

## {5} CYBERBULLYING

When I was young I got teased a lot. Usually it would involve a swarm of guys tossing insults and laughing at me. It was never too extreme, but it definitely affected me. It felt like I was getting swallowed up in that moment and nothing I could do would stop them.

But I could go home.

If I was at a buddy's house, I could leave. If I was at school, eventually class would end. So while in the moment I felt helpless, at least I had some control on the situation.

Life today is different. When I was in high school no one had cell phones and we couldn't even fathom stuff like Facebook or Instagram. Social media and modern technology allow us to stay connected with friends and loved ones like never before. But it also increases the access others have into our lives.

Tragic events like the suicide of Rehtaeh Parsons, a Halifax teen who suffered from cyberbullying, are grim reminders that when social media is abused the impact can be devastating.

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, 1 in 5 teenagers are regularly harassed online, and almost one-half of all teenagers have experienced some form of online harassment.

One teenager in my church shared with me:

Teens are constantly going to media to find their worth. My friends and myself have been cyber bullied and it belittles you. You feel as if you have less value. People can anonymously send hateful messages without getting caught, and I believe they pick on our flaws to distract from their own. Teenagers are very much people of affirmation and when your told you're fat, ugly and stupid we start to believe it.

If you are a teenager, I assume that none of this comes as a surprise to you. I imagine that you have witnessed the harassment, or even been a victim yourself.

So what can we do? How do we respond to the reality that cyberbullying is becoming a regular part of the world teenagers live in.

Consider these words from Hebrews 10:32-34 (NLT):

*Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.*

Social media has changed the way we think about public ridicule and suffering, but the challenge for how Christians should respond remains the same. I think we can summarize this passage in two thoughts: *suffer with* and *remain faithful*.



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When we know that others are falling victim to cyberbullying we cannot stand by - we must find ways to show our friends and classmates that they are not alone. When the scathing comments are mounting there is an opportunity to go against the flow of the crowd and send a message that we are willing to stand with the victim, even if that means absorbing some of the attacks ourselves. Look at that passage again and consider the ways the early Christians joined with those who were suffering. They accepted this with joy, because of their faith that Jesus has promises that far exceed our current struggles.

And if you are among the many unfortunate victims, allow that promise to be a source of strength in your struggles. Hold fast to the promise that there are better things waiting for you that will last forever! Also consider these words from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT):

*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Your suffering is not deserved and it is not right. It is also not yours to carry alone. Understand that Jesus is with you, His Spirit is alive in you and He desires to give you rest from the load of your pain.

Finally, remember that we can turn to Jesus in a very real way by turning to His people. The Christians in your life are the Body of Christ - go to them with your struggles. Don't hide or be ashamed. Allow your brothers and sisters in Christ to join you in your suffering and to be a source of rest by carrying those burdens with you.

Further help:

[www.cybersafegirl.ca](http://www.cybersafegirl.ca)

[www.digitalkidsinitiative.com](http://www.digitalkidsinitiative.com)

[www.unlikecyberbullying.ca](http://www.unlikecyberbullying.ca)

[www.needhelpnow.ca](http://www.needhelpnow.ca)