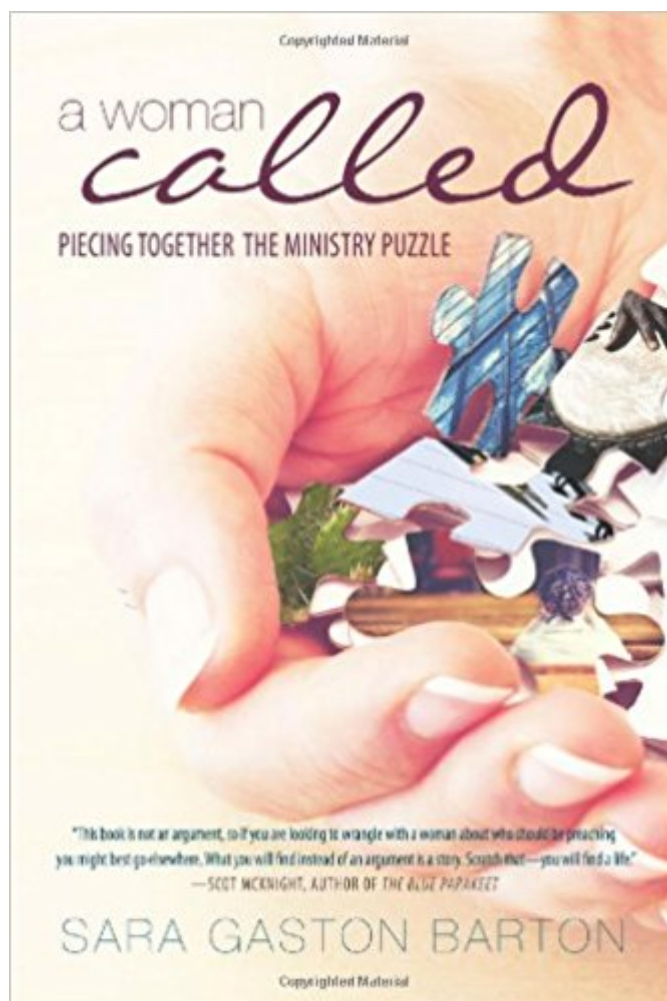


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# A Woman Called: Piecing Together The Ministry Puzzle



## Synopsis

The call to ministry is profound and life-changing, one that women are often forbidden to answer. In this sensitive and moving memoir Sara Barton speaks openly and vulnerably about how the conflict has played out in her life. In many churches today, Christians assume that women are excluded from the public role of preaching--yet women like Sara Barton experience a call to preach, forcing congregations and individuals to confront a complicated rethinking of tradition and theology. For many, the issues that surface are fraught with hopes and fears--hope of what could be in a church that embraces women's voices in the pulpit and throughout leadership; and fear of violating God-ordained order and losing a sacred commitment to Scripture. Other books have addressed the theological arguments in this important debate, and while those works are significant, they tend to be removed from the day-to-day realities involved. Feeling an inner call to preach as a young girl, Sara found herself perplexed because of her community's strong teachings about the role of women in the church. She has been seeking her way ever since--still convinced she is supposed to preach, still confused by the censure that brings in her religious community, and unwilling to reject that community in return. Sara's story is one of being pulled apart and yet deeply committed. Anyone touched by this issue should take her voice seriously.

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## Customer Reviews

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surface are fraught with hopes and fears--hope of what could be in a church that embraces women's voices in the pulpit and throughout leadership; and fear of violating God-ordained order and losing a sacred commitment to Scripture. Other books have addressed the theological arguments in this important debate, and while those works are significant, they tend to be removed from the day-to-day realities involved. Feeling an inner call to preach as a young girl, Sara found herself perplexed because of her community's strong teachings about the role of women in the church. She has been seeking her way ever since--still convinced she is supposed to preach, still confused by the censure that brings in her religious community, and unwilling to reject that community in return. Sara's story is one of being pulled apart and yet deeply committed. Anyone touched by this issue should take her voice seriously.

SARA G. BARTON holds a B.A. in English from Harding University and a Masters of Spiritual Formation and Leadership from Spring Arbor University. She has taught high school English and Speech, worked as a missionary in Jinja, Uganda, and served as a campus minister at Rochester College. Today, she works with Rochester's early college program for academically gifted teenagers from urban environments. In addition, Sara has presented at ZOE Conferences, Abilene Christian University, Pepperdine University, the Christian Scholars Conference, and at women's retreats and conferences all over the United States.

As the title promises, "A Woman Called: Piecing Together the Ministry Puzzle" explores the prickly issue of women called to the ministry, particularly as it pertains to the long-standing men-only tradition in the Churches of Christ. I wasn't sure what to expect, but what I got was a book that refrains from the in-your-face rhetoric of the more militant and argumentative voices on this issue. It also stays refreshingly away from the mushy, saccharine, feeling-based jargon of the sentimentalists. Instead, Sara tackles the issue head-on in a way that invites the reader into her life and into the good news of Christ. "A Woman Called" is an example of what I've come to refer to as the "Barton Invitational." I've heard both Sara and her husband John speak many times, and their talks are invariably peppered with some version of "I invite you to . . ." I smile every time I hear it because that's simply who they are as open and hospitable people. That theme runs throughout the book as well. Sara sees everything from the Bible to the Westminster Abbey in London as inviting participants into some facet of being. To her, even a seemingly dry genealogy is inviting. I came across only one small difficulty. In my sideline work as a freelance editor, I sometimes come across authors whose metaphors can get in the way of the point they're trying to make. There is a little of

that here. The puzzle image is a great metaphor, but a slight overemphasis on the analogy in one chapter slightly obscures the points Sara is making. But I see this as merely a minor criticism of what is overall a brilliant work. At its root, this is simply Sara's story. She doesn't claim to know what other women's callings might be, nor does she disparage any whose callings may take them down a more traditional path. But she does know her own calling and her own story, and she tells it well. It's left to the readers to accept her invitation.-----Disclaimer: I work with Sara Barton at Rochester College and know her personally. I find her to be a fine Christian with a lot to offer any community of which she is a member. She did not ask me for this review, nor did she influence it in any way.

I just finished reading *A Woman Called* by Sara Barton. I have been involved with campus ministry for more than 50 years, as a student, supporter, faculty advisor, and president of an independent group supporting campus ministry at a major university in the same religious tradition as Sara's. I have also been a biomedical engineering faculty member for more than 40 years. My graduating class had three females out of more than 100 engineering students. Now the average engineering graduating class is about 18 percent female, somewhat more in biomedical engineering. I have encouraged young women in our profession to aspire to leadership as professionals. One of our 1993 graduates, a young African American woman, was recently cited by the President as a "Champion of Change" for her work in getting young women into our profession. But gender differences persist professionally, and are even more pronounced in church "circles" (even the term "circle", implying egalitarian, reciprocal relationships, is a misnomer). When a woman with intellectual or leadership capacity walks into an assembly in our fellowship, she has been expected to check her brain at the door. This makes no sense intellectually, and Sara's scholarship has shown that it makes no sense hermeneutically either. I am grateful for her writing the book, and for her kind, forbearing spirit, and have already put it in the hands of intellectually gifted women to encourage them that a new day may finally have arrived.

Just as described! Highly recommend this book and this seller. Would buy from again.

Enter the life of a woman who lovingly embraces both her church heritage and the calling on her life that seem exclusive of one another. The narrative guides the reader along with both embraces and challenges us to understand our place too. This is an engaging journey pairing Sara Barton's warm narrative with a studied and insightful look at scripture and "yes" scripture that has often created

fear and controversy as it speaks about women and their participation in God's work. Sara invites us to step into the stories of the bible that have accompanied her journey and with her genuine view helps the readers grapple with the intention of the scripture in a holistic and practical way. If you are not persuaded after digesting the entirety of this read that God's view of power and authority are the opposite of where we as humans have landed I will be disappointed. My horizon has most certainly been enlarged by Sara's many personal stories, her take on God's pointed involvement with humanity and what I view as her conclusions of truth and wisdom. My hope is that everyone will read this book. Thank you Sara Barton for standing up for marginalized women objectified by both our churches and our world and for loving those of us who often do not see that we are the perpetrators.

The author presents her story as merely that ~ not a one-size-fits-all solution.

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