

Wonderfully Peculiar

THE BLANK STARE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A SURPRISE. Talking about how hard it is to predict future events, I asked Amy if she recalled the morning after the 1962 election in California when the losing candidate petulantly announced to reporters, "You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around anymore."

It turned out that Richard Nixon was wrong. He and the press would have many more opportunities to spar. I was mistaken too, forgetting that Amy has no direct recollection of events that occurred five years before she was born!

Ah, generations. Depending on where and when we start the journey and with whom we travel, the events and surroundings that serve as markers by which we navigate will be conspicuously different.

In our publishing work, we appreciate the importance of clarifying the distinctive characteristics of diverse audiences. Topics, design styles, vocabulary, and preferred writers are all matters of taste that vary dramatically across dissimilar cohort groups.

But which characteristics, preferences, or knowledge of events are reliably prevalent with each group and which are more varied and idiosyncratic? How shall we most effectively segment the people to be served? By chronological age? Marital status? Gender? Perhaps by degree of need for forgiveness or their capacity to forgive? By the extent of their passion for sharing the Gospel, by the depth of their hunger for justice, or by their partiality for hope?

There are myriad factors shaping our characters, circumstances, and conditions. **Discriminating which aspects matter when and for whom is a tantalizing and unending conundrum.** In the pages that follow, you won't find the last word on how ages and stages of life create needs and opportunities for fruitful ministries. But you'll discover intriguing clues, valuable principles, and delightful stories that help expand understanding and guide action and response.

Generational differences are not the only elements that come into play when we respectfully, lovingly, and earnestly seek to know and serve people. But insights about attitudes and opportunities that correspond with periods in our lives help us grapple with the mystery of the sacred, ever-changing, and wonderfully peculiar nature of the human condition.



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