



### Shepherd in Psalm 23, A safeguard to pastoral ministries in Nigeria

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**Abstract**

In the contemporary Churches in Nigeria, many Pastors have become professional practitioners without any positive witness to their pastoral ministry. There is gross abuse among priests and ministers, not only in the orthodox Churches but across denominational affiliations in Nigeria. This has questioned the authenticity of God's calling upon many priest and tarnished their ministries. Such priestly lasciviousness has led to materialism and the quest for physical gratification and exploitation of the members. The shepherd no longer care for the sheep but desire to be fattened alone by the sheep. Both the print and electronic media are occupied with news of pastoral lewdness and inordinate desire for money and properties. The situation has so degenerated that pastors have been charged with fraudulent practices, such as, internet scam, stealing, sexual misconduct, etc. these challenges have grossly affected the pastoral oversight of the Priests and further polarized them from their flocks. It is this challenge that this research undertakes; to re-examine the context of shepherding in Psalm 23 and its implications for the Pastoral ministries in Nigeria contemporary denominations. The research employed historical, and descriptive survey research methods of approach. This became important so that the research will be able to get to the background in order to discover some facts and how this can be appropriated in Nigeria churches. The research concluded that Psalm 23 can be understood from a leadership perspective, that Yahweh's shepherding roles in protecting, providing, and comforting should





Be a model for Priests. The study recommended that the Nigeria head of churches should developed task and ministry oriented groups that shall be committed to reaching optimal health, physical and spiritual growth of the people through, communal life and caring for the congregants. Care-giving ministry should transcends the priesthood, hence, trained members should be incorporated to the care-giving ministry.

**Keywords:** Pastoral, Ministries, Nigeria, Shepherd, Psalm 23

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### Introduction

The Book of Psalms, or "Psalter, has been described as a compilation of prayers and music written by the Israelites over a course of seven hundred years. It is found in the "Writings" or "Kethuvim," the third major division of the *Tanak*. According to <sup>1</sup>Archer, <sup>2</sup>Harris, and <sup>3</sup>Waltke, the "Writings" are called the "wisdom literature" or the "poetry and wisdom books" of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Psalter holds revered significance in both Jewish and Christian contexts, valued not only as a collection of prayers suitable for personal devotion but also esteemed as a guide to the practice of prayer itself. The term "Psalter" originates from the ancient Greek word "Psalmoi," signifying instrumental music coupled with lyrical verses. This highlights its dual nature as a source of musical accompaniment and poetic expression. Metzger and Cole opine that in Hebrew it is known as the book of praises. In the Hebrew tradition of the Book of Psalms, as well as the Greek and Latin version, there are one hundred and fifty consecutively numbered Psalms. Due to the combination of some Psalms, this number is only approximate <sup>4</sup>Keller, Other Psalms, especially Psalm 151, which some Orthodox churches include in their canon, are mentioned in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls and many

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<sup>1</sup> Archer, G. (1994). "Psalm" In *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. 3rd. Chicago: Moody Press. 34

<sup>2</sup> Harris, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Different*. New York: Blackwell.

<sup>3</sup>Waltke, B.K. (1991). "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both" *JBL* 110 (583-596): California Press

<sup>4</sup> Keller, W. P. (2007). *A Shepherd's looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 102-103

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Greek manuscripts. According to <sup>5</sup>Kostenberger in 386, Jerome produced the Latin version of the Book of Psalms included in the Vulgate, and therefore, the Psalter used and authorized by the Roman Catholic Church. The Christian Bible includes the Psalter in its canon of the Old Testament (<sup>6</sup>Harris, <sup>7</sup>Archer and <sup>8</sup>Waltke,.) Psalm 23 is considered a thanksgiving hymn and thanks God for his "beneficent protection" and expresses the faith David had in God's loving care. The existence of Psalm 23 as a thanksgiving hymn and its overall impact in poetical literary study allows Smith (1988) to indicate the compatibility of Psalm 23 with an exilic application. Scholars in biblical studies opined that most of the Psalms were written before the Babylonian exile in 587 BCE. However, dates cannot be assigned to individual Psalms with any certainty. There are also indications that some of the Psalms were written during exilic (586-536 BCE) and post-exilic times (536 BCE and later) according to <sup>9</sup>Vancil. Some scholars maintain that there is no evidence that any Psalms were composed as late as the Maccabean rulers. However, other scholars theorize that some Psalms in the Psalter were still being composed as late as the early first century BCE. Harris The Psalms are now divided into five "books," perhaps to parallel the five books of the Pentateuch, in this grouping: 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. However, there were many smaller collections of Psalms that were eventually combined to create the Psalter as it exists today <sup>10</sup>Harris, <sup>11</sup>Archer and <sup>12</sup>Waltke.

Despite the ambiguities noted above, scholars have offered a broad range of quite specific proposals regarding the date, authorship, and historical circumstance of Psalm 23.<sup>1</sup> However, Psalm 23 has been used often as a psalm of reassurance, confidence, and faith. It has also been personally appropriated as a psalm of security. The psalm

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<sup>5</sup>Kostenberger, S. (1999). *Psalms of the Dead Scroll*. T. A Continental Commentary. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 90

<sup>6</sup> Harris, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Different*. New York: Blackwell.

<sup>7</sup> Archer, G. (1994). "Psalm" In *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. 3rd. Chicago: Moody Press. 34

<sup>8</sup>Waltke, B.K. (1991). "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both" *JBL* 110 (583-596): California Press

<sup>9</sup>Vancil, H. (1992). "The usage of Psalm." *Spiritus*6(1), Vanger Press, UK

<sup>10</sup> Harris, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Different*. New York: Blackwell.

<sup>11</sup> Archer, G. (1994). "Psalm" In *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. 3rd. Chicago: Moody Press. 34

<sup>12</sup>Waltke, B.K. (1991). "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both" *JBL* 110 (583-596): California Press



has taken a life of its own vis-à-vis its diffused usages in the contemporary Church. It suffices to say that it has become a model of what a Pastor should be and how he is expected to relate with his flocks.

It has been observed and noted that Psalm 23 expresses assurance and confidence in יהוה YHWH as רועה (shepherd) to the psalmist, providing for all their needs: verdant pastures, tranquil waters, righteous guidance, safeguarding, plentiful nourishment, and a safe abode. The vivid imagery of Psalm 23 starkly juxtaposes with the mournful tone of Psalm 22's verses. In Psalm 22, the psalmist calls out to God and berates him for being far away, failing to respond to his pleas for assistance, remaining silent in the face of mockery and headshakes from onlookers, ignoring the psalmist's body's shrivelling and emaciation "because" כִּי, God lays the psalmist in ("the dust of death").

In Psalm 23 the psalmist reassured himself that, even while walking through *בְּיַד צִלְמוֹת בְּגִיּוֹת עֲלֵמֹת* ("the valley of deep darkness," or "the valley of the shadow of death") he will not fear רָע ("evil"). "because" כִּי ("you are with me") and in fact, YHWH further "prepares a table" for the psalmist *תַּעֲרֶךְ לְפָנָיו שִׁלְחָן גִּגְדֵי צֹרֵרָי* "in the presence of his enemies"<sup>13</sup>Harris, <sup>14</sup>Archer and <sup>15</sup>Waltke, 1980). Interpreters have correctly attributed Psalm 23's enormous consoling impact to its description of Yahweh, the Shepherd's personal care and attention for His people. It is also commonly acknowledged that the psalm's mobility and journey themes contribute to its ability to encourage the tired, anxious, or discouraged Christian.

A section regarding the Psalm that deserves further examination is the role of the various locations where shepherds (Priests) are expected to provide personal care and attention, as well as the shifting spatial positions between the Shepherd and the Psalmist in the context of the Priests' pastoral ministries in Nigeria. It is therefore the purpose of this research to examine the content and context of Psalm 23 as a safeguard to pastoral ministries in Nigeria, to investigate whether or not shepherds in Nigeria are properly taking care of their sheep, and to assist in restoring the dignity of the office of a shepherd so that their

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<sup>13</sup> Harris, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Different*. New York: Blackwell.

<sup>14</sup> Archer, G. (1994). "Psalm" In *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. 3rd. Chicago: Moody Press. 34

<sup>15</sup>Waltke, B.K. (1991). "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both" *JBL* 110 (583-596): California Press



lives and ministries can be impactful on the community of Christian faith.

### **Conceptual Clarification on Pastoral Ministry**

The theme, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1) encapsulates God's pastoral relationship with His people. Tidball (1986: 18) characterizes this depiction as "the fundamental model of ministry," highlighting its portrayal of the authority, tender care, specific duties, courage, and sacrifice inherent in shepherding. Moreover, the theme of God's love further enriches the shepherd motif. Jeremiah 31:3 articulates God's everlasting love, drawing His people with loving-kindness. Hosea's marriage to a harlot symbolizes God's affection for Israel, despite their waywardness (Hosea 1:2). Even as Israel rejects His love, God's affection endures, as expressed in Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Ultimately, God pledges to "heal their waywardness" and "love them freely" (Hosea 14:4).

The Old Testament abounds with affirmations of God's affection for His people. Isaiah 43:4-5 provides reassurance of their value in God's eyes and His constant presence with them. Various passages such as Genesis 49:24, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 78:52-53, and 80:1 contribute to developing this theme. Frequently, the Old Testament portrays Israel as sheep in need of a shepherd (Psalm 100:3), emphasizing their reliance on divine guidance (also seen in Psalm 44:22; 119:176; Jeremiah 23:1; 50:6).

Linked to God's love is His discipline of those He cares for (Proverbs 3:11), His holding of individuals accountable (Psalm 11:7), and His command for people to reciprocate love (Deuteronomy 6:5). The concept of God's pastoral care is closely associated with the profound idea of His mercy (expressed as loyal love in Psalms 62:12; Isaiah 54:10; 55:3). Thus, the Old Testament lays a significant foundation for comprehending the role and responsibilities of a pastor. The Shepherd Himself exemplifies paternal care, love, mercy, discipline, compassion, and pleasure towards His people, desiring their sincere love and reverence. The shepherd imagery also underscores God's authority, faithfulness, and the importance and consequences of obedience. Servant leaders exhibit both strengths and weaknesses as God employs them to fulfill His divine plan in history. God's compassion (Psalm 145:9) and His delight (1 Samuel 22:20) are also highlighted. Additionally, numerous servant-leaders like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, and David demonstrate God's faithfulness as they carry out His work through faith (as seen in Hebrews 11). Built



upon the foundation laid in the Old Testament, the New Testament unfolds the revelation of the Chief Shepherd, Christ, showcasing His wisdom, glory, power, and humility (referenced in John 10:11, 14; 1 Peter 5:4). The identity and mission of the Great Shepherd reach their climax in His sacrificial death (symbolized by the blood of the eternal Covenant, Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25) and subsequent resurrection. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep, whom He calls to Himself (John 10:11-16). These chosen individuals constitute His church. As the Head of the church, Christ leads and tends to it (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23-25).

### **Theories on Pastoral Ministry and Leadership**

This research examines Pastoral Care/Ministry within the purview of leadership and leadership theories. This became necessary as the two concept of Pastoral Ministry and Leadership are intertwined and are seen as 'two sides of a coin' of necessity. More so, Pastoral Care/Ministry is about influence, while Leadership too is basically about a leaders influence on his/her followers. Powell, 2011. Research into leadership theory and practice is both extensive and wide-ranging. A cursory "review of the scholarly studies on leadership shows that there are a wide variety of different theoretical approaches to explain the complexities of the leadership process (e.g., Antonikis, <sup>16</sup>Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Bass, 1990; <sup>17</sup>Bryman, 1992; Gardner, 1990; Hickman, 1998; Mumford, 2006; Rost, 1991)." Leadership has been viewed "as a trait or as a behaviour, whereas others view leadership from an information processing perspective or from a relational standpoint." In fact, "in the past 60 years, as many as 65 different classification systems have developed to define the dimensions of leadership <sup>18</sup>(Powell, 2011: 12)." Consequently, the practice of leadership may be viewed from a variety of disciplines and perspectives including behavioral psychology, team dynamics, ethics, cultural studies, business, education, ministry, and economic theory. Resultantly, this work will limit the discussion on it to the practice of leadership in terms of three primary areas: business, education, and pastoral ministry. The review surveys leadership

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<sup>16</sup> Cianciolo, S.J.L. (1987). *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

<sup>17</sup> Bryman, C. A. and Briggs, E. G. (1992). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 10

<sup>18</sup> Powell, F. H.(2011). The Resting Waters of Noah. *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society* 23:69-74.



practices in the above-mentioned fields in terms of permanent and interim positions.

### **Trait Theory**

Trait theory in its simplest form focuses solely on the leader. It emphasizes his/her personality, perceived strengths, values, skills, and identifiable leadership traits implying that individuals with certain traits are more likely to be leaders. Often personality and aptitude inventories have been used for an individual to assess whether she has the necessary traits required to be an effective leader. Regularly, "physical characteristics, aspects of personality, and aptitudes were studied, and often these traits were deemed essential for identification of leadership behaviour" (Powell, 2011: 12). Numerous researchers in trait theory have conducted decades of investigation, resulting in several compilations of identifiable characteristics and traits associated with leadership. Powell (2011) references French and Raven's study from "The Bases of Social Power," presenting five distinct lists from four different researchers. However, each researcher identifies unique traits, rendering no two lists identical. Nevertheless, upon comparison, one can simplify the overlapping traits to include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Trait theorists posit that the more traits a leader possesses, the more effective their leadership performance should be. However, challenges to the trait theory of leadership exist. The primary challenge lies in its subjective nature, particularly evident in the methodologies employed by early trait researchers, which relied heavily on observation rather than measurement. As well, trait theories tended to emphasize the leader at the expense of the follower, neglected situational determinants of leadership success<sup>19</sup>(Yukl, 1981), and were unable to decipher the connection between a particular trait and effectiveness.

The early form of research known as trait theory eventually merged with situational leadership research to form a combination theory. This combination theory held the promise that effective leaders required not only the right traits but also the ability to apply them appropriately in various situations. Eventually, leadership research in the latter part of the twentieth century overshadowed trait theory. Nonetheless, as an interpretive approach to leadership practice, trait theory still maintains a significant position in leadership theory as noted by Taylor (1994) at the beginning of the 21st century.

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<sup>19</sup>Yukl, V. L. (1981). King Yahweh as the Good Shepherd: Taking another look at the Image of



For example, a leader might be high in task orientation and low in consideration. In essence, the two behaviors were viewed as unrelated. However, two fundamental types of leaders were identified: employee-oriented and production-oriented (Kahn & Katz, 1960). The employee orientation emphasized the leader-employee relationships, whereas the production orientation focused on the technical and productive aspects of the leader-employee context. The emphasis placed on "comprehending leadership through the behaviours that a person demonstrates" allowed people interested in increasing leadership capacity to create courses and methods for categorising leadership conduct.

### **Empirical Analysis (The Biblical Mandate to Shepherds)**

From time immemorial, especially in both the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that God calls and places into position an individual who He wants to lead His people. From since the beginning of time when the people were recognized as Israel, God had called and commissioned the head of the family to lead His family as He directed. Thus Abraham was called and commissioned by God to relocate, by moving from Ur in Mesopotamia to Palestine. After Abraham's death, his son, Isaac, replaced his father's position and became God's chosen leader. God has called and commissioned shepherds to govern His flock as He sees fit from Israel's inception. God called Moses, the shepherd, while he was watching over the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro <sup>20</sup>(Exodus 3:4), and sent him to Pharaoh with this mandate: "You will lead my people, the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exodus 3: 10). Throughout Israel's history, God chose such shepherds from David, Israel's shepherd<sup>23</sup> king <sup>21</sup>(Psalm 78:70-72), to King Cyrus of Persia (2 Corinthians 36:23, Isaiah 44:28), and He commissioned them to shepherd His people.

According to the New Testament gospels, Jesus, referred to as the Great Shepherd of the sheep in Luke 7:13-16, selected 12 of his disciples to be apostles. The mandate he gave to Peter in John 21:15-17, was not limited to Peter, but was accepted by all who were chosen to be shepherds of God's flock. That mandate calls us to "feed my lambs ... take care of my sheep ... feed my sheep." In Acts 20:28, when saying goodbye to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul called the elders together and commanded them to shepherd the flock of God: "Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock." Peter also writes in his epistle to the elders:

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<sup>20</sup> (Exodus 3:4).

<sup>21</sup> (Psalm 78:70-72).





To those who are older among you, I plead as a fellow elder, a witness to Christ's suffering as well as somebody who will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is given your care, serving as overseers—not because you have to, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd arrives, you will be given the crown of splendour, which will never fade. Young guys should be equally obedient to those who are older. All of you, clothing yourself with humility towards one another, since 'God opposes the haughty, but offers grace to the humble'. (1 Peter 5:1-6).

1 Timothy 3:1-7 clearly defines the traits of a shepherd as well as the commandment for action:

1. A man of character whose life cannot be spoken against
2. Faithful to his wife
3. Self-controlled
4. Wise
5. Reputable
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not a heavy drinker
9. Peaceful
10. Not one who loves money
11. A good manager of his family
12. A mature Christian

### **The Biblical Method of Shepherding**

In seeking a method of caring for sheep, at least two questions must be asked before proceeding. The first is, "What needs to be done?" What are the shepherd's obligations when caring for the sheep? Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, John chapters 10 and 21, and Matthew 18 contain excellent summaries of the scriptural expectations of shepherds. John MacArthur summarizes a list of the pastor's basic functions:

1. To love the sheep
2. To feed the sheep
3. To rescue the sheep
4. To attend and comfort the sheep
5. To guide the sheep
6. To guard and protect the sheep



7. To watch over the sheep <sup>22</sup>(MacArthur, 1995: 338).

The second question to be asked before proceeding to seek methods of pastoral care in a given situation is, "Who needs to do it?" The scripture <sup>23</sup>(Acts 20:28) makes it clear that the ultimate responsibility to care for, feed, and protect the flock is in the hands of the pastor/teacher. Equally clear through scripture is that the pastor/teacher is responsible for gathering around him/her the properly prepared assistants to help accomplish the task of caring for the entire church (Ephesians 4: 12).

### **Old Testament Examples of Pastoral Care and Shepherding**

The first example we note is that of Moses in Exodus 18. Moses is a prime example of overloaded leadership nearing burnout. After the exodus from Egypt, Moses found himself solely responsible for resolving all the conflicts and giving godly guidance to the nation of Israel-now some several million strong. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, went out to meet Moses in the desert. After celebrating God's faithfulness, Jethro went to work with Moses the following day. After one day's observation, Jethro challenged Moses' way of leading the people with a fresh concept of shared leadership <sup>24</sup>(Exodus 18:14, 17-18). Jethro then proposed a technique for dividing the entire nation into manageable segments. The groups each consisted of 1,000s, 100s, 50s, and 10s. Each was to be led by a trained godly leader who would help each person in their group to solve their problems and find guidance. Only the most difficult problems would proceed to the higher level of leadership. In a commentary on Exodus 18, Steinbron (1997: 122) said:

Moses made the one great mistake clergy have been making throughout the years: he tried to keep ministry to himself. I say, 'tried.' Actually, he did keep the ministry to himself, but it didn't work because of the nature of ministry - ministry is to be shared. Jethro's counsel (Exodus 18: 1 7) to Moses is well suited for leaders today.

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<sup>22</sup> MacArthur, W. C.(1995). The roles of Elders in the Church. *Asbury Theological Journal*. 121(2):65-80.

<sup>23</sup> (Acts 20:28)

<sup>24</sup> (Exodus 18:14, 17-18).



## **PASTORAL STAFFS IN NIGERIA AS AT TODAY**

Everything rises and falls on leadership. No church can ever grow beyond the leadership of its pastor. Pastors preach in a complicated world with many new difficulties and demands; thus, every pastor must have a thorough grasp of his function in the church. The role of the pastor has not changed since Pentecost, and he must maintain a biblical principle and understanding of his role in the church as teacher, shepherd, and evangelist. The Pastor As Teacher One of the most important pastoral responsibilities is the role of pastor-teacher. The Bible states, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"<sup>25</sup>(1 Cor. 1:21). "And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4: 11).

The term "pastor" finds its origin in the Greek word for shepherd, "poimen." This metaphor is commonly and appropriately used to describe individuals in authority within the church (referenced in Ezekiel 34:2, 9, 10, 23; 1 Peter 2:25; and Hebrews 13:20). The pastor's duties encompass providing spiritual nourishment to the flock and safeguarding them from spiritual dangers. Jesus Himself employed this term in John 10:11, 14 to illustrate His own role as the Chief Pastor (as noted in Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4), under whom others are called to "feed the flock of God" as subordinate shepherds (1 Peter 5:2, cross-referenced with John 21:15ff; Acts 20:28). "Pastor" signifies those individuals tasked with the responsibilities of nourishing, protecting, and guiding the Church. The one who shepherds God's flock is also a teacher of the Word, having both the task of shepherding and the gift of teaching the flock. The word "teacher" (didaskalos) refers to men who convey biblical truth and strengthen the sheep in the faith. In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul states that a bishop must be "apt to teach." Because instruction was to be an essential component of the pastor's job in the early church, no one could be ordained unless they have the gift of teaching. However, the local church of the first century did not have a special class of pastors who did nothing but teach. These professors are not to be differentiated from the pastor; they are pastors themselves. In Ephesians 4:11, the term for "pastors and teachers" makes a grammatical structure indicating that everything rises and falls on leadership. No church can ever grow beyond the leadership of its pastor. Pastors preach in a complicated world with many new difficulties and demands; thus, every pastor must have a thorough grasp of his function in the church.

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<sup>25</sup> (1 Cor. 1:21).



The role of the pastor has not changed since Pentecost, and he must maintain a biblical understanding of his role in the church as teacher, shepherd, and evangelist. The Pastor as Teacher One of the most important pastoral positions is that of pastor-teacher. The Bible says, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). When enumerating the miraculous abilities God had granted to various members of the church, the apostle Paul wrote, "And He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers." (Eph. 4: 11). The word in the original language that is translated "pastor" is the Greek word for shepherd (poimen). This is a common and fitting metaphor for individuals in authority of others in the church (Ezek. 34:2,9,10,23; 1 Peter 2:25; and Hebrews 13:20). The pastor's tasks include feeding the flock spiritual food and ensuring them safety from spiritual peril. Our Lord used the word in John 10:11,14 to describe His own work. He is ever the Chief Pastor <sup>26</sup>(Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4) under whom men are called to "feed the flock of God" as under shepherds <sup>27</sup>(1 Peter 5:2, cf. John 21: 15ff; Acts 20:28). The word pastor denotes those men whose responsibility it is to feed, to protect, and to lead the church. The shepherd of God's sheep is also a teacher of the Word, having both the responsibility of shepherding and the gift of teaching the flock. The word "teacher" (didaskalos) refers to men who convey biblical truth and strengthen the sheep in the faith. In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul states that a bishop must be "apt to teach." Because instruction was to be an essential component of the pastor's job in the early church, no one could be ordained unless they have the gift of teaching.

However, the local church of the first century did not have a special class of pastors who did nothing but teach. These professors are not to be differentiated from the pastor; they are pastors themselves. In Nigerian churches today, the opposite is true; churches are full with hypocrisy, greed, fraud, falsehoods, pretensions, paedophilia, adultery, fornication, materialism, and everything else He condemned. Thieves are given front-row seats in church; recognition is given depending on the magnitude of one's tithes and offerings; pastors now identify the precise amount of money they desire, and members rush to be the first to make the payments and "claim" their rewards; The left hand is encouraged to observe what the right hand contributes, so the left hand feels "powered up" to out-donate the right hand. Pastors are racing to buy private aircraft and private universities, and to out-do one another in the accumulation of worldly

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<sup>26</sup> (Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4)

<sup>27</sup> (1 Peter 5:2, cf. John 21: 15ff; Acts 20:28).



riches. Their members come to church to show off their cars and clothing; the pastors have pushed the concept, to their own benefit, that wealth and well-being are determined by how consistently people pay their tithes and offerings; the number of material items one owns is today regarded as a measure of one's spiritual wellness.

The Nigerian church does not represent the poor. In fact, Pentecostal pastors of the prosperity-preaching kind actively dissociate themselves from poverty and poor people. They do not discuss Nigeria's weak education or healthcare systems. They do not advocate for human rights or organise rallies against laws that harm the public while rewarding crooks. Instead of courageously confronting authority with truth, they engage in collusion with corrupt politicians to deceive the public and enrich themselves. It raises curiosity to consider Jesus' perspective on these pastors, whose actions bear a striking resemblance to the Pharisees and Sadducees whom He denounced as a "brood of vipers" during His time.

### **Conclusion**

Psalms 23 is one of the most famous poems in world literature. The authorship of this psalm is attributed to David, who, as a shepherd boy tending his father's sheep, was summoned before Samuel. In this composition, David transcends his personal background, recognizing his role as a reflection of God's action. His genuine care and diligent stewardship of his flock are evident, as reflected in the vivid imagery of nature - the scent of the outdoors, the lushness of the grass, and the serenity of the lake - all contributing to the psalm's beauty (Powell, 2011).

The assurance of Yahweh's saving presence in both past and present instills confidence in the Psalmist regarding Yahweh's unfailing love, expressed in covenantal terms such as "hesed" or loving kindness. This assurance of God's past and present grace provides the Psalmist with every reason to worship and rejoice among the people of God in Yahweh's sanctuary. However, the apparent tranquility of this psalm masks a deeper reality. David's depiction does not portray a perfect paradise but rather a world tainted by human sin. Needs and desires linger, unrighteousness pervades, and the shadow of death looms. His surroundings are plagued by evil and adversaries seeking his life. Though these adversities are presented amidst a positive backdrop, their nature remains unchanged.

Yet, God does not eradicate these challenges for David; instead, the presence of the Shepherd compensates for them and ultimately leads to victory. Modern believers similarly face trials akin to those described



by David in the psalm. Therefore, like David, believers also require a shepherd who will listen, care, and empathize without fear or betrayal. It is this sacred duty to which pastoral staff in Nigeria, examined in this work, are called, with the imperative that they lead the people not to themselves but to the ultimate Shepherd.

Psalm 23 is all about God's providential care and protection through the vicissitudes of life which calls believers to rejoice and celebrate in the community of God's people. The role of God as shepherd presents to the contemporary society a paradigm for leadership for priests in Nigeria. Psalm 23 reassures the readers and invokes confidence in them as it helps the readers reminisce the saving presence of God in the past, present and the future. The first three verses present a picture of God as a shepherd metaphorically. It is not just a metaphor. It depicts Yahweh's acts of mercy and providence in the past, as well as his ongoing providential care in the present and promised security and hope for the future. Re-reading Psalm 23 from the perspective of the Gospels allows for a more complete understanding. Jesus Christ has personified this metaphor of "shepherd" and has given believers opportunity to serve others while serving God.

Furthermore Psalm 23 can be understood from a leadership perspective as the research has observed Yahweh's shepherding role in protecting, providing, comforting and confronting for and on behalf of His sheep. Psalm 23 therefore offers readers "a paradigm of leadership." Yahweh, as a shepherd, played the roles of a king who provided and protected his flock, a priest who led his flock with utmost care and comfort, a prophet who guided his flock in the righteous path, and a host who demonstrated his providential care towards his flock in the midst of challenging times and adversaries. It is this roles that the pastors/priests have been called to play in the pursuit of both physical and spiritual well-being of their members.

### **Recommendations**

The research suggests that pastoral staff in Nigeria, regardless of denominational affiliations, should prioritize service over personal gain in their ministries. Furthermore, church leaders should invest more in the training and development of pastoral staff members. The Psalm 23 model is proposed as an effective framework for enhancing skills and competencies in pastoral care within Nigerian Churches. Additionally, priests are advised to handle confidential information with discretion and safeguard the trust placed in them during pastoral counseling sessions.



Moreover, it is recommended that while striving to improve their pastoral skills, pastors should not neglect their families, but rather grow together in the grace and power of Yahweh.

Implementing a new paradigm for pastoral care will require a commitment from church leadership to move beyond merely being a church with identifiable groups. Instead, they should establish a system of quality care-centered nurture groups. Pastoral staff members should embrace the belief that laypersons are willing to invest time and resources into providing excellent care when given the opportunity.

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