

Global Interaction's Nathan Reid bravely dives into the murky waters of generational challenges, as he examines our struggle to understand each other and the large-scale events that impact our lives and faith.



It seems a trend of history that older generations find younger generations challenging.

Ever since the Greek Philosopher Plato apparently overheard Socrates saying that young people “... have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise”, it has been open season on the next generation.

A quick online search of the word millennials, generation Y or young adults will reveal a bucket load of critique. Recently the Guardian posted a story online with the headline, *Millennials: the trials of Generation Y*. Its introduction begins, “Generation Y has been branded insecure, lazy, shallow and ambitious beyond their talents, and even, “the worst generation”.

Ouch!

Yet in my own experience, I find very few millennials bragging about shelves full of participation awards. Rather I see young people who want to carve their mark in a deeply troubled world.

We experience global threats such as environmental change, terrorism, human trafficking, an ocean of refugees fleeing brutal conflicts, the shadow of war on the Korean Peninsula and tensions on the South China Sea. And that's all before we get to the domestic challenges of cultural wars, polarised political debates, housing affordability, student debt, and the questioning of long held common social assumptions about marriage and family (I might need to lie down now).

All of these tensions come at us with hyper-speed and constancy through social media. There are so many voices telling us who to be, believe and what to think. If we say or post the wrong things we are quickly and publically shamed.

I think from the perspective of the younger generation, they can feel caught somewhere between a rock and a hard place, trying to respond to the impact of so many world events (events that for the most part have been ignited by previous generations) while also struggling with negative labels and unhelpful stereotypes.

So how can our faith help us to navigate through the rocks, hard places and social minefields? How might we be able to respond to tensions of the world without becoming lost in them?

There is one idea that has spoken to God's people with striking relevance through seasons of flux and threat. The idea of Exile.

Peter referred to this idea when writing a letter to a follower of Jesus during a time of great upheaval and fear. In 1 Peter 2:11 he begins his thoughts with, “Dear friends, as foreigners and exiles...”

A seemingly simple greeting to a faith community and yet, Peter is promoting a game-changing thought... followers then and now are to embrace being ‘foreigners’ and ‘exiles’. This means that we are to embrace the reality that we are not at home in our own (or any) culture.

An important disclaimer here; we need to be careful that we don't confuse the idea of exile with exclusion. Being an exile is not about removing ourselves from the culture and hiding from the realities of the world. **But rather, it's about more deeply engaging with it so that we can affirm and celebrate that which is consistent with God's creative ‘very good’, while also announcing the subversive news that there is another King whose name is Jesus.**

We see this played out through the Old Testament. As the people of Israel became exiles they were placed into situations of uncertainty and fear within cultures very different to their own. Yet many of these exiled people engaged courageously in their new culture, while being deeply anchored in their faith in God. Think Esther, Daniel and the words of Jeremiah's letter to the people; all amazing examples of individuals and groups caught in tumultuous times, who lived out their faith authentically and changed the course of history.

So as we grapple with the tensions, stereotypes and the realities of the world we live in, it might be worthwhile reminding ourselves of the famous words of one such Old Testament exile, Esther. As she looked at the impending destruction of her people, she was told, “... who knows but that you have come to your position for such a time as this?”¹ Might it be that God is working in you, us, this generation so that we are each well-placed to meet the needs of our time? I guess it is up to us then to respond – labels and all.

1. Esther 4:14