

## 40 Days of Prayer

### Betsy Voreacos

When Debra asked me to speak about the 40 days of Prayer, I wasn't fooled for a second. She didn't ask me because I'm the most devout Presbyterian, or because I have a great divine intervention story or even because I've had a major prayer answered.

No, Debra asked me to speak as the parishioner least likely to pray.

You know. If *Betsy* can do it, *anyone* can do it.

By now, most of you have heard of the 40 Days of Prayer. You have either embraced it with enthusiasm or done what I did last year – let it go in one ear and out the other and hope that no one asks you about it face-to-face.

Last year I got the face-to-face and didn't have a good enough excuse not to do it. Then, once I succumbed, I found out I was supposed to have a prayer partner. So now, suddenly, I'm accountable. I immediately started scheming about how I would dodge all the tough questions and spiritual discussions about my inevitable enlightenment. I figured I would just lie and say I had done my daily deed. But my prayer partner ended up being a psychoanalyst who would surely see right through me, even if I got one over on God.

So, I just bit the bullet and committed to doing the 40 days of prayer.

Then the panic set in. I was totally daunted by the workbook. I didn't even open it until Day One. But when I did, I found it was written in layman's English. It was simple, understandable and gave step-by-step directions. It was impossible to do anything wrong! And best of all – you didn't really have to pray.

So, what is 40 days of Prayer without praying? Actually, the program's full title is *Unbinding your Heart: 40 Days of Prayer and Faith Sharing*. Every day you are given a Bible passage to read. That's easy enough. Then, there's a bit of commentary followed by some thought-provoking questions and then a little exercise to do. I'm not going to ruin the surprise by telling you what the exercises are, but just know that if I can do them, you can do them. Then, you end the day's "lesson" with a prayer. A prayer that is already written. You don't even have to make it up!

So, let's get back to this faith sharing part of the title. At first I thought it meant sharing my inner thoughts and doubts with my prayer partner, who luckily professes to be as unholy as I am. But, in the end, I found that faith sharing had more to do with **God** sharing his faith in **me**, than me sharing my faith with my prayer partner.

You can do this however you want. You can do it first thing every morning or on your lunch break. You can do it at the kitchen table or in your Lazy-Boy recliner. You're not going to get in trouble for skipping a day, or two. You're not going to burn in Hell if you don't follow the exercise of the day to a T. But, it's like the old cliché says, You'll get out of it what you put into it.

As it turned out, I didn't miss a single one of the 40 days of prayer. Which isn't to say I didn't manage to have a little guilt over it. Even though my prayer partner is one of my favorite people in the whole wide world, *I* still wasn't a very good prayer partner. That bothered me until I learned that he thought **HE** wasn't a good prayer partner. So, in the end, we were perfect partners and it all worked out fine. My husband, David, on the other hand, found that sharing his spiritual odyssey with another person was extremely rewarding and had no angst about it whatsoever.

The 40 days of prayers forced me, or shall I say, gave me the opportunity, to stop and breathe and focus on God for 30 minutes or so a day. I hate to admit it, but most of the time I don't make time unless I have to.

Which is why, when I heard we were doing the 40 days again, I got really excited. (Like I need another thing to add to my list of things to do).

Someone asked me why I wanted do the same exact thing with the exact same scriptures and exercises a year later. And some of you who did this last year may have the same question. But think about it. All of us are at least a little different than we were last year. Some of you have changed jobs. Or followed a dream. Maybe you moved to a new house. Or a new church. You may have lost a loved one. Or found someone new to love.

My husband still loves me (I think). I still need to make more money (I know). And the laundry still piles up. But some things have changed. My college roommate is dying of lung cancer. Another close friend has a rare form of throat cancer. My 19 year-old nephew just had an unplanned baby with an unwanted

girlfriend. And I'm about to launch child number two to God-only-knows where. But, I've lost 90 pounds this year and with that have shed a lot of anxiety and a bit of self-loathing. My faith is stronger, my doubts weaker. And I can't help but wonder if the jump start I got last year with the 40 days of prayer had anything to do with it.

I'm excited to see where this journey takes me this year and I hope you'll join me.

Just please. Don't ask me to be your prayer partner.