

Multiple Shepherds — Not One Pastor

A fifteen-minute lesson.

Section One: The Wrong Word

[pause:0.7]

For two thousand years, one professional word has turned a flock into an audience, and shepherds into a stage-act.

We call him the pastor.

We imagine a single man. A professional. A sermon-giver. A visitor of the sick. A performer of weddings and funerals. A manager of staff. A chief executive officer of the religious nonprofit.

But when the New Testament speaks of *poimēn*, it does not describe a job title. It does not describe a degree. It describes a function. A posture. A group of men who smell like sheep because they live among the flock.

[pause:0.7]

One word. One massive inversion.

From a plurality of mature men raised up from within the flock. To a single professional -- imported from outside.

From shepherds who lead sheep to green pasture. To a hired hand who spoon-feeds from a pulpit.

From Jesus as the only Good Shepherd and head of the church. To a man with a title claiming to be the head pastor.

[pause:0.7]

The problem is not just semantics. It is monopoly.

When we use the word pastor, we import centuries of professional clergy that did not exist in the first century.

We turned a plurality of guardians into a solo performer. We turned a quorum of equippers into a single entertainer. We transformed the flock of Christ from a roving herd of influence into passive feedlot specimens -- spoonfed by speeches from a professional influencer.

Section Two: What *Poimēn* Actually Meant

[pause:0.7]

In the Greek world, *poimēn* was not a religious title.

It was rural vocabulary. The word a village used for the men who walked ahead of the flock. Who knew each sheep by name. Who slept at the city gate. Who fought wolves with a staff and laid down their lives between the predator and the prey.

[pause:0.7]

The verb *poimainō* means to shepherd. To feed. To tend. To guard with care. It described the lowest and most intimate kind of leadership. Not oratory from a platform. But presence in the pasture.

[pause:0.7]

When Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd, he was not claiming a church office. He was claiming ownership.

I know my own and my own know me. The sheep belong to him. He lays down his life for them. He does not commute to the flock. He does not preach and leave. He dwells among them. He leads them out. He goes ahead of them. And the sheep follow because they know his voice.

[pause:0.7]

Here is the critical distinction.

The *poimēn* were not a professional clergy class. They were guardians. Not a specialist hired for his rhetorical gifts. But a group of men known by the flock. Because, from the flock they came. Mature men. --Proven men. Men whose households were already in order and familiar places to the sheep, long before they were ever recognized as overseers. [pause:0.7]

Section Three: The Smoking Gun

[pause:0.7]

The English word, pastor, appears exactly once in the King James New Testament.

Ephesians chapter four verse eleven.

[pause:0.7]

Every other time the Greek word *pōimēn* appears — eighteen times across Matthew, Luke, John, Hebrews, and First Peter — it is translated shepherd.

Shepherds in the fields. The Good Shepherd. The Great Shepherd. The Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. Shepherds.

But in Ephesians four eleven, where Paul lists the gifts Christ gave to the church, the translators suddenly needed a religious word. They could not allow the believers to read that Christ gave shepherds to the church.

[pause:0.7]

Shepherd sounded too rustic. Too ordinary. Too much like men who work with animals and sleep in the pasture. It did not sound like a professional. It did not sound like an office. It did not sound like someone who needs a seminary degree and a salary and a board of directors.

So the translators reached back to the Latin. Pastor. A word that had already become an ecclesiastical title in the medieval church. They smuggled in a church word instead of translating a rural word.

[pause:0.7]

This is the same trick they played with *Eck-lay-see-uh*. The same trick they played with *Dee-ah-ko-nos*. When the Greek threatened the hierarchy, they replaced it with a Latin church word.

And in doing so, they changed everything. Shepherds are known by the sheep. A pastor is hired by the board. Shepherds lead to pasture. A pastor performs from a stage. Shepherds lay down their lives. A pastor submits his resignation.

[pause:0.7]

This was not translation. This was transformation. They transformed a guardian into a professional. And we have been reading it wrong for four hundred years.

Section Four: The Plurality

[pause:0.7]

The New Testament never describes a single man ruling a congregation.

Never. Not once. Not in Jerusalem. Not in Antioch. Not in Corinth. Not in Ephesus. Not in Philippi'. Not in Thessalonica. Not in the churches of Galatia.

[pause:0.7]

In Acts chapter twenty verse seventeen, Paul sends for the elders — plural — of the church at Ephesus. In verse twenty-eight, he tells them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers — plural — to shepherd — plural — the church of God.

One church. Many elders. Many overseers. Many shepherds.

[pause:0.7]

In Titus chapter one verse five, Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders — plural — in every city. In verse seven, he calls the same men overseers. The same men. The same function. Three Greek words. One group of leaders. Plural.

[pause:0.7]

In First Peter chapter five verse one, Peter exhorts the elders — plural — among you. He tells them to shepherd — plural — the flock. To exercise oversight — plural — not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God.

In Philippians chapter one verse one, Paul writes to the saints with the overseers — plural — and the servants — plural.

[pause:0.7]

The pattern is relentless. Never one. Always many. Raised from within. Recognized by the flock. Known by their lives. Not selected by a search committee. Not younger than the sheep they are meant to lead. Not salaried by a board. Not functioning as a hierarchical director over a board of subordinate elders.

[pause:0.7]

These men were leaders of the whole church body in decision-making. Not a separate board. Not a staff. Not a clergy class set above the laity. They were the mature among the brethren, guiding the brethren.

[pause:0.7]

The modern church has one pastor. The New Testament had many shepherds. The modern pastor is often a professional speech-giver. The New Testament shepherds were men who had already proven their character in the furnace of ordinary life.

[pause:0.7]

We did not just translate poorly. We replaced a plurality of guardians with a solo performer. And called it church.

Section Five: The Invention of the Professional

[pause:0.7]

The modern pastor would be unrecognizable to the apostles.

[pause:0.7]

He is often young. The New Testament says an elder must not be a recent convert. He must be mature. A man whose children are faithful. A man whose household is well-managed. You cannot manage a household you have not yet raised. You cannot shepherd a flock if you have not yet learned to shepherd your own home.

[pause:0.7]

He is selected from outside. The New Testament says elders are recognized from within the flock. They are already shepherding. Already leading. Already known. The sheep already follow their voice because they have heard it for years in the marketplace and in the home.

[pause:0.7]

He is salaried. Now, the New Testament says the worker is worthy of his hire. But it never describes a professional class who earns a salary for performing the ministry while the sheep sit passive. The modern salary model creates a transaction. It creates an employer-employee relationship. It creates a hired hand.

[pause:0.7]

He is expected to perform the ministry. To preach, visit, marry, bury, counsel, evangelize, manage, and vision-cast — while the members watch, vote, and consume. But Ephesians chapter four verse twelve says the shepherds and teachers exist to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The sheep do the work. The shepherds equip. The modern model has inverted this entirely. The shepherd does the work. The sheep pay to watch. And the shepherd grows exhausted while the sheep grow passive.

[pause:0.7]

He is expected to spoon-feed. The modern pastor is treated as the resident expert. The sheep open their mouths every Sunday, and he drops in the knowledge from his study. From his seminary education. From his books. They swallow. They go home. They wait for next week's feeding.

But New Testament shepherds do not hand-feed. They lead the sheep to pasture, where the sheep do their work of grazing. They teach the sheep to find the green grass for themselves.

They equip them to recognize the Master's voice. They train them to feed one another. The goal is not dependent sheep. The goal is mature sheep who no longer need spoon-feeding. Who can teach others. Who can shepherd others.

[pause:0.7]

The modern model creates perpetual infants. The shepherd performs. The sheep watch. The shepherd grows exhausted. The sheep grow passive. And the wolf finds an easy meal.

Section Six: The Hired Hand

[pause:0.7]

In John chapter ten, Jesus does not contrast the Good Shepherd with the Bad Shepherd.

He contrasts the Good Shepherd with the hired hand.

[pause:0.7]

The Greek word is *misthōtos*. The hired man. The wage worker. The one who does not own the sheep. He is paid to watch them. He has no stake in their survival. No share in their future. He is in it for the wage.

[pause:0.7]

Jesus says: The hired hand sees the wolf coming and flees.

[pause:0.7]

Consider the modern system. The pastor is hired by a board. He is paid a salary. He does not own the sheep — he's a paid manager. What happens when wolves come? False brethren drenched in open sin. False teachers and prophets. Troublemakers bent on causing confusion. Those who would divide the body. Persecutors. And scoffers who revel in doctrinal controversy. What happens?

[pause:0.7]

The hired hand updates his rez-uh'-may. The hired hand flees to a larger flock with better pay. The hired hand negotiates a severance package.

[pause:0.7]

This is not an accusation against every man who serves a church. Many love the sheep deeply. Many lay down their lives in quiet ways. But the system itself is built on the hired-hand model. A

transactional relationship. A salary for services rendered.

[pause:0.7]

Jesus said: I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He does not flee. He does not negotiate his contract. He does not send his resignation letter when the wolf arrives. He lays down his life. Because the sheep are his. He owns them. He purchased them. He knows them by name.

[pause:0.7]

And here is the critical point. In the New Testament, Jesus alone is the Good Shepherd. He alone owns the sheep. He alone laid down his life. He alone is the head of the church. The human shepherds are under-shepherds. They do not replace him. They do not stand between him and the flock. They do not claim his titles. They lead the sheep to him. They walk ahead. The sheep follow their voice because it sounds like his.

[pause:0.7]

But the modern church has made the pastor the head. The head pastor. The lead pastor. The senior pastor. The executive pastor. Titles that belong to Jesus alone have been handed to a hired man. And the sheep forget the need to listen for the voice of the Great Shepherd because they have been lulled into believing the paid voice is the --only voice.

Section Seven: The Contrast

[pause:0.7]

Here is how the first century poimēn differs from the contemporary pastor.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn was plural. Always a team of mature men from within the flock.

Pastor today is often singular. A professional trained far away at seminary.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn led by example and voice. The sheep followed because they knew him.

Pastor today often directs by title and position. The sheep obey because he is the head pastor.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn was Jesus' gift to the church. Jesus remains the head.

Pastor today is often treated as the head of the church. The board reports to him. Or he reports to the board. Either way, Jesus is functionally absent from the org chart.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn equipped the sheep to minister.

Pastor today often performs the ministry while the sheep watch.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn was recognized by character and maturity. Elders. Proven men. Households already in order, open for hospitality and frequently inhabited by the members.

Pastor today is often selected by credentials and oratory. A degree. A rez-uh'-may. A sermon sample. A youth group he once led.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn walked with the sheep. Lived among them. Knew their names. Led them to still water.

Pastor today often commutes to the building. Preaches and leaves. Hides in a study. Meets the sheep in a conference room.

[pause:0.7]

Poimēn taught the sheep to feed themselves.

Pastor today often spoon-feeds from a pulpit, creating dependency, not maturity.

[pause:0.7]

Early believers did not ask, Who is the pastor?

They asked, Who are the shepherds? Who are the mature men among us who know the sheep and are known by them? Who are the elders? Who are the overseers? And do they smell like sheep?

Section Eight: The Recovery

[pause:0.7]

What would change if we stopped asking, Who is the pastor?

And started asking, Who are the shepherds in this city?

[pause:0.7]

Three Shifts

[pause:0.7]

1. Language Shapes Identity

When we use the word pastor, we reinforce the idea of a single professional who performs Christianity for us. When we recover *poimēn*, we see a plurality of mature guardians who lead the flock to Jesus. Not to themselves. Not to their vision. But to the Good Shepherd.

[pause:0.7]

2. The *Poimēn* Are Not Singular Performers; They Are Equippers

They do not exist to entertain or inform. They exist to train the saints for the work of ministry. To work themselves out of a job. To make the sheep into shepherds. To teach them the Master's voice so they no longer need a human voice to find their way home.

[pause:0.7]

3. We Are Not an Audience; We Are a Flock

And Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The human shepherds are gifts he gave to equip us. Not to replace him. Not to stand between us and him. Not to claim his titles. But to walk ahead. To lead us to green pasture. To teach us his voice. To guard us from wolves. Until every sheep knows the Shepherd directly and follows him home.

[pause:0.7]

Jesus did not come to establish a professional clergy class.

He came to be the Good Shepherd. To lay down his life. To gather one flock under one shepherd. And to raise up mature men from within that flock to guard, feed, and lead — until the whole body grows into the fullness of him who is the head.

[pause:0.7]

The gates of Hades will not stand against his Eck-lay-see-uh.

But they might stand against a flock that forgot the Shepherd owns the sheep, and hired a hand to do his job.

Optional Discussion Questions

1. A biblical requirement of shepherds is hospitality. How much time have you spent enjoying the hospitality of your pastor, on his living room couch, at his table, among his household?
 2. Why do you think we prefer a single professional pastor rather than a plurality of mature shepherds raised up from within the flock?
 3. What would it look like for shepherds in your city to equip the saints for the work of ministry, rather than performing the ministry themselves or directing from a boardroom?
 4. How does seeing Jesus as the only Good Shepherd and head of the church change how you view human leadership?
 5. What would change in your community if the goal of teaching was to make the sheep independent and mature, rather than dependent and passive?
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End of lesson.