

40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words

*Lenten Reflections
for Everyday Life*

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INTRODUCTION

Prayer is an interesting thing.

Some folks believe that prayer is a powerful act with the ability to heal, while others think it's an exercise in foolishness with the sole result being pacification. Some see prayer as a wish list for God populated by a list of items wanted or happenings hoped for. Some go through the motions every Sunday, while others maintain a fulfilling daily prayer life. Some pray with words and song, others through creation and movement, and others find stillness and silence as the prayer vehicle of choice. Some expect answers, and others pose questions. Some yell with confidence, and some whisper with fear. The meaning, practice, and intent of prayer are as wonderfully diverse as are the human beings who are doing the praying.

In the end, I don't believe there is a wrong or right way to pray. Prayer, in whatever form, is an ongoing conversation between humanity and God. Sometimes we hope for God to show up in particular ways, at other times we need to yell and wail at God, and at other times we simply need to let God know what's going on in our lives. Sometimes God's response is what we hope; at other times God answers in ways that are unexpected; and still at other times, God seems to remain silent. In the end, I trust that God does hear every prayer, and a significant part of our faith life is learning to listen for the many ways that God may respond.

There is, of course, the shadow side of prayer: prayer that is used to manipulate others; passive aggressiveness and judgmental attitudes couched as prayer; and prayer that is more about building up the one praying than about speaking with God. Like many folks, when prayer is used in any of these ways, especially in public worship or other public settings, I cringe and lift my own prayer that is usually

something like, “Dear God, please don’t let that last prayer work.”

In the end, no matter how one prays or what one prays for, I trust that God is big enough to take it all in and handle both the good and the bad. While there are certainly times people need to be held accountable for the prayers that they may pray, the last thing that God needs is a bunch of us acting as prayer police trying to regulate theology and legislate content. Instead, I believe the best way to impact the culture and understanding of prayer is to offer prayers that reflect a theology and worldview that is in line with what we believe prayer should be.

Truth is, it is harder work to create new prayers than to deconstruct the prayers of others. I am convinced, however, that creating prayers that are contextually relevant and theologically consistent is a more effective way to share a theological perspective and to build relationships across the many differences of life and culture.

#40wordprayer

I offer *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* as a contribution to the larger community. Not only do I hope to offer the written word, but I also hope to expand the ways in which we may connect. I have tried to create a space where liturgy, technology, and life converge by integrating social aspects to the process and product. All forty prayers are written using forty words so that they may be accessible in length and a reminder of the forty-day season. With these concise prayers, I hope that people will interact through *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* in the following ways:

- Connect with others, through prayers I offer (or those written by others) with the hashtag #40wordprayer,

across geographic locations, theological perspectives, and personal relationships.

- Allow people to easily share and connect on Twitter, Instaprayer, and my blog with Quick Read Codes (QR Codes) and links for each devotion.
- Provide graphics that can be used on most social networks as well as in paper bulletins or other hard copy resources.
- Read and share updated blog posts for each day that include downloadable images, prayers, reflections, and more.
- Offer resources for use of the Revised Common Lectionary (Year C) for Lenten reflections, worship planning, and/or daily prayer.

Hopefully, almost anyone can connect with *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* regardless of theological perspective, technological capacity, or congregational context. Whether the convergence of technology and faith is your yesterday's news or if you are just dipping your toe into the waters of social media, I hope you will find a way to connect and engage with others around these prayers and reflections.

The Process

While *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* is framed as a collection of Lenten prayers, my intention is that these prayers may be able to stand on their own. In order to give each prayer some autonomy and to avoid having each one be part of a bread-crumbs trail leading to a particular liturgical destination, I approached the writing of the prayers with a particular process.

The first step was to choose the readings. From the daily lectionary readings for Year C, I randomly chose one reading for each day's reflection.* I generally rotated between a wisdom text, a Hebrew text, and a New Testament reading and used expansive language whenever possible. Although I think an important aspect of the lectionary is that it forces one to tackle texts that might otherwise be ignored, I did choose not to use texts if I got stuck or I just wasn't feeling it.

The next step was to write a prayer for each text. To do this I read through each of the aforementioned Scripture choices—*not in order and a little before and after the assigned text*—and wrote down the first few words and phrases that came to mind. After one pass through, I reread the Scriptures and solidified my theme choices. This allowed potential prayers and reflections to begin dancing together in my head. Then, I began a cycle for each of the forty prayers: writing the prayer, writing the reflection, and tweaking the prayer.

The final step was to create the graphics, Twitter updates, blog entries, Instapray posts, and corresponding Quick Read Codes (QR Codes).† This process was no easy task, but thanks to the help of Lauren Gibbs Beadle, you have what I believe are some cool interactive opportunities for *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words*.

How to Use #40wordprayer

Depending on what version of *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* you are reading, the hard copy or the electronic version, you will access some of these components differently. The hard copy will have QR Codes or links that can be scanned with a

* Daily Readings from the Revised Common Lectionary can be found at www.commontexts.org.

† I used www.canva.com to create all images.

smartphone or tablet. The electronic version will have clickable links. Regardless of the version—and *thank you for purchasing either version*—you are invited and encouraged to use *40 Days, 40 Prayers, 40 Words* in the following ways.

See it!

This link will direct you to a blog post on my site [www.reyes-chow.com] where you will have access to each prayer. You can download an image for use in bulletins, newsletters, and social media; read part of a reflection; and find ways to buy or review the book. These resources are free of charge. I only ask that attribution is given whenever possible.

Tweet it!

Tweets have been created on through my twitter account [twitter.com/breyeschow] for each prayer that includes the prayer title, the graphic, and a few hashtags. This link will take you to that tweet so that you can respond to, mark as a favorite, or retweet any of the prayers.

Pray it!

As with Twitter, each prayer and the accompanying graphic has been posted on Instapray [www.instapray.com]. Accessible only through a smartphone or tablet app, this link will take you to the prayer where you can pray, re-pray, or comment on the prayer through your own Instapray account.

Let Us Pray

This has been a wonderful journey. The process of writing these prayers has reconnected me with some places in my

own heart and mind that have been in need of care, challenging me to put into words my conversations with God—not an easy process but a fulfilling one.

With all these things in mind, I hope that you receive these prayers with the spirit and intent that they are offered: to be conversations with God about things that are important to me and I hope to others as well; to be theological statements informed by a reformed and justice-centered faith tradition; and to be words that will touch the souls of people at all stages of the journey of faith.

Thanks again for sharing your time and yourself with these prayers.

Let us pray.

on COMMUNITY

Ash Wednesday

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
—Isaiah 58:6

WHEN I LIVE BELIEVING MY LIFE IS THE ONLY
LIFE THAT MATTERS,
GOD, REMIND ME THAT
THE FACES OF OTHERS REFLECT YOUR FACE,
THE STRUGGLES OF OTHERS BRING YOUR
LIBERATION TO MY LIFE,
AND THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS SPEAKS
YOUR GRACE INTO MY SOUL.
AMEN.

ON COMMUNITY
#40WORDPRAYER
@BREYESCHOW

*When I live believing
my life is the only life that matters,
God, remind me that
the faces of others reflect your face,
the struggles of others bring your liberation to my life,
and the kindness of others speaks your grace into my soul.
Amen.*

Every once in a while—OK, quite often—I have to remind myself that I am not the center of the universe. Yeah, yeah, I understand that I am a uniquely created child of God, but sometimes I can take this knowledge to the extreme and begin to think that life is all about me, and thus, in all things, the world should revolve around me.

Lent is one of those times where we can run the danger of reinforcing this idea: that our faith is ultimately about us and us alone, that the walk to the cross is to be taken in isolation, that blame for violence is to be laid at the feet of another, and that the resurrection is only a personal experience. Although certain aspects of Lent, and any Lenten discipline, require self-reflection and self-awareness, we must not enter that endeavor believing that it is only about our individual experiences. For we are reminded over and over and over again that the journey of life, the walk to the cross, and the experience of resurrection is a communal one—together we often turn on one another and away from God; and together we can experience forgiveness, repentance, and new life; and together we can be the best of who God intends.

So as we begin this journey, let's think about it as a collective of individuals on a journey, each discerning God's hopes and intentions for our personal lives while seeking freedom and justice for the larger community. Let's make this a time where it is about me—but it is also about you, about us, and ultimately all about God.

See it!

Tweet it!

Pray it!

on COURAGE

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

—Psalm 91:1–2

on courage

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GOD, SOMETIMES, I AM
OVERWHELMED BY FEAR,
FEARFUL OF CHANGE,
FEARFUL OF OTHERS,
FEARFUL OF THE UNKNOWN.

IN THOSE TIMES, GRANT ME COURAGE,
A COURAGE NOT BORNE OUT OF FEAR,
BUT COURAGE THAT IS
GUIDED BY YOUR WISDOM,
GIFTED WITH YOUR PRESENCE,
AND GROUNDED IN YOUR CALLING.
AMEN.

#40wordprayer
@breyeschow

*God, sometimes, I am overwhelmed by fear,
fearful of change, fearful of others, fearful of the unknown.
In those times, grant me courage,
a courage not borne out of fear, but courage that is
guided by your wisdom,
gifted with your presence,
and grounded in your calling.
Amen.*

One of the most difficult aspects of engaging in self-reflection is that I might find something that I don't like about who I am, what I do, what I think, or why I do what I do. And even worse, I would then have to change my behaviors, my thinking, and my motivations. Who wants to do that?

I believe that most people are pretty good folks, and in our most honest times, we are able to acknowledge aspects of our behaviors and personalities that may need to change. At the same time, I also know that changing lifelong behaviors and ways of thinking, large or small, is not easy. Few of us can simply wake up in the morning and say, "Today, I am no longer going to judge people unfairly," or "Today, I am going to be compassionate toward all people," or "Today, I am not going to eat foods that I know are bad for me."

And yet, Lent is a time when we can explore changing, if even for a short time, those behaviors and perspectives that may need to change. For some people it means letting something go and for others to take something on, but it all requires embracing the difficult task of self-reflection and change.

And no one—*no one*—likes change. We generally like change for other people but not for ourselves. Change takes courage, it takes discipline, and it takes hope.

Sounds a lot like Lent.

See it!

Tweet it!

Pray it!