

Turning 40

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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As we're all in the midst of Advent longing, I realize that I'm turning forty in a couple of days. Which puts me in an odd position, since I [write](#) and speak about ministering with people in their twenties and thirties. I started talking about young adults because I was tired of hearing people older than me talk about my generation. What they had to say didn't quite ring true.

When I saw the 4-0 coming, I shifted gears with my [second book](#), and now I talk about cultural shifts more generally.

But I'm still asked to speak about young adults. I still have a lot of research and work under my belt, and much of what I wrote five years ago (especially about the economic situation) is just now coming to the surface.

I've seen a couple of women in their twenties who look frustrated when I talk about their generation. I recognize the discomfort on their faces, because it's the same grimace I was wearing. I always take them aside and tell them, "If you're feeling like you should be the one writing and speaking about this stuff, then do it. I have a limited shelf life. My expiration date is coming soon."

I invite any of you who feel irritated to do the same. I don't think that we religious leaders pay attention to our jealousies enough. (This sounds odd. I don't mean jealousy of me. I just mean in general.) They're so unattractive and unspiritual that we hide them and pretend they're not there. But it's important to listen to yourself when you want to roll your eyes, make a snarky comment, or give a colleague a nasty Shelfari review for no apparent reason. That feeling just might be a shadowy manifestation of God's calling.

The church needs people who can speak loud and clear. I'll always try to let you know what I did to get on this path. Publishing is changing very quickly, so the route might be different than it was a few years ago, but this is what I know...

Listen for a calling. I just heard [this interview](#) with Trent Reznor. He was talking about playing concerts and said that the tour always lasts much longer than he wants it to. It made me realize how much hard work being a musician is.

It can be the same for writing and speaking. I love traveling and meeting new people. But it's work. To keep up with the exertion, you usually have to do it because of a calling to something other than your ego—you love God, you love the church, you love people, you love the art, and you want to help.

Oh, and there's not much money in it. Some writers I know figure how many cents they're getting per word. Or if you speak, you can count up the prep and travel time and figure out what you're making per hour. Those exercises lead to utter frustration. And it's a reminder that you have to have a calling.

Create content. We're not only called through divine snark, but we're also called through what we love. Think about what you like to do, what you like to research, read, and talk about. It's good to focus on a general theme, and it's often interesting to mix a churchy subject with something non-religious. But focus. You may love technology, church, and ewoks, but after you sharpen your attention, you will realize that the ewoks can wait.

There are so many ways to create content now. For instance, you can start a blog, record a [podcast](#), host webinars, or write [a buck 99 e-book](#). You don't have to be a techy to do these things (I'm not technologically savvy at all... just ask anyone who works with me... I ask other people to tell me what buttons to push and I push them).

Form genius constellations. The beautiful thing about all of this is that no one has to be writing in a cabin in complete solitude. With the Internet, we're able to connect and encourage one another. Join a

[blogging community](#). Work with other podcasts. Follow authors and publishers on Twitter.

One of most interesting places I've found to interact with other people who are doing creative things is at [Unco](#). "Unco" is short for Unconference, and it's an open-space gathering of leaders who gather to worship and think about the future of the church. I help to host the gatherings, so if you're up for it, we'd love for you to join us!

Get published. If you're looking to get published by a traditional house, they want to see that you have a "platform" (in other words, they want to know that people will buy your book). This used to mean that you were broadcasting on television, preaching on the radio, speaking at conferences, teaching at a seminary, or pastoring a church like Saddleback. Now it means that you can create meaningful content and connect with genius constellations.

There's a lot more to all of this, but since the coming of the Lord is at hand, you probably have some cookies to bake and sermons to write before you start in on it.

In this good season, I pray that you will sense your longings and God's calling as we all learn to do new things.