

# WHEN DID EVERYBODY ELSE GET SO OLD?

**INDIGNITIES, COMPROMISES,  
AND THE UNEXPECTED  
GRACE OF MIDLIFE**

## **Discussion Guide by Paula S. Wilding**

Whether you read this book by yourself, with a group of friends, or in a class, you can use the following questions to connect your story with the ones told in the book. Choose the questions below that best help you reflect on what it means to enter into middle age.

1. *When Did Everybody Else Get So Old?* details some harder truths about growing older, but ultimately, it is a hopeful book. What has spurred hope in you as you've aged?
2. How does the format of essays and stories lend itself to the book's focus?
3. It can be very easy to point out the *losses* we experience as we age. What have been some of your favorite *gains* as you have grown older?
4. The author writes about finding God in unlikely places—such as in the car with her kids or in the waiting room during jury duty. Where have you found sacred places in the normal routines of your day?
5. In chapter 9, the author draws parallels between the tasks performed by flight attendants and those done by parents of adolescents. Do you agree? What would you add?

6. The author writes about the healthy and natural tension between teenagers and parents. How have you experienced that, either in your teenage years or as a parent? Where did you find help and sustenance in those times?
7. What do you consider to have been the best years of your life? Do we have just one set of “best years”?
8. As you have aged, how has your faith changed? How has your understanding of God grown or diminished? How do you think aging has contributed to this?
9. In chapter 12, the author discusses her pattern of praying while taking walks. Do you have any similar devotional practices?
10. Do you encourage friends in their prayer lives? If so, how? How have you been encouraged in yours?
11. The book references the book of Ecclesiastes multiple times. These references include Ecclesiastes 1:9, 7:3, 7:10, 9:11-12, and 11:5. Read these passages and reflect on how they connect to growing older and maturing in one’s faith. What do you think makes Ecclesiastes a good resource for people as they grow older?
12. In chapter 15, the author discusses the “clean, untangled grief” of her kids growing up. If you have children, what adjectives would you use to describe the experience of watching them move toward independence?
13. Chapter 16 of the book is a love letter, of sorts, to the author’s husband. It is not what some would consider a traditional love letter, and it lacks sentiments such as “You complete me,” or “The world all made sense once I met you.” What do you think about the author’s realistic view of marriage?
14. The author speaks of her estranged relationship with her father and the difficult life her sister led. What strained or broken relationships in your own life come to mind? What are the benefits of being open and vulnerable about such difficulties?
15. In chapter 17, “Five Simple Lessons Learned in a Botanical Garden,” the author reflects on spiritual wisdom that we can gain from gardens. Think about each of the five lessons the author outlines in that chapter. Do you identify with these? How have you seen them play out in your own life?
16. The author cites various authors and poets and others who have helped her grow and mature. What writers have helped you as you face midlife?
17. As you finish the book, how do you see aging differently? What do you hope to take with you from your experience of reading this book?