
March/April 2008

2008

3-2009

Ask Johnnie

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Recommended Citation

Liberty University, "Ask Johnnie" (2009). *March/April 2008*. 28.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2008_mar/28

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Ask Johnnie

March 05, 2008 | Johnnie Moore

“Johnnie, I work with the teenagers at my church but I just can’t figure out these students today (I’m more than a little older). Can you help me understand them and maybe give me some tips on connecting with them?” — Caroline

I’m certainly no expert on a generation, but I do have a few observations.

First, today’s student culture is saturated in subcultures. Everyone has their own “thing.” This digital age has birthed an enormous access to information and there is a Facebook or MySpace group or YouTube video for everything. One of the first things you need to do is find out what they’re really interested in and then curiously question them about it (before you give your opinion). Inquisitiveness about what a kid likes shows them your genuine interest. Remember, these little subcultures make up much of their identity.

Secondly, they are relationally starved yet relationally gluttonous — what I mean is that they have plenty of relationships, but they are at a deficit for healthy ones. There are more cliques than you can count in the average high school, but fewer and fewer students have close relationships with parents, teachers or mentors. When students don’t have healthy adult relationships then they’re forced to get the answers to life’s tough questions from the media or their peers. You need to position yourself in a place where they will come to you for wise answers to their toughest questions.

Finally, they are a morally scarred generation. With skyrocketing divorce rates and the zealous marketing of media moguls, like MTV, we have many millions of students who have learned from the media what they used to glean from their church or family. Many have stumbled into shocking kinds of lust at surprising ages. This scars their perspective on spiritual and relational health and leaves the church to the task of restoring kids because their values were formed first outside of its walls. Don’t be easily shocked when a kid opens up. Culture has robbed many of them of their innocence. We must guide them to restoration by modeling Christ and His Word.

Whether we like it or not, these students will hold the leading posts at corporations, government offices, educational institutions and churches of tomorrow. They are the future leaders and they will drag into these important positions the values they’re learning now.

So, keep it up and don’t give up! With patience and love you are shaping the future.