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Elisabeth Jerončić

Andrews Academy, elisabethj@andrews.edu

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Think Before You Speak

AS I SAT IN MY ENGLISH CLASS, MY MIND WAS DRAWN TO A POSTER ON THE WALL. IT READ: “THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK. IS IT TRUE? IS IT HELPFUL? IS IT IMPORTANT? IS IT NECESSARY? IS IT KIND?”

This made me think about all the times I said things that weren't true, helpful, important, necessary or kind. It also made me think of times I've been on the receiving end of unkind words.

Many assume that living in a Christian community or attending a Christian school guards us from ill intentions, but the truth is that even within the protective circle of faith, individuals are victims of cyberbullying. While I wish my Christian community could shield me from such wounds, I recognize that raising awareness starts with one voice: mine. To be leaders in our community, we must follow biblical principles.

The Bible, in many instances, offers profound insights into the power of words and the importance of careful speech. Proverbs 18:21 tells us, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.” This verse highlights the immense potential of our words to bring both life and destruction. Just as words can uplift and inspire, they can also wound and devastate. It reminds us of the responsibility we bear for our speech.

James 1:19 advises us, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person

be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” This verse teaches us the importance of active listening and measured speech. Often, it's in our silence and careful consideration that we can find the wisdom to respond thoughtfully rather than react hastily.

Additionally, Proverbs 15:4 reminds us, “The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.” The gentle, considerate use of language can be a source of healing and renewal, while hurtful words can shatter the spirit and damage relationships irreparably.

Moreover, Matthew 12:36 warns us, “I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak.” This verse underscores the eternal significance of our words. It encourages us to be vigilant and responsible in our speech, as we will ultimately be held accountable for the impact our words have had on others.

Cyberbullying is a grave issue that wields the power to deeply wound individuals, leaving scars that may never fully heal. This force can ruin friendships, destroy self-esteem, and even lead some to unimaginable acts. The keyboard has become a weapon, and the screen a shield, providing some with the illusion that they can evade the repercussions of their harmful words. But let's make this clear: Words have power and carry consequences.

It's crucial to remember that behind every profile picture is a real person with dreams, fears and vulnerabilities. The words we type have the potential to uplift or tear down, and it's our moral obligation to choose kindness over cruelty, empathy over apathy, and compassion over indifference. ■

Elisabeth Jerončić is a junior at Andrews Academy and this article is adapted from a chapel presentation.

