

Donna Giver-Johnston. *Claiming the Call to Preach: Four Female Pioneers of Preaching in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 344 pages. \$55.19.

Throughout history, women have faced challenges in identifying their vocational "calling." When it comes to women and preaching, it often elicits adverse reactions, confusion, disapproval, and even hopelessness. Women expressing a divine call are often harmed during the process of discernment. Donna Giver-Johnston in *Claiming the Call to Preach*, examines the calls of four female pioneers of preaching, claiming their calls to preach through resistance. With a 21st-century understanding of gender identity, Giver-Johnston claims that within the periods of these women's lives and call narratives, the concept of identity was limited to males and females. Giver-Johnston argues that the history of these call stories and how we grasp the broader picture of language prove that anyone can experience a "call" regardless of societal barriers. Contextually, *Claiming the Call to Preach* responds to disenfranchisement attached to discerning a call or pull to preach. Using her narrative, Giver-Johnston recalls the harm and discomfort associated with the first time she heard a call, citing how it perpetuated the silencing of women.

This book shares the inspiring stories of Jarena Lee, Frances Elizabeth, Caroline Willard, Louisa Maria Woolsey, and Florence Spearing Randolph. Despite living in a time when women were often silenced, they heard a calling and overcame numerous challenges to follow their paths. The author, Giver-Johnston, shares their journeys and relates them to her own experiences of resistance. By highlighting these pioneering women, the book offers valuable insight into the struggles and triumphs of those who knew they had a calling. It also sheds light on their neglected narratives and how they reclaimed their voices through preaching. In addition, Giver-Johnston explains the purpose of providing the history of each call story as a response to a neglectful narrative. The book highlights the concept of a call to ministry and preaching by exploring the relationship between theology and the practice of claiming the call. Each chapter focuses on one woman and her narrative, with added subtitles that respond to specific pieces and spaces that have been overlooked (34). The book is compelling as it situates an outward call, the endorsement to preach, and an inward one, being a divine summons within the stories of each woman and the author herself (2). The text also details how one critically examines the rhetoric of the call to preach, highlighting the hermeneutics of experience, social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, and reconstruction. The book contributes a wealth of life expertise alongside theological research while pointing out an overarching hurdle in claiming the call. Ultimately, this book reaches an audience wrestling with complicated questions about the idea of a call to ministry and preaching while also affirming the experiences of all persons. Beyond preaching moments, we experience it; discerning a call is nothing short of a task within itself. However, this writing is not a "how to" resource but a landing space in authority and authenticity.

The relationship between Giver-Johnston's claims of power and her extensive research is apparent. Her work indicates that interpreting a call involves various perspectives while influenced by harmful past practices. Her consideration of rhetoric provides an outstanding conversational tool for readers discerning a call beyond its use in the history of preaching. In summary, *Claiming the Call to Preach* critiques the practice of preaching and its effectiveness in traditional transformation. It is a compelling text that offers an analysis and contextual framework for historical knowledge while providing a lane for readers to adopt a contemporary awareness of counterculture. Her personal experience of the issues raised in the text is critical and engaging. Due to her intimate encounters with resistance, more detail into her life as a woman in ministry who is actively re-imagining her call is necessary as it helps the reader make

deeper connections between her powerful claims and her wealth of research. In hindsight, Giver-Johnston's work suggests that interpreting a call takes on several lenses due to historically harmful norms. As a result, claiming a call can be reconstructed, re-imagined, and reconsidered because by re-imagining, we can approach experiencing God without ableist biases.

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