

Review: Becoming the Pastor's Wife

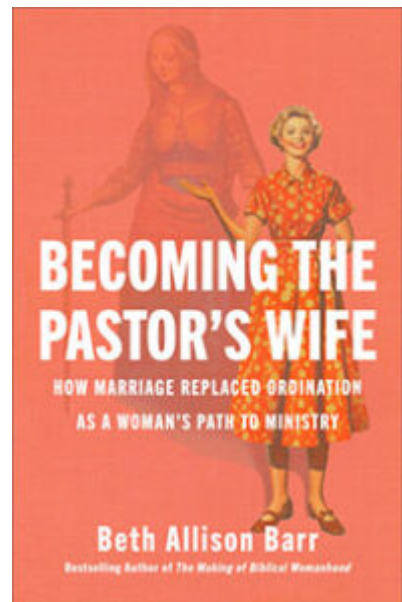
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Becoming the Pastor's Wife: How Marriage Replaced Ordination as a Woman's Path to Ministry

By Beth Allison Barr (Brazos Press)

Beth Allison Barr is a pastor's wife with her own call to support her husband in his pastoral ministry. She loves being a pastor's wife. She also is a Baylor University history professor specializing in medieval, women's and church history. Her latest book—*Becoming the Pastor's Wife*—marries the personal and professional to properly situate being a pastor's wife within a woman's call to ministry.

Barr describes how the role of pastor's wife took shape over the last century by analyzing, along with her research assistants Katie Heatherly and Brooke LeFevre, 150 books for ministers' wives published from 1923 to 2023. The authors of these books represent evangelical, mainline and Black denominations and lay out expectations for how a pastor's wife will look and conduct herself.



During the period they studied, they determined the highest—and sometimes only—ministry role for a woman was to be a pastor's wife, even if a woman sensed no such call herself. Barr differentiates between a woman's identity and a woman's activity. A woman might marry into ministry, but is she called to ministry?

Archaeological evidence suggests women led in ministry for centuries, with or without husbands. This changed with the Reformation and industrialization, as Barr explains, arguing the complementarian conception of a pastor's wife is a product of those seismic cultural changes rather than Scripture. Even so, Barr points out the New Testament is not an egalitarian document. Yet, Scripture does not relegate women to secondary status.

Barr takes on Southern Baptist proponents of complementarianism directly, such as Dorothy Patterson, Albert Mohler, Jimmy Draper and Adrian Rogers. For example, she notes the silence on the role of pastor's wife within Scripture and church history, despite modern claims by complementarians—particularly Mohler—to the contrary.

One of the more intriguing explorations is the role of the pastor's wife in Black churches. Barr sees much for others to learn from the authority held by and the ministry activity of pastors' wives in Black churches.

While extensive, Barr is fully aware her research on the role of pastor's wife is not complete. She notes areas for further study, some of which she is conducting already.

Barr doesn't disparage pastors' wives or the role of pastor's wife. Rather, she seeks to situate the role properly.

Becoming the Pastor's Wife is expected to release March 18, with a book launch event at Fabled Bookstore in Waco. [RSVP here](#) for a free ticket.

*Eric Black, executive director/publisher/editor
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