“FEED MY SHEEP”

Song: “Feed My Sheep” by Dallas Holm
Lyrics and Chords: https://praiselive.com/list/pdf/Feed%20My%20Sheep.pdf A> Bb
Cover Version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD7p8Ihuwew

John 21:17 KJV
17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

Female Pastors

(Compiled from Google AI and commented by Anand K.C., August 4, 2026)

The Evolution of "Pastor" from Shepherd to Church Leader

The concept of a "pastor" transitioned from an ancient agrarian metaphor for kings and prophets into a formal, spiritual office within the early Christian church.

---

1. Old Testament Foundation: The Shepherd-King

In the Old Testament, the concept was rooted in Israel’s pastoral culture. It was used metaphorically rather than as a religious title.

- **God as Shepherd:** Israel viewed Yahweh as the ultimate *ra'ah* who led and protected His flock, famously illustrated in Psalm 23.
- **Political Leaders:** Kings and civic rulers were called shepherds. Prophets like Jeremiah routinely criticized Israel's political and military leaders as "bad shepherds" for failing to protect the people.
- **Davidic Ideal:** King David was literally called from the sheepfolds to shepherd the nation, setting the pattern for leadership as protective, sacrificial service.

Women and young girls did work as shepherds in biblical times. While general daily life was often structured by family needs, tending small flocks of sheep and goats was a common task for daughters in pastoral households.

Biblical Examples of Female Shepherds

- **Rachel:** In Genesis 29:9, Jacob first meets Rachel because she is actively tending her father Laban’s sheep.
- **Zipporah and her sisters:** In Exodus 2:16–17, Moses meets the seven daughters of Jethro (the priest of Midian) while they are watering their father's flock.
  Context of the Role
- **Family Tasks:** In ancient nomadic and rural families, young children and daughters were routinely assigned to watch small livestock close to home.

- **The Nativity:** Because young people and women frequently managed household flocks, some scholars note that females may have been included among the shepherds in fields near Bethlehem, though the biblical text in Luke does not specify their gender

---

2. New Testament Transition: The "Good Shepherd"

Jesus bridged the gap between the Old Testament political metaphor and the New Testament spiritual office.

- **The Paradigm Shift:** Jesus rejected the authoritarian style of earthly rulers, declaring Himself the "Good Shepherd" (*poimen* in Greek) who lays down His life for the sheep.
- **The Commission:** In John 21, Jesus explicitly transferred this duty to human leaders when He commanded Peter to "feed my lambs" and "shepherd my sheep."
- **The Metaphor Extended:** The early church leaders were no longer physical herders of animals or political kings, but spiritual caretakers of people.

---

3. The New Testament Office: Elders and Overseers

In the early church, "pastor" was not a standalone title, but a functional description of a local church leader's duties.

- **The Threefold Synonyms:** The New Testament uses three Greek terms interchangeably for the same role: *Presbyteros* (elder/mature leader), *Episkopos* (overseer/bishop), and *Poimen* (shepherd/pastor).
- **The Functional Office:** Ephesians 4:11 lists "pastors and teachers" as gifts given by Christ to equip the church. Here, the noun *pastor* is used directly to describe a spiritual ministry leader.
- **The Core Duties:** Leaders were told to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2) by protecting the community from false teachings, guiding their spiritual growth, and feeding them with sound doctrine.

---

4. Language Shift: From Greek to Latin to English

The actual word "pastor" entered the English language through translation history.

- **Latin Vulgate:** In the 4th century, the Bible was translated into Latin. The Greek word *poimen* (shepherd) was translated to the Latin word *pastor* (which also literally means shepherd).
- **English Adoption:** Early English translators kept the Latin root *pastor* for certain spiritual leadership contexts to distinguish church overseers from literal sheep farmers in the fields.

In the Old Testament, only male Levites (and specifically the male descendants of Aaron for the highest priestly duties) served as priests due to **divine substitution for the firstborn, tribal loyalty during the Golden Calf, and ancient patriarchal and ritual structures.**

Selection and Substitution

- **Firstborn Replacement:** God originally designated every firstborn male in Israel for sacred service after sparing them during the Exodus. He later substituted the entire tribe of Levi to take the place of all the firstborns.
- **The Golden Calf:** When the rest of the Israelites worshipped the golden calf at Mount Sinai, the tribe of Levi stayed loyal to God and executed judgment, earning a permanent set-apart status.
- **Aaronic Lineage:** Within the tribe of Levi, active altar service and the priesthood (*kohanim*) were restricted specifically to Aaron and his male descendants, while the rest of the Levites assisted with tabernacle and temple duties.

Gender and Cultural Context

- **Patriarchal Leadership:** Ancient Near Eastern societies, including ancient Israel, organized lineage, tribal identity, and official public offices patrilineally.
- **Ritual and Legal Roles:** The physical duties of slaughtering and handling sacrifices, carrying heavy structural elements of the tabernacle, and representing the people at the veil required specific legal and physical roles that the Mosaic covenant assigned exclusively to men from this designated family line.

The opening of the priestly ministry to Gentiles, non-Levites, and women happened because **Jesus completely changed the nature and definition of the priesthood itself.**

When Jesus offered his "once-for-all" sacrifice on the cross, the physical Levitical priesthood ended. In its place, the New Testament introduces what theologians call the **"priesthood of all believers"**.

1. The End of Physical Sacrifices

The physical, manual labor of slaughtering animals and maintaining a physical tent or temple was entirely abolished. Because Jesus was the ultimate, perfect sacrifice, there was no longer a need for a specific group of physically capable men to handle heavy ritual labor.

2. A Shift to Spiritual Sacrifices

Because the mechanical duties were gone, the New Testament redefined "sacrifices" as spiritual, lifestyle actions. According to 1 Peter 2:5, all Christians are now part of a "holy priesthood". The new priestly duties include:

- Offering your own body as a **"living sacrifice"** (Romans 12:1).
- Offering the **"sacrifice of praise"** through prayer and worship (Hebrews 13:15).
- **Interceding for others** and sharing the Gospel.

Since these duties are spiritual, ethical, and relational, they do not require physical strength, a male gender, or a specific family bloodline.

3. Destruction of the Old Barriers

The New Testament explicitly dismantles the strict Old Testament boundaries regarding ethnicity, social status, and gender:

- **Gentiles and Non-Levites:** Under the Old Covenant, entering the holy places of the temple as a non-Levite or a Gentile meant instant death. In the New Covenant, Jesus' death tore the Temple veil. This gave everyone direct, equal access to God.
- **Females:** Because the spiritual priesthood relies on faith and the Holy Spirit rather than patriarchal lineage, women fully share the status of "priest" in terms of direct access to God and offering spiritual sacrifices. As Galatians 3:28 states, *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

A Note on Leadership Offices

While **all** believers are spiritually priests with equal access to God, Christian traditions differ on how this applies to modern church governance.

- **Protestant traditions** generally emphasize that because all believers are priests, no special human "mediator" priest is ever needed again.
- **Catholic and Orthodox traditions** believe that while all Christians share a "universal priesthood," Jesus still instituted a distinct, ministerial priesthood (bishops and priests) to lead and administer sacraments, which they restrict to men based on Christ's choice of the twelve male apostles.

Certain Christian denominations use specific biblical texts to state that only males can hold authoritative leadership or pastoral roles, though interpretations vary widely across traditions.

Biblical Passages Used for Male Leadership

- **1 Timothy 2:12**: States that a woman should not teach or have authority over a man, a primary verse cited by traditional groups.
- **1 Timothy 3:2** and **Titus 1:6**: Mention an overseer or elder being the "husband of one wife," which traditional interpretations read as requiring a male leader.
- **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**: Instructs women to be silent in certain church settings, reinforcing complementarian views.

Denominational Positions

- **Catholic and Orthodox Traditions**: Limit the priesthood and major hierarchical leadership strictly to men, teaching that the church is bound by Jesus' choice of male apostles.
- **Conservative Protestantism**: Many denominations (such as the Southern Baptist Convention) restrict the office of pastor/elder to men based on creation-order theology.
- **Egalitarian and Liberal Traditions**: Other Christian groups point to examples of female leaders, deacons, and apostles in the New Testament (such as Junia or Phoebe) and argue that cultural context or overarching principles of equality make gender irrelevant for church leadership.

Commentary: “Pastor” comes from the word to lead to pasture and there were male and female shepherds in the Bible. Pastoring is not limited to a specific gender.

There were prophets and judges and queens who were female. And now even as “priests” or pastors.

1 Peter 2:9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

The Bible features women who proclaimed God's word and led communities, though opinions on whether they held formal "preacher" or "pastor" roles vary. Key figures include **Deborah** (a judge and prophet), **Phoebe** (a deacon/minister), and **Priscilla** (who taught the gospel).

Old Testament Leaders and Prophets

- **Miriam**: Led the women in song and was recognized as a prophet alongside Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20; Micah 6:4).
- **Deborah**: Served as a judge and prophet who led Israel and directed military strategy (Judges 4–5).
- **Huldah**: Worked as a prophet in Jerusalem who authenticated the Book of the Law for King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14–20).

New Testament Ministers and Proclaimers

- **Mary Magdalene**: Commanded by Jesus to announce his resurrection to the male disciples, acting as an early proclaimer of the gospel (John 20:17–18).
- **Priscilla (Prisca)**: Mentioned alongside her husband Aquila; she helped instruct the teacher Apollos more accurately in the faith (Acts 18:26).
- **Phoebe**: Described by Paul as a servant or deacon (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1).
- **Philip’s Daughters**: Four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9).

The word **pastor** comes directly from Latin, meaning **shepherd**, **pascere** (to graze/feed), and the Proto-Indo-European root **pa-* (to protect/guard).

Linguistic Path

- **Proto-Indo-European Root:** **pa-*, meaning "to feed, tend, guard, or protect".
- **Latin:** *pascere* (verb meaning "to lead to pasture or cause to eat") and the noun *pastor*("shepherd, herdsman").
- **Church Latin:** Shifted metaphorically to mean a "spiritual guide or shepherd of souls" (seen in works like Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*).
- **Old French:** *pastor* or *pastur* ("herdsman, shepherd").
- **Middle English:** Adopted as *pastour* in the late 14th century before evolving into the modern English spelling.

Related Words

- **Pasture:** Shared origin from *pascere*, denoting the field where animals graze.
- **Pastoral:** Derived from *pastoralis*, shifting from relating to rural shepherds to church care.

The concept of pastor is really not to have "authority" over men or women as only God has such position but to have responsibility to lead others to pasture and thus pastor. The life of Jesus can serve that supreme example of servant and sacrifice instead of imposing authority even though He is God. Pastorship is a position of responsibility rather than mere authority or hierarchy.

It's a role of servitude and service and submission rather than imposition of any choice on any other. You increase, I decrease. Jesus exemplified this even by washing the feet of His own disciples.

If women or females cannot teach or preach, then they cannot say anything, anywhere to anyone or sing or take part in any worship services. This ends up being contrary to the Bible itself.

1 Cor. 14
Good Order in Worship
26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.
27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.
28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.
40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

The role of pastor or shepherd is to be a servant of God. Who can be servant? Only male?

The sanctuary morphed into a church in which all can serve according to the calling and gifting of God.

If only a married male can serve then it will disqualify many of the disciples who were single or widowed.

Does it state anywhere that only males can be the "head of a church"? No it does not. The fact that a male name was used throughout the bible does not mean always that only males are implied. It is important to read the whole context and take the entire Biblical teaching in to account.

For example it says in Matthew 24:13
"13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" – this does not mean that only males will be saved.

What was the purpose of priests in the Old Testament? It was to serve and care like a shepherd. When the Sanctuary system was in place, the priest had to assist in daily sacrifices which was a very physical and laborious activity and thus was limited to only males and Levites first. After Jesus died the role of priest and pastor was greatly expanded to non Levites and gentiles and even females but according to the gifting and calling of God.

CONCLUSION:

Who is the head of the Church? Jesus alone. The rest is the body or church that has many members that work together in various roles as leaders or followers to serve and edify one another. Serving and service requires submission first.

1 Thessalonians 5:11: Urges believers to encourage each other and build each other up.
Romans 14:19: Calls us to pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
1 Peter 4:10: Reminds each person to use their special gift to serve others as good stewards of God's grace.

The church is also represented by a pure woman or the bride. Jesus as the bridegroom gave His life to save his bride, the church. Each individual body is also called the temple of the living God.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

2 Cor. 6:16

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

In Christian theology and biblical symbolism, the church is frequently depicted as a chaste bride or a pure woman pledged to Jesus Christ. This metaphor emphasizes holiness, spiritual fidelity, and an intimate, unblemished relationship with God.

Biblical Symbolism of the Pure Woman

- **The Bride of Christ**: The New Testament uses marriage as a model for Christ and the church. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, the apostle Paul writes about presenting the church as a "chaste virgin" to Christ.
- **Revelation 12 Woman**: Many Christian traditions view the radiant woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12 as a symbol for God's faithful people or the true church protected through trials.
- **Contrast with Corruption**: In prophetic imagery, a pure woman stands for a faithful, truth-abiding church, while an unfaithful or corrupt religious system is conversely symbolized by an impure or scarlet-clad woman (Revelation 17).

Jesus as the Good Shepherd became a **servant of servants** to offer the **sacrifice of sacrifices** to **save our souls** (SOS) and He has called all to FEED HIS SHEEP which is the priesthood of all believers.