



# “Pastor” in the New Testament

By Dave Detwiler (February 2003)

1. The word “pastor” (Gk. *poimen*) is literally “shepherd,” or “one who takes care of sheep.” It is used 11x in this literal sense (see, for example, Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20). Significantly, good shepherding in the biblical world was characterized by a relationship of trust where the shepherd would lead the flock rather than drive it. This naturally led to the metaphorical usage of the word in Scripture (see, for example, Psalm 23; John 10:11-16, 27).
2. It is used 5x in a metaphorical sense in reference to Jesus as the shepherd of God’s flock (John 10:11, 14, 16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; see also Matt 2:6; Rev 7:17). The related term “Chief Shepherd” (Gk. *archipoimen*) identifies Jesus more specifically as the “Head Pastor” of the church (1 Pet 5:4). This clarifies that local church pastors are actually undershepherds (assistant shepherds) who are accountable to Christ and responsible to care for God’s flock as Jesus would.
3. It is used 1x in a metaphorical sense in reference to local church leaders (Eph 4:11). According to this passage, these “pastors,” along with the other gifted leaders mentioned, are responsible “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12). This, along with the two passages below, is essentially the biblical job description for those serving in a pastoral role.
4. The related verb “to shepherd” (Gk. *poimaino*) is used 2x in a metaphorical sense in reference to local church leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2; see also John 21:16; Jude 12). These important passages reveal the following:
  - a. The stress is on function rather than position or title. That is, pastoring is all about service, not status (see also 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Cor 16:15-18).
  - b. Local churches have a plurality of leaders. That is, a team of gifted people share in the pastoral care of God’s flock in a particular locale (see also James 5:14; Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 4:14; Titus 1:5).
  - c. There is no explicit indication here that pastoral teams were gender exclusive. On the contrary, the biblical evidence elsewhere suggests that women were likely a part of these teams (see, for example, Acts 1:13-14; Rom 16:1-7, 12; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15).
  - d. Those serving on a pastoral team are also identified here as “elders” and “overseers,” suggesting that these leaders were (or should be) exercising wisdom and spiritual oversight in their service to the church.