

IMMERSE

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Getting our head, heart and
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Barefoot exists to provide youth workers with effective ministry tools and resources. Our deepest desire with the *Immerse Journal* is to partner with you in guiding students into spiritual formation for the mission of God. This is why we have sought content that ensues the shaping of the whole of a youth worker's life. We believe that if *your* life is being transformed, you will be able to aid in the transformation of others.



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Ahh, That's a Good Question

Jim Kast-Keat

I have three roommates. One of them is four years old. And he is constantly asking questions.

“What are you doing, Jim?” “Can we play Mario now?” “Can I have some fruit snacks?” “Are you and Daddy going to play a game?” “Where are you going?” “Why are you doing that?”

At this oh-so-cute and not-yet-annoying age, his questions are expected, even welcomed. We want to encourage him to explore and discover. His questions open up the world around him, allowing him to see it more clearly (and us to see precisely what it is he is noticing).

But for some reason we too quickly stifle this question-forming ability and activity. Instead of encouraging a barrage of questions, we encourage a regurgitation of answers. We see it in schools on standardized tests, and we even see it in our churches.

Which is why I employ a narrative-inquiry method of formation with the students I lead. We tell the story of God, and then we create space for students to ask and explore questions. We are formed not only by the answers we discover but by the questions we ask along the way. The goal is not an ethereal destination of an answer but the questions that make up the journey along the way. Questions take us deeper into ourselves, into the Bible and into God's world, and they allow us to discover who God has made us to be and what God is calling us to.

Every Tuesday night at our middle school programs, students are equipped with notecards and golf pencils. We use these to intentionally incorporate questions into our program and content. Instead of focusing on giving all the answers, we create space for students to discover and explore their own questions.

At the end of each night's teaching (and before they go to their small groups), everyone is invited to write down a question they have from what they just heard and experienced. They take these notecards with their questions scrawled on them to their small groups, where the small group leaders (who also wrote their own questions) facilitate space for everyone to share their questions and then discuss them together.

One morning, after a teaching titled *Jesus and the Jerkface* (our own rendition of the Zacchaeus story), a student wrote the question, “Why are there bullies at school who are mean?” What her small group leader picked up on were two words casually left out of this question. The student was really asking, “Why are there bullies at school who are mean *to me*?”

Inviting and empowering students to ask questions (rather than simply reproducing answers) allows small groups leaders and youth pastors to get a glimpse beneath the surface of a student's exterior life. The questions they ask stem from the things they notice in a story, teaching or experience. And the questions they ask are rooted in the deeper context of their lives. The student's question about bullies allowed her small group leader to hear the deeper cries of her world beneath.

Another morning, after an overview of the ongoing and ever-unfolding story of creation to new creation that we find ourselves in, a student asked, “If the story of God is a song, what part do I play in it?” This student realized there was something more; he knew God wanted something from his life, and he wanted to know what it was.

Inviting and empowering students to ask their own questions can help us realize that they're asking the same questions we are. Even though we are separated by decades in age, we are still pursuing the same God and living in the same story of redemption and restoration. And as we journey together, our questions can become something we share, allowing ourselves to orient not simply around the answers we have in common but the questions.

Rather than simply pushing for the right answer, we pursue the deeper question. Questions do what answers often can't. Answers are the periods at the end of sentences that halt conversation, while questions can open the conversation to a new world of dialogue and discovery.

Just like my four-year-old roommate, the propensity to ask questions is built into who we are. As student ministry pastors, we have the opportunity to unleash this ever-needed facet of our humanity in our students.

I have a dream for the day to come when the right question is pursued with the same fervor as the right answer. I dream of students taking notes on a lecture or sermon or lesson or book, but instead of writing bullet point after bullet point of information, they chart their own journeys with the ideas and information in the form of questions. I dream of a day when the church will not be seen as a place that simply gives answers but as a place people go to ask their questions; a place where every question is welcome—questions about spirituality and sexuality, about ethics and other faiths, about life in all its beauty and ugliness.

So question everything and hold onto what is good. For, while giving answers is human, asking questions can lead us to the divine.

Jim Kast-Keat is a writer, speaker, pastor and pathological optimist. He is the middle school program and content pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, MI, where he co-leads Fifty6 (fifth and sixth grade) and TheElement (seventh and eighth grade). When he's not writing, speaking, pastoring or pathologically optimizing, he loves to read books, update Twitter or play music in the band Supernova Like the Sun. To find out more, go to www.jimkastkeat.com and start exploring.