**Leadership Studies: Priority 1 - What is Christian Leadership?**

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CONTENTS

[Introduction 3](#_Toc204356139)

[What is Christian Leadership? 3](#_Toc204356140)

[Who is Called to be a Christian Leader? 4](#_Toc204356141)

[Foundational Truth 1: Christian Leaders are Under-Shepherds Accountable to the Chief Shepherd 5](#_Toc204356142)

[Foundational Truth 2: Christian Leaders Provide Holistic Care: Feeding, Guiding, and Protecting 6](#_Toc204356143)

[Foundational Truth 3: Christian Leaders Embody Sacrificial Love and Service 7](#_Toc204356144)

[Conclusion 8](#_Toc204356145)

[References 9](#_Toc204356146)

# **Introduction**

Christian leadership stands distinct from secular models, rooted deeply in the biblical narrative where God Himself is portrayed as the ultimate Shepherd of His people. This assignment explores the essence of Christian leadership through the lens of the shepherding motif prevalent in Scripture. By examining this motif, we uncover a leadership paradigm that emphasizes care, guidance, and sacrifice, modeled supremely by Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. This overview will articulate foundational truths derived from biblical texts and scholarly interactions, highlighting the uniqueness of Christian leadership as a divine calling to steward God's flock. In a globalizing church context, this motif offers a timeless framework that adapts to diverse cultural settings while maintaining biblical fidelity. Central to this discussion is the question of who is called to such leadership, a divine appointment that demands specific qualifications and a heart aligned with Christ's example.

# **What is Christian Leadership?**

Christian leadership, at its core, is the God-ordained stewardship of His people, patterned after the shepherding motif that permeates Scripture. Unlike secular leadership, which often prioritizes efficiency, power, or outcomes, Christian leadership is relational and sacrificial, viewing followers not as resources but as a flock entrusted by God. The shepherding metaphor originates in the agrarian context of ancient Israel, where shepherds were responsible for the well-being of sheep—vulnerable creatures prone to wandering and danger. In Scripture, this motif depicts God as the compassionate Shepherd who provides, protects, and restores (Psalm 23:1-3). Jesus embodies this fully, declaring, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11, ESV).

Scholars emphasize that this motif critiques failed human leadership while promising divine restoration, as seen in prophetic texts where neglectful leaders are condemned (Ezekiel 34:1-10). Christian leaders, therefore, serve as under-shepherds under the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), accountable to God and called to emulate Christ's example. This leadership is not about authority for its own sake but about nurturing spiritual growth, fostering community, and advancing God's kingdom. Interaction with academic sources reveals that the shepherd model integrates care with accountability, offering a holistic framework for pastoral theology that transcends cultural contexts. For instance, in analyzing John 10, the impetus for such leadership lies in a heart motivated by genuine concern for the flock, rather than mere tactics, ensuring leaders prioritize the sheep's welfare in today's diverse church environments. Furthermore, socio-rhetorical studies identify key characteristics like spiritual feeding and protection, reinforcing the motif's primacy in defining Christian pastoral roles (Pickwell, 2022).

# **Who is Called to be a Christian Leader?**

Who is called to be a Christian leader within this shepherding framework? Biblically, the call originates from God, who appoints shepherds after His own heart to lead His people with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15). In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit appoints overseers to shepherd the church (Acts 20:28), emphasizing a divine initiative rather than self-selection. Primarily, this calling applies to elders, pastors, and deacons, who must meet stringent qualifications outlined in Scripture. For elders, these include being above reproach, able to teach, managing their households well, and not greedy or domineering (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Deacons, as servant-shepherds, are called to roles of practical care, requiring maturity, responsibility, and a good reputation (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The call is confirmed through testing in home and church life, ensuring leaders demonstrate godly character and willingness to serve humbly. While formal leadership roles are specified, all believers are called to elements of shepherding influence, such as mutual edification, but the structured shepherding of the flock is entrusted to those divinely equipped and church-affirmed. Scholarly analysis supports this, noting that leaders are called to embody shepherding through spiritual and relational competency, often extending to emerging adults and diverse communities (Sarver, 2020).

# **Foundational Truth 1: Christian Leaders are Under-Shepherds Accountable to the Chief Shepherd**

The first foundational truth of Christian leadership is that leaders function as under-shepherds, deriving their authority and purpose from Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, to whom they are ultimately accountable. This truth underscores the Christocentric nature of leadership, where human shepherds do not assume God's role but participate in His ongoing ministry. In Ezekiel 34, God rebukes Israel's leaders for self-serving neglect, promising to shepherd His people Himself and appoint a Davidic shepherd—a prophecy fulfilled in Christ (Ezekiel 34:11-24). Jesus reinforces this in John 10, contrasting Himself with hired hands who abandon the flock, emphasizing His ownership and care: "I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14, ESV). Peter extends this to church elders, exhorting them to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you... not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you" (1 Peter 5:2, ESV), with the promise of reward from the Chief Shepherd.

This accountability implies that not all are called to leadership; rather, God selects those with the right motives and qualifications, such as humility and doctrinal faithfulness, to serve as undershepherds (1 Peter 5:1-5; Numbers 27:16-17). Academic sources affirm this accountability, arguing that pastoral care is fundamentally God's work, with leaders imitating Christ's character rather than relying on human functions, ensuring a biblical and transformational approach. Pastors are accountable as stewards, managing church resources wisely to fulfill God's mission, as emphasized in 1 Corinthians 4:2 (Kelly, 2023). Socio-rhetorical analysis identifies stewardship as a core characteristic, where leaders recognize the flock as God's, leading with humility and ideological alignment to biblical ecclesiology, countering secular models that emphasize personal gain (Pickwell, 2022). In a globalizing church, this accountability fosters a "diasporadically conscious" approach, where pastors maintain scriptural authority while engaging cross-cultural dialogues, ensuring leadership remains faithful across diverse contexts. Thus, this truth guards against authoritarianism, fostering humility and dependence on Christ.

To arrive at this truth, one begins with exegesis of key passages like Ezekiel 34 and John 10, identifying the contrast between false and true shepherds. Cross-referencing with 1 Peter 5 reveals the hierarchical structure: human leaders under Christ. Scholarly analysis then integrates these texts, deriving principles of accountability through thematic synthesis.

# **Foundational Truth 2: Christian Leaders Provide Holistic Care: Feeding, Guiding, and Protecting**

A second foundational truth is that Christian leaders provide holistic care to the flock, encompassing feeding with God's Word, guiding through life's challenges, and protecting from spiritual dangers. This mirrors the shepherd's daily responsibilities in Scripture, where sheep require constant nurture due to their vulnerability. Psalm 23 vividly illustrates this: "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul" (Psalm 23:2-3, ESV), depicting provision and restoration. In the New Testament, Jesus demonstrates this compassion, seeing crowds as "sheep without a shepherd" and teaching them (Mark 6:34). He commissions Peter to "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep" (John 21:15-17, ESV), linking care with discipleship. Paul echoes this to elders: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock... to care for the church of God" (Acts 20:28, ESV).

Those called to this care must exhibit maturity and conviction, as seen in the selection of deacons for practical shepherding (Acts 6:3), ensuring they can address the flock's diverse needs with courage and wisdom. Scholarly engagements enrich this truth, detailing God's actions in Ezekiel 34—seeking the lost, strengthening the weak, and providing peace—as models for leaders, centered on Christ's redemptive work (Pickwell, 2022). The shepherding model entails meeting the broad spectrum of human needs, defined by inspiration rather than self-perceived desires, reflecting Jesus’ ministry of grace and truth (Rudolph, 2024). Socio-rhetorical studies outline characteristics like protection from threats, care for strays, and inspection of needs, urging pastors to create restorative cultures and address burnout through shared ministry (Pickwell, 2022). This truth ensures leadership addresses the whole person, promoting flourishing in community.

Deriving this involves thematic analysis of passages like Psalm 23 and Acts 20, categorizing shepherd actions (feed, guide, protect). Scholarly synthesis confirms these as enduring principles applicable across contexts.

# **Foundational Truth 3: Christian Leaders Embody Sacrificial Love and Service**

The third foundational truth is that Christian leaders embody sacrificial love and service, willing to lay down their lives for the flock, following Christ's example. This distinguishes Christian leadership as selfless, countering self-interest condemned in Scripture. In John 10, Jesus states, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11, ESV), fulfilled in His crucifixion. Ezekiel 34 contrasts this with exploitative leaders, promising a shepherd who unites and restores (Ezekiel 34:23). Peter urges elders to shepherd "not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2-3, ESV), linking service to Christ's return.

The call to sacrificial service requires leaders to follow God's heart, relying on the Holy Spirit for perseverance and compassion, as those appointed must prioritize the flock over personal gain (Jeremiah 3:15; Mark 10:45). Sources reinforce this sacrificial ethos, tying it to union with Christ, where leaders partner in His redemptive sacrifice, empowered by the Spirit (Sarver, 2020). Leadership is characterized by sacrifice, mirroring Christ's suffering, with servant leadership as the central model (Kelly, 2023). In John 10, the impetus is a heart motivated by singular concern for the sheep, prioritizing self-sacrifice over tactics. Socio-rhetorical analysis adds selflessness, willingness, and modeling, where pastors sacrifice personally while exemplifying Christ-like lives, fostering trust and replicable behavior (Pickwell, 2022). This truth cultivates authentic, enduring leadership.

To derive this, examine John's Gospel for sacrificial language, correlate with prophetic promises, and apply to epistolary exhortations. Scholarly insights validate through historical and theological lenses.

# **Conclusion**

In summary, Christian leadership, through the shepherding motif, is a divine vocation of accountability to Christ, holistic care, and sacrificial service, extended to those God calls and qualifies for the role. These truths, drawn from Scripture and scholarly discourse, provide a robust framework that prioritizes God's people and His glory. As under-shepherds, leaders must continually align with the Good Shepherd, ensuring their ministry reflects biblical fidelity and transformative impact in an increasingly global church landscape.

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