

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Words Hurt

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In January 14, Phoebe Prince took her own life by hanging herself in her bedroom.

Phoebe, a 15 year old South Hadley High School student had recently moved to Massachusetts from Ireland. Phoebe had been relentlessly taunted by other girls on campus, off campus and on the internet through facebook. The hateful name calling surrounded dating issues. Apparently the verbal abuse was too much for Phoebe and she tragically took her own life.

While bullying at school, dating issues, and name calling are not new to the turbulent teenage years, the forms they are taking now penetrate even into the privacy of our homes. You might be able to ignore or even stare down a foul mouth bully at school, but now you must be prepared to read the ugly things people are saying about you to your peers as you take a break from homework.

We might “brave up” to the situation my saying to ourselves and others, “*Sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.*” But even as adults the scars left by

hateful words often leave a mark in our memory bank. Tragically, they also drive the young and insecure to thinking death is the only way out.

Our words pack a powerful punch. James enhances this thought by contrasting the tongue’s “large” effects with the tongue’s “smallness.” *“So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how much wood is kindled by how small a fire. And the tongue is a fire, the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue. . . .”* (James 3:5-6). “Cyber bullying” may be a new form for listening to the tongue, but it does not contradict James’ ancient assessment that the tongue *“is a restless evil, it us full of deadly poison”* (James 3:8).

One solution is that we would remember that we all have been made in the image of God and should therefore should not curse one another (James 3:9-10). Being a senior girl, I may not like the idea of a freshman from Ireland dating the senior boy I have my eyes on, but she has been made in the image of God, and does not deserve to be verbally degraded. But this solution only works when we have the respect for God.

James is pointing out the contradiction of blessing God and then with the same tongue, cursing a human being who is made in the image of God. Using our tongues to bless God is not being heard much in public, and sadly, has no place in today’s schools.

Another solution is the involvement of parents in the lives of teenagers. However, this is not always successful. One mother, knowing her eleven year old son was being harassed at school, joined the PTO and talked to teachers to try to solve the problem. But her young son took his own life anyway.

Teenagers are going to be cruel, and modern technology may allow cruelty to be even more intrusive. What can we do? Make new laws? The solution is to teach your child respect for God and His wisdom. Because you respect God, you must not curse others. Yes, words hurt, but words do not determine who we are. Character does! Death is our enemy, not our friend. In Christ we can conquer all: death and hurtful words.