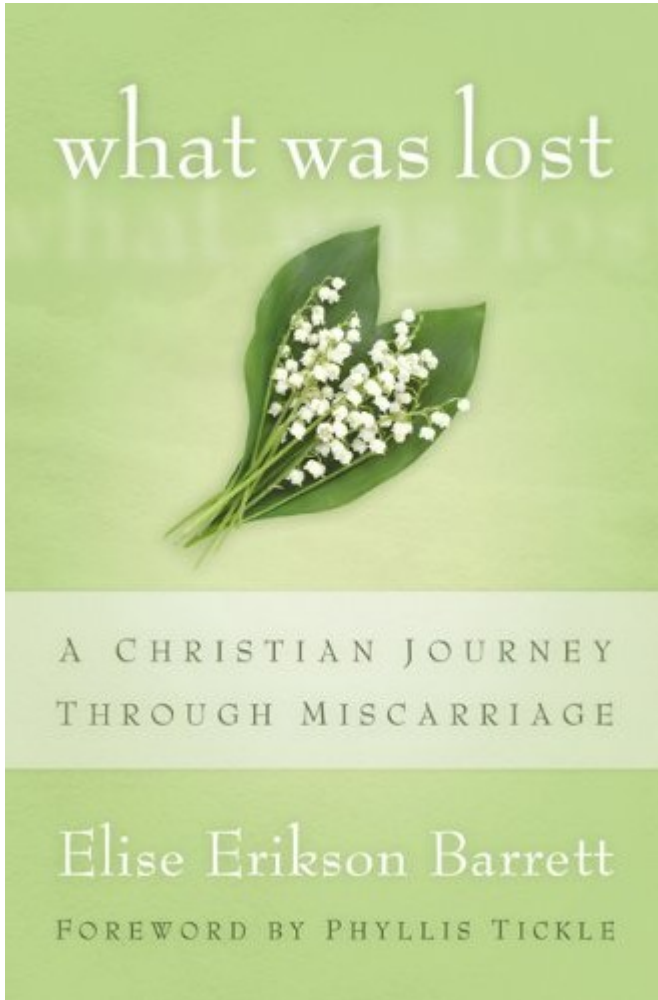


What Was Lost

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

August 18, 2010

In Review



What Was Lost

by Elise Erikson Barrett

Westminster John Knox

One in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage. But as United Methodist pastor Elise Erikson Barrett points out, we don't much like to talk about miscarriage. She offers her new book to women who have experienced miscarriage, to pastors who help couples grapple with it and to anyone who has helped a friend, spouse or relative grieve. Barrett tries to answer the question of "what was lost."

The book tells Barrett's story, but this doesn't serve a distracting or self-indulgent function. We get a glimpse into the powerful ideology of pregnancy, especially when it is embedded in Christian contexts. For some, the meaning of being pregnant is so overwhelming that when a pregnancy is lost, a great deal of meaning goes with it. Yet often women do not talk about their pain. If they do, they may be met with unsatisfying responses like "you can have another" and "God had a reason."

Barrett describes the long waits in hospitals. The painful ironies of being sent to Labor and Delivery as the place to acknowledge the death of your child. The naming of your hope as "tissue." She includes the voices of other women and men who've been through the experience, and she does not try to resolve their experiences into a set of principles.

This book is powerful and unique because Barrett grapples with the issues of miscarriage theologically. She really wants to know what her tradition would say about miscarriage. She skillfully engages abortion literature, knowing that the answers she seeks may or may not be found there, searches the Bible and turns finally to the possibility that personhood is a mystery known in community grounded in the love of God.

The conclusion is shockingly nonideological. Barrett doesn't make a final statement about the personhood of the fetus, or about abortion, or about what miscarriage means or doesn't mean. Instead, she redirects the conversation. Her book provides the framework for a discussion of miscarriage and its aftermath.