

## BOOK REVIEW:

### ***3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections*** **By Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin**

**Reviewed by: Terri Robertson, CENetwork of the ELCA**

Kara Powell and Brad Griffin of Fuller Youth Institute (Pasadena, CA) and the authors/co-authors of numerous books, including *Sticky Faith*, *Growing Young* and *Growing With*, have partnered once again in *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager*.

Released in August 2021, *3 Big Questions* is based on research involving 100+ hours of in-depth interviews involving 27 teenagers representing 13 distinct ethnic backgrounds. It also includes data from over 2200 additional teenagers obtained through surveys and focus groups.

The research identified three descriptors helpful in understanding teenagers around us:

- **Anxious** because of external stressors, which can easily become internal pressure
- **Adaptive** as they adjust with creativity and agility to the new needs and opportunities they face
- **Diverse** in their ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, gender identity, values, and worldview

From the numerous questions teenagers expressed in the authors' research, almost all had their roots in the following primary areas:

- **Who am I? - IDENTITY** (Our view of ourselves)
- **Where do I fit? – BELONGING** (Our connection with others)
- **What difference can I make? – PURPOSE** (Our connection to the world)

*3 Big Questions* is divided into five parts. The first part lays the foundation for understanding these questions, learning to listen for answers, including practical tips for practicing empathy in our conversations with young people, and helping teenagers connect with their faith to imagine new ways of answering big questions.

The next three parts each provide in-depth reviews of each of the 3 questions, providing data and incorporating real stories from student interviews. The authors give numerous examples of ways to guide conversations with teens in such a way that God becomes a central part of the conversation, including practical advice on starting points to integrate faith and discipleship. In addition, each part includes current answers provided by young people along with alternative Christ-centered answers described as "Jesus' Better Answer", based on the following:

- Who am I? – **ENOUGH (We're Enough Because of Jesus)**
- Where do I fit? – **WITH (I Belong with God's People)**
- What difference can I make? – **STORY (I'm Invited into God's Greater Story)**

The final part of the book addresses conversations and connections in tough times. Its relevance in acknowledging the pandemic and the power of disruptions is appreciated. Ideas are provided for engaging in conversations with young people about painful experiences, violence, and suicide, as well as ways to connect with tough times through lament.

I found *3 Big Questions* written in a way that can be helpful for parents, volunteers, paid staff, or anyone with the opportunity to be in relationship with young people. Instead of abstract ideas, it provides practical guidance. Each chapter of the books ends with “Reflect and Apply” questions, which would be helpful in a book study or in a leadership development setting. Appendix B of the book includes the 170+ interview questions used in the research, for the reader’s use to foster better conversations and connections. In addition to helping the reader reach young people, it will also help shape their own relationship with Christ.