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***We Pray With Her: Encouragement for All Women Who Lead***

is an inspiring collection of 100 devotions along with multiple prayers for special occasions, divided five sections:

CALL, STRUGGLE, COURAGE, RESISTANCE, and PERSISTENCE.

This sampler includes an example of a devotion from each section, multiple prayers, and the table of contents.

Find out more at [AbingdonPress.com/WePrayWithHer](http://AbingdonPress.com/WePrayWithHer).

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WE PRAY WITH HER  
ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL WOMEN WHO LEAD

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*O how careful ought we to be, lest through our by-laws of church government and church discipline, we bring into disrepute even the word of life.<sup>2</sup>*

—*Jarena Lee*

I have always known I wanted to be a mom. I don't even know when I first realized it, but I have always known it deep in my bones. I have three kids who are a constant source of joy and busyness and humility. I am also an ordained minister and a seminary professor. I know that these are all my call, my vocation. I know this because I am passionately alive when I am fulfilling my calls to motherhood, ministry, and teaching.

I didn't meet an ordained woman until the summer before seminary. I still don't know how I thought I could even be a pastor, except I know the Spirit must have called it forth in my imagination. But here's the thing: I have been told I shouldn't preach because I am a woman. I have been told that since I am a mother, that is my only call and I am betraying my children and my God by working at all.

It is sometimes impossible to hear God's gentle and consistent Spirit over the constant din of other people telling us what we should be doing with our time and energy. The hardest voices to ignore are the voices from within the church.

Jarena Lee, an African American preacher in the 1800s, faced many people within the church telling her that what she knew to be from God was wrong. She questioned the call herself and asked God about it repeatedly, but in the end, it was clear and became clear to others too. She became the first woman authorized by the African Methodist Episcopal Church to preach.

Women who are called to both motherhood and work will be questioned, sometimes combatively. We will face people who don't understand or respect the call we know is from God.



The church should not be part of the problem. The church should help us discern our call and support us when it inevitably becomes difficult to juggle more than one call faithfully.

Jarena Lee knew that betraying a call from God, even when the church was the one telling her to, would bring “disrepute to the word of life.” May she help us do the same.

*Prayer: God who knows my gifts and limitations better than I do, lead me to live a life that honors your word of life. Clear away the doubts that come from listening to people who don't understand your call for me. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Emily A. Peck-McClain





*I call on your name, Lord, from the depths of the pit. Hear my voice. Don't close your ear to my need for relief, to my cry for help. Come near to me on the day I call to you. Say to me, "Don't be afraid."*

—*Lamentations 3:55-57*

When I began my career, over a decade ago, I received a lot of advice—both solicited and unsolicited. People gave me helpful pointers about where to live in my new city, the best professional networking events to attend with those who had cache, and the most sought-after spots for a discreet business lunch. However, no one gave me advice on how to survive while in the pit.

What no one tells you about leadership is that things will change and with some change comes struggle. I was utterly unprepared when my professional and personal lives began to orbit on different planes. While I was thriving professionally, my personal life was falling apart. I was meeting all the professional standards for success, but my marriage, mental health, and physical health were crashing. I lived in a beautiful condo with a picturesque view; I attended the “right” events with the “right” people. I even knew the managers at the best restaurants in town. And yet, I found myself in the pit.

What no one tells you is that while in the pit you will realize that your drive to live is greater than your fear. My life did seemingly fall apart: the marriage ended, my sister died unexpectedly, I became an adoptive single parent to my nephew, my father died, and then my ex-husband died. In the midst of unbearable grief, I was clinically depressed, super morbidly obese, and struggling to face the daily tasks of life. Still, I knew I was supposed to have a greater life, and this was not the end. One morning on my bedroom floor, I cried out to God, and She came near saying, “Do not fear.”

What no one tells you is that in the most challenging circumstances





you will find your authentic and best self. It was in the pit of life that I stopped seeking outside validation and began listening to my truth. I not only worked to be my best public self, but I committed to loving and taking care of the fragile parts of myself. I bathed in forgiveness and held myself with grace.

What no one tells is you is that one day you will look back and be amazed at yourself.

*Prayer: Dear God, may I face every pit knowing that you are already there waiting for me to return to myself. Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Theresa S. Thames





*The king of Egypt spoke to two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah: “When you are helping the Hebrew women give birth and you see the baby being born, if it’s a boy, kill him . . .” Now the two midwives respected God so they didn’t obey the Egyptian king’s order. Instead, they let the baby boys live.*

—Exodus 1:15-17

Very few times in history or myth have midwives been on center stage, but here, in the book of Exodus, their courage becomes legendary. Shiphrah and Puah are brought before the king of all Egypt, which in and of itself must have been at least unnerving. His instructions to them indicate that the meeting was terrifying: two small women before a powerful, unstable, genocidal man. He wants them to kill for him—to kill babies for him. We don’t know how they responded in the moment. But we do know that they had courage. Courage to disobey authority.

In some ways, the courage to disobey authority is lacking in those of us with privilege. Authority protects our privilege. Authority rewards me for being white and performing my gender in a nonthreatening way. If I were to courageously take a stand against authority, what privilege I have would be in jeopardy. But the thing is, sometimes authority is unstable and violent. The rewards I get with my privilege come at a heavy price. White pastors like me might find saying Black Lives Matter from the pulpit may get us fired. But two centuries of white churches refusing to speak out about racism has allowed the church’s prophetic voice to rot. Maybe you have found speaking out against authority to be dangerous as well. We look away from sexual harassment in the workplace, for instance, trying not to draw attention to ourselves. And yet, look at the sea change that has happened since some people have begun to speak out, regardless of the risk.

Shiphrah and Puah didn’t care about privilege. They didn’t care about authority. They cared about God. And so they courageously worked with



God to bring life into the world. I wonder what it would look like if I would embody courage like theirs. What would it look like for you? What privileges do you need to risk? What authorities do you need to disobey?

*Prayer: Spirit, breathe life into me, strong, courageous life, to help me stand up to authority and live into your vision of justice and peace. Amen.*

Rev. Shannon E. Sullivan





*Queen Esther answered, “If I please the king, and if the king wishes, give me my life—that’s my wish—and the lives of my people too. That’s my desire. We have been sold—I and my people—to be wiped out, killed, and destroyed.”*

—*Esther 7:3-4a*

**I**n her acceptance speech for the 2018 Golden Globe Cecil B. DeMille Award for lifetime achievement, Oprah Winfrey said, “What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, our most powerful form of resistance is showing up and unapologetically being our fullest, truest selves in the face of powers that would silence us, enslave us, and destroy us.

Queen Esther shows us how it’s done. Not without fear. Not without a tribe. Not without a second try. But in the most basic and terrifying act of living her truth for all the world to see. When the Persian king needed a new wife, he rounded up all the eligible bachelorettes in the country and ended up giving the rose to Esther. Esther was an orphan who was raised by her older cousin Mordechai. They were Jews exiled in Persia. Now as queen, Mordecai kept his relation to Esther a secret. He thought it was best no one knew she was a Jew and of course, he would end up being right.

The king’s right-hand man, Haman, developed a grudge against Mordechai, but rather than throw him in jail, Haman went full on maniacal and decided to have the entire Jewish population in Persia wiped out. Mordechai sent word to Esther that she needed to do something and quick. So even though it was illegal, she requested an audience with the king. Emboldened by the prayers and fasting of her fellow Jews, she was able to reveal her truth, halting the nationwide assault on her people. When we show up just as God created us to be (femme, butch, quiet, loud, taking up as much space as we take up, loving the people we were born to love), when



we live as our true selves, we express the Truth of our Creator. Truth always frightens evil. That's resistance!

Esther teaches us, to save the world:

1. Show up
2. Be unapologetically yourself

Not on the list: apologizing, staying silent, and trying to be some version of yourself the world is comfortable with.

Indeed, as long as injustice exists, we commit to making those with power uncomfortable.

*Prayer: God of truth, help me reveal your nature by being exactly who you made me to be. Strengthen me in the discomfoting work of being myself and resisting the evils that seek to change me. Amen.*

Rev. Corey Tarreto Turnpenny





*A Canaanite woman . . . came out and shouted, “Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.” But he didn’t respond to her at all. . . . But she knelt before him and said, “Lord, help me.” . . . Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish.”*

—Matthew 15:21-23a, 25, 28a

**W**e don’t know her name, but we know she persisted. Picture this scene: Jesus is traveling with his disciples, and a woman runs up to him, shouting for help because her daughter isn’t well. The harried disciples, clearly on a mission to get to their destination, implore Jesus to tell the women to go away. Shockingly, he does—albeit somewhat more diplomatically than that. Jesus tells the woman that he’s here for the Jewish people, not for people like her. It’s not personal. Helping her just doesn’t fit the mission.

The woman doesn’t give up. She gets on her knees and begs. Jesus dismisses her again, this time not quite so nicely. He makes a rude comment about not throwing bread that is meant for the children to the dogs. (In case it’s not clear, the woman and her people are the “dogs” in this metaphor.)

Thinking quickly, the woman retorts, “But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters’ table” (Matthew 1:27). Whoa. Can you imagine talking back like that to Jesus?

In a shocking twist, Jesus affirms the woman for her faith, and her daughter is immediately healed.

In this story, a determined woman fights for what she knows is right. She refuses to take no for an answer and even has the audacity to turn Jesus’s words back on him in an effort to change his mind. This woman demands that Jesus see her and her daughter as people worthy of his attention. She was told repeatedly to stop, but she nevertheless persisted.



Few people like conflict. When faced with push-back, our tendency is to quiet down and keep everyone happy. The cause of justice, however, requires persistence through awkward and uncomfortable confrontation. How is God calling you to persist in the fight for what is right? Commit to boldly persist, even when you're told to stop, and know that God is with you.

*Prayer: Holy One, thank you for this persistent woman whose name is lost but whose story lives on. She reveals that persistence is a virtue. Give me the drive to press forward for the cause of justice even and especially when faced with resistance. Help me persist when I'm told to go away or when my concerns are dismissed as irrelevant. Remind me in those difficult moments that even Jesus needed to be challenged by persistent people of faith. Amen.*

Rev. Mary R. W. Dicken





— **A Prayer of Gratitude for when** —  
**a Pregnancy Test Is Positive**

Creator of us all, in this moment of emotion, I turn to you.

What a gift it is to be able to cradle life in my body, to witness its slow and mysterious shaping within. And yet at the same time, what uncertainty there is as I think of the weeks and months and years ahead.

You are the Creator, I am a vessel. Whatever happens, you hold me and this little life within. Hold me closely and tenderly, as I hold this baby. Carry me in grace as I carry this baby. I ask this in the name of Jesus, whose origin in this world mirrors what is happening in my body right now. Amen.

Rev. Alison VanBuskirk Philip

— **A Prayer for When Someone Asks,** —  
**Again, Why You Don't Have Children**

Loving and faithful God, help me remember that my worth does not come from my womb and that my salvation is in Christ and not childbirth. In those times when others question or criticize, may I find my rest in your loving embrace. I am your beloved child and my value comes from you, and from you alone. May I come to the joy of new life by partnering in your creative work in the world. Amen.

Rev. J. Paige Boyer



— A Prayer for Transformation —  
Through Struggle

Curled up, head in hands, tears streaming.  
The days and nights run together.  
Covered up, seeping with desperation.  
Soaked pillows, hollow eyes.  
There is no sense to be made.

The cry goes out, “How long, O Lord?”  
How long?  
How long . . .  
Something changes.

Light peaks through.  
Face begins to dry.  
Sorrow gives way.  
Little by little, God breaks in.  
Bit by bit, healing starts.

Desperation turns to determination.  
Sorrow to joy.  
Weeping to dancing.  
Life is renewed.

Merciful God, in this moment of struggle, let your comfort surround me.  
In time, wipe away my tears. Help me see beyond this despair. In your  
great mercy, turn my mourning into dancing. Amen.

Rev. Sarah A. Slack

— A Prayer in the Midst —  
of Technical Difficulties

(Or, God, I have already smashed the patriarchy today,  
please don't make me smash the printer too.)

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me.”<sup>1</sup> But I wish you would search and know this machinery so I don't have to pull out my hair trying to figure it out. And yes, I already tried shutting it down and turning it back on again.

I have important things to do, and so I just need your wisdom dealing with technology so I can go about the rest of my day

because this day will not stop!

These frustrations build and build, and I don't have the time or the energy for it. Help me transform this moment into a space for breath and reconnection. Soothe my aggravated nerves and help me see clearly in the midst of the mess. Amen.

Rev. Shannon E. Sullivan



## — A Prayer When Experiencing — a Panic Attack

I am in pain.

I feel scared to the point I want to jump out of my skin and run away. Or maybe crawl under the covers and make myself as small as possible. I pray for the courage to face this fear.

With strength, I turn inside to find the pain and explain it to you. Hear me—that I may finally feel that I am fully seen and known. All of my pain and all of my beauty, brought to light. Great Comforter, bathe my suffering in your love and compassion. Let me feel comfort as lush as a rain forest, freedom that makes my heart soar high into the clouds, and peace as deep as the oceans. Amen.

Rev. Julia Singleton

## — A Prayer at the Time of Burnout —

God of Mercy, I confess I feel like I am bereft of sinew, a bag of dry bones, and my spirit in ashes. I have tried to take it all on myself. I have failed to seek sustenance. Give me courage to seek help. Help me find a moment of Sabbath today, breathe into me and revive these bones. Help me trust that you will walk with me though this land. Amen.

Rev. Sarah Karber



## — A Prayer for Boldness —

Righteous God, I feel you nudging me, no, pushing me to stand up for justice in this world. I know you call me to resist evil, injustice, and oppression. This feeling is overwhelming.

I want to do what is right. I want to do what is needed. I want to follow your lead.

So I pray for boldness. Give me not only the strength to speak and the words to say but the spirit of power so that I might deliver your message in a way that changes things, changes the world.

Help me be bold. Take the quiver from my voice and the tremors from my hands.

Help me be bold. Pour into my heart a feeling of peace.

Help me be bold. As I take a deep breath to do what is right, help me be bold. Amen.

Rev. Sarah A. Slack



## — A Prayer at a Time of Violence —

After another act of violence . . . another mass shooting . . . another case of police brutality . . . another high profile rape case . . . we feel numb. It is the same story. Calloused killers and abusers are protected by the same people in power who always protect them, while bereft families look the same, unconsolated in the streets. We don't have the energy to wail and lament anymore.

But, Truth-Telling God, you call us to weep anyway. And not just to weep, but to get on the phones and out in the streets in anger, serving the survivors with compassion, breaking the silence that protects those in power and perpetuates cycles of violence. Do not comfort us. Inspire us to resist apathy and insist on your peace and wholeness in our homes, our communities, and our world, always. Amen.

Rev. Shannon E. Sullivan



— **A Prayer for Surviving** —

Holy God, you know all that I've experienced.  
You know the pain in my heart and the difficulties I've faced.  
You have wept with me.  
You have comforted me.  
You have been angry on my behalf.

In these moments, remind me of your love and your continued presence  
in my life.  
Strengthen me to speak for justice, and grant me the courage to follow  
your call.

God, you have journeyed with me, never leaving me alone.  
In these moments, remind me that I am yours; strong, beautiful, and be-  
loved.  
Guide me by your Spirit all the days of my life. Amen.

Rev. Lorrin M. Radzik



## — A Prayer When Overwhelmed —

Merciful God, I am overwhelmed. I'm worn out. I can't do all the things that must be done. I am empty and I have nothing left to give.

Help me, God: please help me.

You are the One who brought light in the darkness and swept across the waters to bring order out of chaos. Do that here today, God.

Show me just the very next step forward. Send me someone to remind me I'm not alone, Show me one task I can handle, or just the next step that is in front of me.

Help me remember that you love me because I am, not because of what I do. Be with me in this moment God. I can't go on without you. Be with me here and now. Amen.

Rev. Anjie Peek Woodworth