rather than extracts human wholeness.

- AI companionship recalibrates your tolerance for friction, making real relationships feel burdensome rather than life-giving.
- The passive verb in Paul's vision — 'fully known' — exposes what no chatbot can supply: another person doing the knowing.
- Jesus's yoke bestows power without extracting yours; every algorithmic alternative works only by slowly taking yours.

“AI extracts. Jesus bestows. AI leaves you smaller and Jesus leaves you more yourself than you were before.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

[Matthew 11:28-30](#) — Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

[Matthew 11:28-30](#) — Are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion? Come to me, get away with me, and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me, and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

[1 Corinthians 13:12](#) — For we now see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

The argument

Frictionless Relationship Is Not a Better Relationship — It Is the Destruction of Relationship — How AI companionship degrades the appetite for formation

The preacher opens with documented present realities — AI psychosis, the suicide of Sewell Setzer III, mass romantic engagement with chatbots — not to numb but to name: these are the extreme edge of what is being marketed to everyone. The deeper diagnosis is not that people are choosing fake relationships but that habitual exposure to an always-agreeable, never-tiring, never-disappointing interlocutor reconditions expectations for all relationships. "Once you spend enough time with something that always agrees with you, always responds within a second, never gets tired, never has a bad day, never disappoints you, never asks you to change, you start to expect everybody in your life to behave that way." The chatbot does not just simulate intimacy; it erodes the tolerance for the push-and-pull that makes intimacy real. Coasting and confirming, he argues, will leave relationships — and the people in them — exactly as it found them, except more selfish.

Insight — An appetite shaped by friction-free relationship will eventually find every real relationship unbearable.

The Passive Verb in Paul Identifies What AI Can Never Supply — Being fully known requires a knower — and there is no one on the other side

Working from 1 Corinthians 13:12, the preacher isolates the grammar: "fully known" is passive — the deepest measure of intimacy is not your knowing but your being known by another. He presses the exegetical implication directly against the companion-bot pitch: the chatbot can mirror preferences back with increasingly accurate language, but mirroring is not meeting. "AI cannot know you, not really, because there's no one there to do the knowing." Paul is writing toward an eschatological horizon — face-to-face knowledge of God — but the preacher draws the import forward: in a world already settling for cracked and cloudy mirrors, AI represents a further dimming rather than any kind of approach to that destination. The bot mirrors your desires from a remote server; no one is actually on the other side of the mirror.

Insight — Genuine intimacy is constituted by the other's active knowing of you, which no system without personhood can perform.

Jesus's Yoke Bestows Power; Every Algorithmic Yoke Extracts It — The contrast between a power that costs you yours and a power that gives you his

The preacher exegetes the yoke image historically: where other rabbis multiplied commandments, Jesus simplified and crystallized, redefining the yoke as shared burden that enables what neither party could do alone. The whole point of a yoke is power — power that does not crush. He then sets this directly against AI's offer: "AI is offering you power — the power to do more, the power to write more, the power to ship more. But the price of that power is the slow surrender of your own." Cognitive offloading, outsourced decisions, proxied

conversations — each is a small surrender that compounds into atrophy. The structural contrast is stark: "AI demands a kind of power that only works if you give it yours. Jesus offers a kind of power that only works if he gives you his." The yoke of Jesus is the only yoke that does not cost you your agency to wear it.

Insight — Every tool that scales your output by substituting its agency for yours is extracting the very capacity it appears to augment.

The Four Dimensions of Humanity Form a Shape That Requires Resistance in All Directions — Awe, agency, identity, and intimacy are not a list but an interdependent cruciform system

The preacher draws the four-week framework into a single integrating image: awe pulls upward into what is bigger than any technology can create; agency grounds you in the world's need for your contribution; intimacy pulls you outward toward real persons; identity pulls you inward toward an integrated self. Each requires the others — agency without awe makes you a god to yourself; awe without agency makes you a spectator; intimacy without identity makes you a chameleon; identity without intimacy makes you a fortress. The shape that holds all four in tension is cruciform. "The four directions of a whole human form something that Jesus — the most human human — hung on for you and me." Formation does not come through optimization; it comes through the cross-shaped resistance of all four directions simultaneously.

Insight — Human wholeness is not achieved by maximizing any single dimension but by sustaining the tension between all four — a shape that only holds when something is pressing back.

Presence Is the Practice: Friction as the Site of Formation — Concrete disciplines that refuse the frictionless substitute

The sermon closes with embodied practices rather than principles: share a meal weekly, in person, without devices; show up physically for someone in pain. The preacher disarms the pastoral-competence objection directly — "the more pain, the fewer words" — because the point is not articulate comfort but irreplaceable presence. The prayer exercise — placing a hand on the shoulder of the person next to you and praying one sentence aloud — is itself an argument: "the chatbot in your pocket can say the same words that you just said, but God will not listen to them as a prayer. It cannot put a hand on your shoulder." The analogy to sugary cereal marketed as part of a complete breakfast names the category error: AI companionship is not a relational supplement; it is a counterfeit. Friction is not a defect in relationship to be engineered away; it is the location where formation actually happens.

Insight — Showing up in person — without an exit, without words, without efficiency — is not a nicety but the irreducible form of the love it claims to offer.

Cross-references

- [Matthew 16:24](#) — Cited as the warrant for understanding cruciform living as the daily shape of discipleship, not only a one-time act — 'take up your cross and follow me' read as the ongoing spiritual posture that mirrors the physical extension of the cross in all four directions.

DEVOTIONAL

There is a kind of hunger the machine world has learned to feed without ever satisfying — the hunger to be known. It studies your patterns, reflects your preferences back in increasingly fluent language, and presents what looks very much like understanding. But understanding is not what it is. A mirror can hold your image without knowing your name. Paul wrote from within a world of impressive mirrors — the bronze mirrors of Corinth, polished enough to show a shape, too dim to show a face — and he named what we see in them honestly: partial, fragmentary, a hint of something whose fullness lies elsewhere. What he set against that dimness was not a better mirror but a person: face to face, fully known. The grammar matters. Not knowing, but known. The deepest thing intimacy asks of you is not effort but vulnerability — the willingness to be seen by someone who is real enough to see you and stay. Jesus walked into that grammar and inhabited it completely. He knew people — really knew them — and was known by the Father in a way that held even when everything else was being stripped away. When he stretched out on the cross, he was not being optimized; he was being crucified into the shape that wholeness takes. Upward in awe toward the Father, downward in agency into the earth, outward in intimacy toward those who drove the nails, inward in identity knowing exactly who he was. He offers you that shape now — not through a subscription, not through a profile, not through an algorithm that learns your preferences. Through a yoke. Through shared weight. Through the unforced rhythms of grace that feel like a glitch to a world addicted to frictionless efficiency and feel, if you stay with them long enough, like home.

Reflection

- Where in your relationships have you begun to expect the frictionless responsiveness of a machine — and what has that expectation cost the people who were trying to love you?
- Which of the four dimensions — awe, agency, identity, intimacy — is currently collapsing in your life because nothing is pressing back on it from the other side?
- Who in your life has loved you by staying when it was easier to leave, and what would it look like this summer to offer that kind of presence to someone who needs it from you?

Closing prayer

God, thank you that even when summer comes and goes and we convince ourselves that a few days away has reset whatever is disordered, you know us better than that. We know that unless something really changes, the old patterns come back — the shrinking appetite for friction, the drift toward whatever is easy and smooth. So let what you have spoken from your scriptures do its work in us: remind us what it means to be human, and move us to step into it in ways that shape us into who you have ultimately made us to be. For those who do not know you yet, may these handles toward humanity lead them to find you in the middle of them. For those already walking with you, may this carry them forward with even greater joy. In Jesus' name, amen.
