

# Pastors with the Master

## Pastoring God's Flock

This presentation is my second contribution to our new fellowship series for 2025 on "The Wisdom of the Elders." We'll be concerning ourselves with one of the [responsibilities of an elder](#), which is [pastoring God's flock](#).

Please turn to 1 Peter 5. In this chapter, Peter exhorts his fellow elders to [minister to people like a pastor would](#).

1 Peter 5:1a,2a:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder...

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, ...

The word "shepherd" in this verse is the verbal form of the word "pastor". Peter was quite literally admonishing his fellow elders to [pastor God's flock](#).

So just [what is a pastor, according to the Bible?](#)

Growing up in the Protestant church, I always understood the terms "minister" and "pastor" to be interchangeable. When you spoke of the leader of your congregation, you would refer to him as your pastor. To us, a pastor was the one entrusted with performing the duties of a minister in the context of a particular denomination.

Biblically, however, a ["pastor" has](#) nothing to do with an organization; but it does have [to do with a profession](#). The profession in question is that of [shepherding](#). As a matter of fact, the word ["pastor" is the same word used for "shepherd"](#). [A pastor is someone who shepherds a flock.](#)

You can't be a shepherd without sheep. In like manner, *you can't be a pastor without people to take care of*. That's why the term "pastor" is always used in the context of taking care of God's people. *A pastor is a shepherd of God's flock*. He's the one who puts the flock out to *pasture* or feed, unperturbed by lack or attack. The flock that *the pastor* *pastors* are *God's people*.

In Ephesians 4 God singles out *pastors* (called "shepherds" in the ESV) as *one of the five grace ministries* provided for the Church.

Ephesians 4:11:

And he [Jesus Christ, when he ascended up on high] gave [by shedding forth by God's grace the spiritual ability to minister in the way he himself did as] ... apostles, ... prophets, ... evangelists, ... *shepherds* and teachers,

Each one of these grace ministries exemplifies a particular facet of the life and service of Jesus Christ.

## Jesus Christ, Master Pastor

Was *Jesus Christ a shepherd*? He himself said so in John 10. In truth, *Jesus was the Master Pastor*. Let's hear what he has to say about it.

John 10:11-15:

I am *the good shepherd*. *The good shepherd* lays down his life for the sheep.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am [the good shepherd](#). I know my own and my own know me,  
just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down  
my life for the sheep.

Our mind picture of a [shepherd](#) tends to be a [tender, peaceful](#) one,  
harking back to the lovely message of the opening verses of Psalm 23.

Psalms 23:1-3a:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still  
waters.

He restores my soul...

But as Jesus Christ made clear in John 10, there's also a [fierce, uncompromising side to a shepherd](#). When the hulking threat of a lumbering Philistine giant caused the armies of Israel to tremble, the youthful shepherd David made his case to Saul on why he wanted to be the one to personally take on Goliath. The fearless keeper of defenseless sheep recounted how, on multiple occasions, he had struck a marauding lion or bear in order to snatch a lamb from its mouth and still managed to escape himself — presumably, after slaying the beast. Now that's one badass! But these are the realities of life as a shepherd. When someone or something tries to attack the flock, somebody's gonna have to die, either the shepherd and the hapless sheep or the interloper. David's hard-fought skills as a warrior, his deep-set conviction, and his unshakeable trust in God would determine the final outcome.

A pastor is the guy you want to have your back in a crisis, when you're up against a wall. A pastor is a "not on my watch" kind of guy. When everyone else is ready to throw in the towel he's just getting started.

Shortly after Jesus relates to his disciples the parable of the good shepherd, Lazarus falls sick and dies and the Master isn't there. He tells the disciples the news of his demise on their way to Bethany and Thomas, in an expression of sympathy, remarks "Let us also go, that we may die with him." But that was not the point, and Jesus lets it go. They arrive at Lazarus' home and each of his two sisters greets the Master, bemoaning the fact that their brother wouldn't have died had he arrived on time. Ministering to Martha's grief he tells her that "I am the resurrection and the life", and she in turn replies that "you are the Christ, the Son of God." Sharing Mary's sorrow, he weeps as they approach the tomb together. Giving the order to roll away the stone, he deals with Martha's objection, redirecting her to the glory of God that they were about to see in action. Not forgetting the other doubting mourners who were present, as he prays he thanks the Father for hearing him (even though he himself harbors no such doubts), so that the bystanders too might believe. Finally, he bellows out the powerful cry "Lazarus, come out" and they literally see a dead man hopping. Being sensitive to Lazarus' new predicament, he tells them to unbind him and let him go so he can walk on two feet.

It truly is incredible to think that one man could be so present with God and so present with man that, in a situation of great personal distress, he could move from one to the other to the next, meeting all the varying needs of each person one at a time and never skipping a beat or losing focus. But that is our [Master Pastor in action](#).

Now we can pick up where we left off earlier in Psalms 23 to see [the defender side of a pastor](#).

Psalms 23:3b,4:

... He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

The rod and the staff are a comfort to the sheep because they know the shepherd knows how to use them in their defense. A shepherd is not just the gateway to green pastures and still waters, he is also the gatekeeper standing in the way of all comers who might try to bring harm and wreak devastation on the flock.

We see both of these aspects, gateway and gatekeeper, in the closing verses of the psalm.

Psalms 23:5,6:

You prepare a table before me [green pastures, still waters] in the presence of my enemies [I will fear no evil, for you are with me]; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

In the safety of the sheepfold — here called “the house of the LORD” — the sheep dwell securely not just overnight, but throughout their lives, for the shepherd is always there. Now that is a loving caretaker.

## The Heart of a Pastor

Jesus Christ most assuredly had the heart of a pastor or shepherd as he clearly illustrated in the parable of the lost sheep.

Luke 15:1-7:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable:

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Master Pastor had a job to do ministering to the heart of his disciple in the wake of the tumultuous events surrounding his suffering and death. We find him alone with Peter in the final recorded post-resurrection appearance.

John 21:15:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these [referring to the incredible catch of 153 fish that they were just starting to sort through]?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

Jesus was no longer thinking about fish, he had moved on to lambs. In this brave new world, the inveterate fisherman [Peter needed to start thinking about a new occupation: \*shepherding\*](#). They were *Jesus’* lambs, but [Peter’s responsibility to feed with his Word](#).

John 21:16:

He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

Again, who was the one that Jesus charged with the care of the sheep? Peter, the fisherman.

John 21:17:

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Let’s take a look at the two basic things Jesus exhorted Peter to do:

1. Feed God’s flock with His Word; and
2. Tend the sheep on Christ’s behalf.

Tending encompasses not only feeding, but also everything else involved in being a shepherd — leading, guiding, guarding, and folding the flock.

Take a moment just to consider how pointedly [Christ’s words must have ministered to Peter’s heart](#). This was the man who had twice denied the Master three times, despite his earlier insistence that he would never do so. How could he overcome the guilt he must have felt following these repeated denials in his Master’s hour of greatest need? [What could he do to get off to a fresh start?](#)

Christ gave Peter [three specific actions he could take](#) to regain his mental and emotional equilibrium: [feed the lambs, tend the sheep, and feed the sheep](#). By doing this, Peter could learn to [stop concentrating on his own failures](#) and instead [start walking free from condemnation](#). There was deliverance in choosing instead to [help](#)

others so that *they* could consistently have *their* needs fulfilled. This is the freedom in service that opens up to a pastor of the flock.

## In Company with the Master Pastor

Peter never forgot this lesson... would you? Some thirty years later in his first epistle we see him returning to this theme in his admonition to the elders of the Dispersion or diaspora, the Jews who had been scattered abroad.

1 Peter 1:1:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

All these Roman provinces were located on the Anatolian peninsula or Asia Minor, what we today call Turkey. We should note here that the Dispersion or diaspora spoken of in this verse was actually divided into two groups, a Western and an Eastern Dispersion. These Jewish Christians of Asia Minor were part of the Western Dispersion because they had settled west of Palestine.

Allow me to digress for a moment to give you a little more historical context. The last chapter of this epistle informs us that Peter is writing from Babylon, the heart of the Eastern Dispersion. It is intriguing that God would have directed him to this location at this time in the history of the early Church. Why?

Babylon was situated in the “land between the rivers”, Mesopotamia. Unlike Judea, Mesopotamia had not been occupied by the Romans. What’s more, in Peter’s time it was home to several million Jews who enjoyed considerable security, prosperity and status in their adopted land.



We know from Galatians that Peter was the apostle to the circumcision. There were actually far more Jews living in Babylon in his day than there were in Palestine, where only some fifty thousand remained. By relocating to Babylon, he would have a far greater number of the circumcised he could potentially reach.

Also, God knew when Peter first traveled to Babylon that within less than a decade (in the year 70 AD), the Romans would invade Jerusalem and destroy both the city and the Temple. What future would there have been for the ministry to the circumcision had Peter chosen to remain in Jerusalem rather than to leave?

Please turn to 1 Peter 5. To get the richest understanding possible of this passage, I will be reading verses 1 to 14 from various Bible translations. You can follow along in whatever Bible version you have.

1 Peter 5:1 [ESV]:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

It's interesting to note here that Peter doesn't vaunt his status as an "apostle of Jesus Christ", which is what he calls himself in 1 Peter 1:1. Instead, he speaks of himself as a "fellow elder".

1 Peter 5:2 [AMPC]:

Tend (nurture, guard, guide, and fold) the flock of God that is [your responsibility], not by coercion or constraint, but willingly; not dishonorably motivated by the advantages and profits [belonging to the office], but eagerly and cheerfully;

The word for "flock" in this verse literally means "little flock", emphasizing that everything doesn't rest on you. You have your job, you have your portion, you have your responsibility; and the Master Pastor takes care of the whole. So rest easy!

1 Peter 5:3,4 [WNT]:

not lording it over your Churches but proving yourselves patterns for the flock to imitate.

And then, when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the never-withering wreath of glory.

An Aramaic translation of “chief Shepherd” is “lord of the shepherds”. Now that’s some good company! I want to [be a shepherd in the care of the Lord of the shepherds](#).

1 Peter 5:5 [TPT]:

In the same way, the younger ones should willingly support the leadership of the elders. In every relationship, each of you must wrap around yourself the apron of a humble servant. Because: God resists you when you are proud but multiplies grace and favor when you are humble.

Other translations speak of the younger *submitting* to the elders. But the more frequent translation of this Greek word indicates support, *supporting* their leadership.

We will now read the remainder of the chapter from the Weymouth New Testament.

1 Peter 5:6-8 [WNT]:

Humble yourselves therefore beneath the mighty hand of God, so that at the right time He may set you on high.

Throw the whole of your anxiety upon Him, because He Himself cares for you.

Curb every passion, and be on the alert. Your great accuser, the Devil, is going about like a roaring lion to see whom he can devour.

The reference to a roaring lion is not incidental here. We're talking about shepherds protecting the sheep from predators! A footnote in the Passion Translation reminds us:

Just as lions go after the feeble, the young and the stragglers, so the enemy of our souls will always seek out those who are isolated, alone, or depressed to devour them.

Was Peter a shepherd? No, he was a fisherman. But he had learned by way of the Master's personal demonstration what a shepherd was, and in his own life and ministry he was determined not to forget it!

1 Peter 5:9 [WNT]:

Withstand him, firm in your faith; knowing that your brethren in other parts of the world are passing through just the same experiences.

This message underscores the fact that the experience of your local flock is not unique. There are other pastors and other flocks, and **you are just a single contingent**. But not to worry, **the Master Pastor is the one on whose shoulders the care of all the churches rests**, so you just **take care of the part that's yours**.

1 Peter 5:10,11 [WNT]:

And God, the giver of all grace, who has called you to share His eternal glory, through Christ, after you have suffered for a short time, will Himself make you perfect, firm, and strong.

To Him be all power unto the Ages of the Ages! Amen.

Peter here speaks from firsthand experience. He went from a man overcome with grief from his past failings to a fiercely audacious champion of God's people in the midst of the fray. How? He himself had been ministered to by the Master Pastor, and now he would do the same for others. What a message of deliverance!

1 Peter 5:12,13 [WNT]:

I send this short letter by Silas, our faithful brother—for such I regard him—in order to encourage you, and to bear witness that what I have told you is the true grace of God. In it stand fast.

The Church in Babylon, chosen like yourselves by God, sends greetings, and so does Mark my son.

Silas and Mark were evidently staying with Peter in Babylon. Both men had ministered in the lands of the Western Dispersion, where the addressees of the epistle resided. Though they had a home in Jerusalem, Mark's family were natives of Cyprus, where he had ministered with Paul on his first missionary journey. Silas had also accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey, visiting most of the provinces mentioned in the salutation of Peter's epistle. Peter chose Silas to be his courier to deliver the letter.

In contrast to Silas and Mark, Peter had likely never visited these regions. Based on the biblical record, the farthest he ever traveled in the direction of the Western Dispersion was to Antioch, as documented in Galatians 2. There is not a single mention in the Bible of him ever having lived in Rome.

Persecution had been a factor in the West, where the unbelieving Jews had pursued Paul, Silas, Timothy and others from city to city. The Jews of the East, on the other hand, lived in relative peace and harmony with their neighbors, and persecution, while not unknown, had been a rare occurrence. Peter could not address the Western diaspora from a standpoint of firsthand experience of their travails. He was convinced, however, of his calling as an apostle to the circumcision and so wrote to them in that capacity, speaking on God's behalf.

Personal knowledge of circumstances is not the basis of a pastor's ministry. [God enables the heart of a pastor to reach across all barriers to connect with all people](#), regardless of where they live and whatever

they might be living through and holding in their hearts and minds. By the power of God, a pastor can become all things to all men, plumbing the depths of compassion poured forth by the Lord of the shepherds.

A pastor is equipped by God to *connect* with God's people, and to connect His people with His Word!

The epistle closes with this tender sendoff.

1 Peter 5:14 [WNT]:

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ.

We have peace because we know the Prince of peace. As shepherds of God's flock and as elders doing the work of a shepherd, we are never alone. *We are pastors with the Master!* Surely we "shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."