

## SHEPHERDING AS A MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S GRACE: A Theological–Exegetical Study of John 21:15–17

Gerbin Tamba,<sup>1</sup> Janes Sinaga,<sup>2</sup> Juita Lusiana Sinambela<sup>3</sup>  
Universitas Advent Surya Nusantara, Pematang Siantar, Indonesia<sup>1,3</sup>  
Bible University, Prince Edward Island, Canada<sup>2</sup>  
Email: [tambagerbin11@gmail.com](mailto:tambagerbin11@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Shepherding constitutes a central dimension of church life; however, it is frequently reduced to administrative and functional roles in contemporary practice. This study critically examines shepherding as a manifestation of God's grace through a theological–exegetical analysis of John 21:15–17. Employing a qualitative approach, this research integrates biblical exegesis with a lexical analysis of key Greek terms, particularly ἀγαπάω, φιλέω, and ποιμαίνω, to explore the theological foundation of pastoral ministry. The findings demonstrate that shepherding is not grounded in human competence or institutional authority but in a relationship of love initiated and sustained by divine grace. The pastoral mandate given to Peter reflects a grace-centered dynamic in which love becomes the essential basis for responsibility. Furthermore, shepherding is understood as a continuous and holistic vocation encompassing nurturing, guiding, protecting, and teaching the congregation. This study contributes to pastoral theology by offering an exegetically grounded and theologically integrated framework that interprets shepherding as a manifestation of God's grace. It also provides a conceptual foundation for contemporary pastoral ministry to embody Christ-centered leadership rooted in relational love and divine initiative.

**Keywords:** shepherding; God's grace; pastoral ministry; theological–exegetical study; John 21:15–17.

### INTRODUCTION

A church is pastored by a pastor. The role of the pastor is to care for the members of the congregation. He is a manager who must understand management and administration and be a good administrator, understand risk management, administrative management, human resource management, and especially strategy management. He also became a teacher to teach the truth. Pastors are also required to be totality in serving. Pastor as a servant.<sup>1</sup> A pastor of the congregation is a leader who has the responsibility of leading the congregation to grow to maturity. Without good leadership, of course, the church cannot achieve the goal of maturation. Therefore, it

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<sup>1</sup> Janes Sinaga et al., "Peran Fundamental Gembala Bagi Guru Saat Pandemi Dalam Pembelajaran Online Berbasis Karakter: Tantangan Dan Sistem Pendukung," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen (JUPAK)* 2, no. 1 (2021): 13–35, <https://doi.org/10.52489/jupak.v2i1.61>.

cannot be denied that the pastor of the congregation has a vital role that is needed for the church.<sup>2</sup>

Pastoral ministry is a fundamental dimension in the life of the Christian church because it is directly related to the spiritual growth, maintenance of the faith, and the sustainability of the congregational community. In the biblical tradition and pastoral theology, the pastor of the congregation is not understood solely as an administrative leader, but rather as a person called by God to nurture, guide, and care for His people with love and spiritual responsibility.<sup>3</sup> The growth of a ministry or church lies in the extent of the responsibility or participation of the church management in taking a role in the ministry, especially for the pastor of the congregation. Congregational pastors have an important role in providing spiritual growth to God's congregation.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the quality of shepherding greatly determines the direction, maturity of faith, and resilience of the church in the midst of the dynamics of today's ministry challenges.

Various previous studies have examined the role and function of pastoralists from various perspectives. Alferdi emphasizes shepherding principles based on John 10:1–21 with a focus on Jesus as the Good Shepherd and its implications for church leadership.<sup>5</sup> Karundeng, Sumampouw, and Santoso highlight the characteristics of a church pastor based on 1 Peter 5:1–4, with an emphasis on the example, humility, and moral responsibility of church leaders.<sup>6</sup> Another study by Antonius Missa emphasizes the strategy and role of pastors in improving congregation building, with a practical and contextual approach to church growth.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Santoso shows the urgency of the pastor's duty in the context of the challenges of contemporary pastoral ministry, emphasizing that church leaders must consistently hold to God's word as the basis of their ministry.<sup>8</sup>

Based on this mapping, it appears that most previous research tends to place pastoring on normative-practical aspects, ecclesiastical leadership, or pastoral moral examples. Studies that specifically and systematically place John 21:15–17 as the central text for understanding shepherding as a manifestation of God's restorative and relational

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<sup>2</sup> Kalis Stevanus, "Kepemimpinan Gembala Jemaat Menurut 2 Timotius 4:1-5," *KINAA: Jurnal Kepemimpinan Kristen dan Pemberdayaan Jemaat* 2, no. 2 (2021): 99–119, <https://doi.org/10.34307/kinaa.v2i2.31>.

<sup>3</sup> Nathan H. Gunter. "The Shepherd-Leader Motif as a Pastoral Model for a Globalizing Church." *Perichoresis* 16, no.3 (2018): 87-105. <https://doi.org/10.2478/perc-2018-001>.

<sup>4</sup> David Lazuardi, "Peranan Gembala Sidang Bagi Pertumbuhan Jemaat," *Jurnal Salvation* 2, no. 1 (2021): 67–79, <https://doi.org/10.56175/salvation.v4i2.34>.

<sup>5</sup> Alferdi Alferdi, "Prinsip-Prinsip Pengembalaan Berdasarkan Injil Yohanes 10:1-21," *Jurnal Christian Humaniora* 5, no. 1 (2021): 01–13, <https://doi.org/10.46965/jch.v5i1.617>.

<sup>6</sup> Dwi Setio Budiono Santoso Ariel Hizkia Karundeng, Jefit Sumampouw, "Tinjauan Teologis Tentang Karakteristik Gembala Jemaat Menurut 1 Petrus 5:1-4," *Jurnal Antusias* 6, no. 2 (2020): 92–105, <https://sttintheos.ac.id/e-journal/index.php/antusias/article/view/470>.

<sup>7</sup> Antonius Missa. "Visitasi Gembala Kepada Anggota Gereja: Suatu Perspektif Etika Kristen". *SERVIRE: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 2, no. 1 (2022): 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.46362/servire.v2i1.107>.

<sup>8</sup> Joko Santoso, "Pelayanan Hamba Tuhan Dalam Tugas Pengembalaan Jemaat," *SANCTUM DOMINE: Jurnal Teologi* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.46495/sdjt.v9i1.55>.

grace are still relatively limited. In fact, this passage displays a distinctive theological dynamic, namely the giving of the pastoral mandate that was preceded by the restoration of the loving relationship between Christ and Peter after his failure.

This research gap is the basis for this research. This research does not only view pastoralism as a structural function of the church, but as a response of faith to God's restorative grace. John 21:15–17 shows that the foundation of Christian shepherding lies not primarily in human capacity or ecclesiastical office, but in a religious love for Christ expressed through a willingness to shepherd His people.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the role and responsibility of the shepherd as a tangible manifestation of God's touch of mercy through pastoral ministry based on the theological-exegetical analysis of John 21:15–17. The novelty of this study lies in the emphasis on shepherding as a pastoral practice rooted in the relationship of love that has been restored by God's grace, as well as in the exegetical reading of the key Greek terms *agapaō* and *poimainō* that affirm the dimensions of love, responsibility, and the sustainability of the shepherding call. With this approach, the research is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of pastoral theology as well as practical relevance for the pastoral ministry of the church today.

Research methods are a scientific way to obtain data with a specific purpose and use, the results of which can be used to solve the problem being researched.<sup>9</sup> The research methodology is also a research step that explains how research can be carried out so that the research hypothesis can be tested scientifically, empirically, and rationally.<sup>10</sup> This study uses a qualitative method with a biblical-exegetical theology approach.<sup>11</sup> This approach was chosen to interpret the theological significance of the biblical text in depth and to formulate its implications for pastoral theology. The main focus of the research is directed at John 21:15–17 as a primary text that is contextually, linguistically, and theologically analyzed.

The stages of the research include several steps. First, an analysis of the historical and narrative context of the Gospel of John to understand the theological background of the dialogue between Jesus and Peter after the resurrection. Second, an exegetical analysis was carried out through *word studies* of key terms in Greek, especially the words *agapaō*, *phileō*, and *poimainō*, in order to uncover the meaning and theological nuances of the shepherding call. Third, the results of the analysis of the text are in dialogue with relevant pastoral theology and Christian leadership literature, especially articles of accredited national journals and theological books that have academic authority.

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<sup>9</sup> Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Administrasi* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2005), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Iskandar, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Sosial: Kuantitatif Dan Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Gaung Persada Pres, 2009), 176–177.

<sup>11</sup> Sonny Eli Zaluchu, "Metode Penelitian Di Dalam Manuskrip Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan," *Jurnal Teologi Berita Hidup* 3, no. 2 (2021): 249–266, <https://doi.org/10.38189/jtbh.v3i2.93>.

The data collection technique is carried out through library research, with primary data sources in the form of biblical texts and secondary data sources in the form of books, scientific journal articles, and contemporary pastoral theological works. Data analysis is carried out in a descriptive-analytical and synthetic manner, namely by describing exegetical findings and then synthesizing them into the framework of pastoral theology. Through this method, the research aims to produce a systematic conceptual understanding of shepherding as a manifestation of God's grace, while providing a relevant theological basis for the practice of pastoral ministry in the context of today's church.

## RESULT

### The Theological Call of Shepherding in John 21:15–17

The passage John 21:15–17 contains a dialogue between Jesus and Peter that is the basis for understanding the shepherding call. In this passage, Jesus asks Peter's love for Him and relates that answer to the mandate to shepherd His people. The question repeated three times shows the seriousness of the call and serves as Peter's recovery process after his failure to deny Jesus. The command to "Feed my sheep" (John. 21:15) was given in the context of the great grace of God that Peter personally experienced. Even though Peter recognized his weaknesses and failures, Jesus entrusted him with the shepherding task. This shows that shepherding is not based on human strength, but on the grace of God who calls and equips.<sup>12</sup>

This calling shaped Peter's identity as an apostle and servant of God who shepherded God's people. That restoration experience was then reflected in Peter's counsel to the elders to shepherd God's flock responsibly (1 Pet. 5:2). Thus, John 21:15–17 affirms that shepherding is a theological calling rooted in God's love and grace.<sup>13</sup>

### The Imperative of Shepherding in John 21:16: Lexical and Grammatical Analysis

In the Greek text of John 21:16, Jesus' command to Peter is expressed by the phrase λέγει αὐτῷ· ποιμαίνε τὰ πρόβατά μου ("Jesus said unto him, Shepherd my sheep"). The verb ποιμαίνε comes from the root ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*), which in the New Testament lexicon means to shepherd, tend, guide, and care for the flock, including feeding and protecting them from harm.<sup>14</sup> This meaning shows that shepherding is not just a teaching activity, but a total responsibility for the life and safety of the flock.

<sup>12</sup> Nathanael Channing, "Anugerah Dalam Pelayanan Pengembalaan," *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan* 3, no. 2 (2002): 193–198, <https://doi.org/10.36421/veritas.v3i2.93>; Patrick E. Spencer, "Narrative Echoes in John 21: Intertextual Interpretation and Intratextual Connection." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22, no. 75 (1999): 61–62.

<sup>13</sup> Toni Marie Nichols. "Homiletical Exegesis on John 21:15-19." *Obsculta* 14, no.1 (2021) : 170. <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta/vol14/iss1/14>.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 842.

Grammatically speaking, *the ποιμαίνε* form is an active present imperative, denoting commands that are direct, urgent, and continuous.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the shepherding mandate that Jesus gave Peter was not temporary or symbolic, but rather a task that had to be carried out consistently and continuously. The urgency of this command confirms that the survival of the flock—both spiritually and communitarianly—depends heavily on the shepherd's faithfulness in carrying out his calling. Without faithful shepherding, the flock is at risk of getting lost, plundered, and perished.

Furthermore, John 21:15–17 shows that the duty to shepherd the flock is rooted in the dimension of love. Jesus first tested the relational basis of Peter's calling through the question of love before entrusting him with the responsibility of shepherding. In the dialogue, Jesus used the term *ἀγαπήσ* (from the root *ἀγαπάω*), which refers to divine love that is willing to sacrifice, is oriented to God's will, and is unconditional.<sup>16</sup> This agape *love* goes beyond *philia* and becomes the theological and ethical foundation for pastoral ministry.

The repetition of Jesus' question three times was not merely a rhetorical repetition, but a restorative process that theologically restored Peter from his previous failures.<sup>17</sup> On the third question, Peter leaves the judgment of his love entirely to the knowledge of Christ by saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." This statement affirms that to love Jesus means to obey His will and plan, which are concretely manifested in a willingness to shepherd His people.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the shepherding call that Peter received was rooted in a relationship of love that had been restored by God's grace. Peter was called not because of his strength, but rather in the midst of an awareness of his weaknesses and failures. Love for Christ is the primary basis for the performance of the pastoral task, so that pastoral ministry is understood as a response of faith to God's grace, not just an institutional office or function.

### **Theological Concept of the Shepherd in a Biblical Perspective**

There are two kinds of shepherds in the Bible: First, the one who herds livestock. Second, the person who nurtures and nurtures humans, namely shepherds who are divine and mortal.<sup>19</sup> The term shepherd uses Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in

<sup>15</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 272–274.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 596–599.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, Anchor Yal (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 1101–1105.

<sup>18</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary, John*, Vol.36, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 406–407.

<sup>19</sup> Asih Rachmani Endang Sumiwi, "Gembala Sidang Yang Baik Menurut Yohanes 10:1-18," *HARVESTER: Jurnal Teologi dan Kepemimpinan Kristen* 4, no. 2 (2019): 74–93, <http://e-journal.sttharvestsemarang.ac.id/index.php/harvester/article/view/16>.

the New Testament. The term shepherd in Greek has three basic words, namely *Episkopos* which is translated in English usually with the word "Eishop" or "Oversear", *Presbuteros*, *Episkopos* (Bishop, Oversear) means to supervise, guard, observe. 1 Timothy 3:2; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:7; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:5, which means overseer of the congregation or overseer. While *Presbuteros* (Elder, Older) are the elders, in the Christian church they are called "Elders" in the book of Revelation, and *Poimen* (Shepherd) which means to shepherd and rule. The word shepherd in Latin is called "Pastor", while pastoring is also called "Pastoralia" or the Greek word "Poimenika". Pastoral ministry is the same term as pastoral as well.<sup>20</sup>

Pastoral care is a public service in Christianity. Christians do not live only as individuals; in terms of worship, they are members of a community led by congregational leaders. The relationship between the leader and the people he leads is often described as the relationship between a shepherd and a sheep.<sup>21</sup> Leadership of a group or people has occurred since Old Testament times, this was done by Moses as the leader of the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses also learned shepherding leadership when he became a shepherd during his escape from Egypt. Moses also continued the concept of leadership by appointing leaders of one hundred, fifty, and ten men on the advice of his father-in-law Jethroe (Ex. 18).

A growing church needs a minister in the sense of a shepherd as a leader who plays an important role in the ministry that God gives him. A person becomes a shepherd not by choice, but because he is called by God to be a shepherd. In carrying out his duties, a shepherd must be one who truly loves God, who is faithful and responsible, not seeking self-interest or vain praise, but being an example to all. A shepherd who truly loves God does not choose his position, but is chosen for his position.<sup>22</sup> Jesus Christ stated this to Peter, the proof of the expression of love for His people was by shepherding them (John 21:15-17).

In the New Testament, Jesus is not only described as the Good Shepherd, but also as the Great Shepherd according to the Apostle Peter's acknowledgment in his counsel. That shepherding comes from God to those entrusted to continue the task and mandate. In other words, true shepherding is accepted as a duty from God and therefore must also be accountable to Him.<sup>23</sup> God has the authority to entrust His flock (His people), because

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<sup>20</sup> Antonius Missa. "Visitasi Gembala Kepada Anggota Gereja: Suatu Perspektif Etika Kristen": 89-102; Natanael Winanto, Antonius Missa, and Juan Ananta Tan. "Surat-Surat Pastoral sebagai Petunjuk Praktis Penggembalaan untuk Jemaat (Pastoral Letters as a Shepharding Practical Guidelines in Congregation)". *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 44-61. <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v2i1.14>.

<sup>21</sup> Sumiwi, "Gembala Sidang Yang Baik Menurut Yohanes 10:1-18," 74.

<sup>22</sup> Jermia Djadi Yenda Kosta, "Peranan Gembala Sebagai Pemimpin Dalam Perspektif I Petrus 5:1-4 Dan Relevansinya Pada Masa Kini," *Jurnal Jaffray* 9, no. 2 (2011): 172-200, <https://dx.doi.org/10.25278/jj71.v9i2.100>.

<sup>23</sup> Jermia Djadi Yenda Kosta, "Peranan Gembala Sebagai Pemimpin Dalam Perspektif I Petrus 5:1-4 Dan Relevansinya Pada Masa Kini": 172-200.

He is the owner of the sheep. And everyone he calls to that shepherding task can imitate what Jesus did as the Great Shepherd and the owner of the sheep, because He did it well, earnestly and self-sacrificingly.

The greatest contribution of leadership is the leadership we saw when Jesus lived on earth. Jesus' leadership is supreme and worthy of an example for everyone. There is one good leadership contribution that can be considered to learn and emulate.<sup>24</sup> Pastoral leadership comes from the foundation of the ministry that Jesus Himself has done as a true shepherd. Willyan Barclay said, "Jesus is the good shepherd. He is a shepherd who is willing to sacrifice His life for man who is lost in sin." Jesus as the leader, He is also the one who takes care of His people, then takes care of them and seeks out those who have gone astray. A shepherd must perform his duties and roles as a leader, in which case duties and responsibilities must be understood correctly within the limits of the role of a shepherd.<sup>25</sup>

Pastor is a term that refers to the position and duties of a church leader. The term also has synonyms such as Pastor or Pastor. In general, a shepherd is defined as a guardian of animals or keepers of animals, but in the context of a pastor of the church, it is as a guardian of the safety of the people.<sup>26</sup> In today's church, the term "shepherd" is applied to the person who leads the congregation, or more commonly referred to as the "congregation shepherd." The shepherd of the congregation is a special person, if a person is called to this ministry, it means that God has told him to care for His people.<sup>27</sup>

Both the Old and New Testaments describe God's people or believers as a flock of sheep. This depiction is natural to the ancient culture of Israel. At that time there was a custom of shepherds taking sheep far away from the barn to get pasture. In bringing the sheep to the pasture, the shepherd is fully responsible for their lives. The shepherd acts as a guard who protects the sheep from harm. Sheep is an animal that needs to be provided with food, it cannot go alone to get its food. This is where the role of the shepherd in guiding and caring for the sheep comes in. Meanwhile, sheep should not be left alone in the pasture, because they are weak and easy to fall prey to wild animals such as wolves or lions. The condition of the sheep that needs guidance and leadership is the same as God's people who need guidance, attention, and love from the shepherd.

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<sup>24</sup> Sunarno Sastro Atmodjo et al., *Buku Antologi Teologi Kontemporer* (Purbalingga: Eureka Media Aksara, 2022), 149, <https://repository.penerbiteureka.com/publications/559609>.

<sup>25</sup> Yenda Kosta, "Peranan Gembala sebagai Pemimpin dalam Perspektif I Petrus 5:1-4 dan Relevansinya Pada Masa Kini"; Dottie Rhoads. "A Friend of Tax Collectors and Sinners: an Intertextual Reading of Luke's Jesus According to Divine Identity and YHWH Shepherd Language." *Dissertation*, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, US, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6203&context=doctoral>.

<sup>26</sup> Antonius Missa. "Visitasi Gembala Kepada Anggota Gereja: Suatu Perspektif Etika Kristen": 89-102.

<sup>27</sup> Sumiwi, "Gembala Sidang Yang Baik Menurut Yohanes 10:1-18," 85.

Therefore, God gives special gifts and abilities to congregational pastors to carry out their duty to care for the congregation.<sup>28</sup>

Bons Storm defines that shepherding is: *One*, seeking out and visiting members of the congregation one by one. *Two*, declare God's Word to them, in their personal life situations. *Three*, serve them, just as Jesus would serve them. Fourth, so that they are more aware of their faith, and can manifest that faith in their daily lives.<sup>29</sup>

The task of shepherding is a difficult task from a humanitarian point of view because it requires many sacrifices, namely the sacrifice of time, material, thoughts and feelings. Faced with such circumstances, a pastor is required to have determination and commitment to shepherd the congregation willingly, even with a willingness to sacrifice as set by the Great Shepherd. Christian leadership is willing to make sacrifices. This character comes from the character of the great leader, the Lord Jesus, who willingly leaves heaven and comes into a world full of limitations and evil. To be human, to be a slave, to suffer and even to die willingly on the cross for the salvation of those He leads.<sup>30</sup>

Shepherding duties require a lot of attention and are often risky jobs. Especially protecting His sheep from harm. Dangers often lurk in the valley area, ranging from wild animals such as lions, bears, wolves to various types of birds of prey that snatch off guard lambs and bring them as food for their young. Being a shepherd requires great courage and a willingness to take risks. A true shepherd of the church is willing to sacrifice for the lives of the members of the congregation he serves as the Lord Jesus said, I am the good shepherd Jesus is not just a word, but He is willing to sacrifice for His flock, very different from a hired shepherd. The hired shepherd is not responsible for his shepherd sheep when faced with danger and even runs away and leaves the sheep.<sup>31</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### Theological Reflections on the Role and Responsibilities of the Shepherd Based on John 21:15-17

Further, the results of the interpretation of John 21:15-17 show that the responsibility of the shepherd is based on *agape love*, that is, divine love that is willing to sacrifice and is oriented to God's will. This love serves as the ethical foundation of

<sup>28</sup> Sumiwi, "Gembala Sidang Yang Baik Menurut Yohanes 10:1-18," 85; Bobby Kurnia Putrawan. "The Contribution of Sociology to Church Leadership: Promoting Social Justice and Unity in the Christian Community". *MODERATE: Journal of Religious, Education, and Social* 2, no. 1 (2024): 42-54. <https://doi.org/10.46362/moderate.v2i1.15>.

<sup>29</sup> Antonius Missa. "Visitasi Gembala Kepada Anggota Gereja: Suatu Perspektif Etika Kristen". *SERVIRE: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 2, no. 1 (2022): 89-102. <https://doi.org/10.46362/servire.v2i1.107>; Ariel Hizkia Karundeng, Jefit Sumampouw, "Tinjauan Teologis Tentang Karakteristik Gembala Jemaat Menurut 1 Petrus 5:1-4," 96.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Danbaki Jatau. "Feed My Sheep in John 21:15-17 and the Pastoral Role of Priests in Nigeria." *Biblical Studies Journal* 5, no.2 (2023): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.54513/BSJ.2023.5201>.

<sup>31</sup> Ariel Hizkia Karundeng, Jefit Sumampouw, "Tinjauan Teologis Tentang Karakteristik Gembala Jemaat Menurut 1 Petrus 5:1-4," 99.

pastoral ministry and distinguishes Christian shepherding from secular leadership models. In this context, pastoral ministry is understood as a form of participation in the active and transformative love of God, aimed at bringing about the spiritual well-being of the congregation.<sup>32</sup>

Theologically, the term shepherd refers to the act of care and maintenance carried out by a person intensively who knows neither time nor situation and cannot be represented by another person. The Bible Dictionary explains that shepherding was a very important task in Israel for maintenance, this lies in one's dependence on sheep (livestock). It is further explained that the term 'shepherd' can be understood from two sides; the first points to the task of caring for and maintaining livestock, pets; and second, in a spiritual sense, refers to the task that God entrusts to a person to be the nurse or keeper of the soul of mankind (the people of God).<sup>33</sup>

### **Caring**

The shepherd is responsible for guarding his sheepfold. This confirms his important role in protecting and caring for his sheep, even more important than feeding them. Before the unprotected sheep starved to death, they may have already been killed by smugglers or other animals. Clearly, that the flock without a shepherd is in greater danger of murder than the danger of starvation. Caring for the church is a noble task and not easy for the shepherd to do, but with Jesus' participation the shepherd is able and ready to do this task. A shepherd who cares for his congregation means that he must be ready to care with all his heart, that is, sincerely.<sup>34</sup>

In the context of shepherding, care involves actively seeking those who have strayed from the flock. A faithful shepherd endeavors to restore spiritual well-being by addressing wounds arising from both external circumstances and personal shortcomings. Such care is characterized by empathy and a sincere commitment to helping the sheep regain their intended wholeness. Furthermore, a shepherd discerns the condition of the weak and takes preventive measures to strengthen them before their situation deteriorates further.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Homer U. Ashby. "Pastoral Theology As Public Theology: Participating In The Healing Of Damaged And Damaging Cultures And Institutions." *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 10, no. 1 (2000): 18-27. <https://doi.org/10.1179/jpt.2000.10.1.003>; Nathan H. Gunter. "The Shepherd-Leader Motif as a Pastoral Model for a Globalizing Church": 87-105; see also Bobby Kurnia Putrawan. "The Contribution of Sociology to Church Leadership: Promoting Social Justice and Unity in the Christian Community": 42-54.

<sup>33</sup> Rikardo Sianipar and Herifeka, "Peran Gembala Menurut Yohanes 21:15-17 Studi Kasus Di GBI Big Jakarta." *The Way Jurnal Teologi dan Kependidikan* 6, no. 2 (2020): 168-179, <https://doi.org/10.54793/teologi-dan-kependidikan.v6i2.35>.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremy L. Pickwell. "The Mandate of Shepherding: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Shepherding Metaphor Scriptures and Phenomenological Study of a New Shepherding Pastoral Leadership Model." *PhD in Organizational Leadership* 10 (2022), 132. <https://firescholars.seu.edu/org-lead/10>.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy L. Pickwell. "The Mandate of Shepherding: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Shepherding Metaphor Scriptures and Phenomenological Study of a New Shepherding Pastoral Leadership Model", 132.

### **Preserve**

John 21:15-19 tells everyone how Jesus told Peter to take care of His sheep, which He was about to abandon. Jesus himself likened or equated the ministry in Himself, with "shepherding". Thus, the congregation should be cared for, nurtured, guided, and saved from harm. Jesus wanted His followers to associate with one another and act as a shepherd. The pastor must act upon the congregation in all aspects of his life, not only teaching, feeding, nurturing, but guarding or preserving the congregation from the attack of misleading danger.<sup>36</sup>

The important duty of the shepherd is to keep the sheep, a job that can be done by both men and women both young and old, although it is quite difficult and dangerous.<sup>37</sup> A shepherd is the keeper of a herd. In Greek the word shepherd is used for the word *Poimen*, who has the task of feeding in a spiritual sense and of caring for and caring for the flock that God has entrusted to him (John 21:16).<sup>38</sup>

Msweli and Crider interpret a congregation shepherd as a person called by God to care for God's flock. He nurtured a group of Christians. Tidball explained that a congregation shepherd is one who is given the authority of God to lead and care for God's flock. He became a leader because he was appointed by God over His people. Msweli and Criber stated that a congregation shepherd must be convinced that he is called to shepherd God's flock. A congregation shepherd is chosen and called by God to this work. Just as Peter was called by the Lord Jesus to shepherd His sheep (John 21:17). This means that the Lord Jesus wanted Peter to take care of His people.<sup>39</sup>

The Shepherd must know every member of his congregation, because they are the ones he serves, it is their souls that he wants to be nurtured. Rice says, "Nurturing the soul involves a wide variety of attention more than just the mind and body. Since knowledge of the human soul comes only from a relationship with God, ministering to souls means taking care of the way people relate to God by paying attention to their spiritual lives"<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Sianipar and Herifeka, "Peran Gembala Menurut Yohanes 21:15-17 Studi Kasus Di Gbi Big Jakarta," 171.

<sup>37</sup> Misheck Nyirenda. "The pastor as spiritual mediator between God and the congregation: Corruptions of the relationships of the 'under-shepherd', the 'flock' and the 'chief shepherd' in a Zambian context and their implications for spiritual maturity." *HTS Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): a6349. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6349>.

<sup>38</sup> Ariel Hizkia Karundeng, Jefit Sumampouw, "Tinjauan Teologis Tentang Karakteristik Gembala Jemaat Menurut 1 Petrus 5:1-4," 95.

<sup>39</sup> Kepemimpinan Gembala Jemaat Menurut and Kalis Stevanus Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Tawangmangu, "Kepemimpinan Gembala Jemaat Menurut 2 Timotius 4:1-5," *KINAA: Jurnal Kepemimpinan Kristen dan Pemberdayaan Jemaat* 2, no. 2 (December 9, 2021): 103-104, accessed July 10, 2023, <https://kinaa.iakn-toraja.ac.id/index.php/ojsdatakinaa/article/view/31>.

<sup>40</sup> Hanny Frederik, "Prinsip-Prinsip Kepemimpinan Penggembalaan Berdasarkan Yohanes 10:1-21 Dan Implementasinya Dalam Kepemimpinan Gereja," *Jurnal Ilmu Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 2 (December 1, 2020): 69-86, <https://dx.doi.org/10.25278/jitpk.v1i2.487>.

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This maintenance also includes ensuring the safety of the congregation in the context of a heretical attack. The shepherd must act as a watchman and protector to save the congregation from danger. Supervise the congregation in the practice of worship and the decrees of the gospel and protect the congregation from various false and misleading teachings (Eph. 4:11-16). Pastors must prepare and equip the congregation in facing various teachings that are not in accordance with the truth of God's word, one of which is through the intensive and focused teaching of God's words, so that in the face of the apostasy the congregation is able to fortify itself and reject it.<sup>41</sup>

Maintenance responsibility is important, maintaining means ensuring the safety, comfort, existence of it remains in the cage or herd. The pastor has the duty to keep the members of his congregation in fellowship, there is a feeling of comfort in fellowship so that his faith will be maintained.

### ***Feeding***

It is obligatory for the shepherd to have the role of feeding the best for his congregation. This food is useful for health, refreshing the congregation so that it is always well maintained. The role of a good shepherd is always to pay attention to the intake of a good life for the growth and development of his congregations. For the body of Christ this present day must be strict in spiritual and physical nourishment, for this is all for His glory.<sup>42</sup>

In the work of a congregation pastor, the service from the pulpit or the preaching of God's word is important. A congregation shepherd is commanded to preach the word of God to feed his flock of sheep. Stevanus emphasized how important it is to teach God's word to the members of the congregation so that they can grow. The pastor of the church is responsible for feeding the church, that is, feeding their souls with the word of God that is explained to be understood and done faithfully. The teaching of God's word to the church is essential because through God's word, the church is built in faith by the true knowledge of God. The Word of God must be truly able to be touched and lived in the daily life of the congregation.<sup>43</sup>

Feeding the flock means keeping them full, if they are full then they will be healthy. When a shepherd feeds spiritual food for his congregation, it will make them spiritually filled. They will not be spiritually hungry and thus seek out false, even poisonous foods that can damage the quality of the faith. Spiritual hunger will make them thin or

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<sup>41</sup> Hanny Frederik, "Prinsip-Prinsip Kepemimpinan Pengembalaan Berdasarkan Yohanes 10:1-21 Dan Implementasinya Dalam Kepemimpinan Gereja": 69-86.

<sup>42</sup> Sianipar and Herifeka, "Peran Gembala Menurut Yohanes 21:15-17 Studi Kasus Di GBI Big Jakarta," 172.

<sup>43</sup> Frederik, "Prinsip-Prinsip Kepemimpinan Pengembalaan Berdasarkan Yohanes 10:1-21 Dan Implementasinya Dalam Kepemimpinan Gereja," 74.

spiritually poor. And a shepherd is expected to provide nutritious food for their healthy spiritual growth, of course, all of which leads them to remain faithful to his faith.

### **Teaching**

One thing Jesus did every time in his ministry as a true shepherd was to make time for His disciples to teach about the true truth. The people of Jesus' day also called Him a Rabbi (John 1:38; 3:2) not because they were formally educated, but because they knew the quality of His teaching. The Bible records that approximately forty-five times Jesus was found teaching, the rest preaching the gospel while teaching. Jesus' zeal in teaching His Word is evident from His diligence in delivering His teaching. Whether it was in the Temple, by the roadside, by the lake, or in any other place. The enthusiasm shown by the Lord Jesus was extraordinary.<sup>44</sup>

Every form of service has teaching potential. In the meeting room, classroom, fellowship room, assembly hall, or office there is always an opportunity to teach. The principles of Christ permeate all areas of life. One does not just live in a classroom. Jesus wanted the classroom of His teachings to encompass all areas of life. He taught the disciples wherever He was. He taught them by the wayside, at home, out of town, in the park, at banquets, in the temple, and in the marketplace. This attitude should be imitated by the pastor of the congregation and those involved in the church's teaching ministry.<sup>45</sup> At every opportunity the shepherd can teach. In the daily life of the congregation it may be on the road, work in the office or in the field they need to understand how to live as a true Christian, so it is necessary to be given guidance or teaching to stay on the path of truth. That is where the role of the shepherd guides them.

One of the duties of a congregation shepherd is to teach. A teacher who must teach systematically, with the foundation of the material being the Bible. The material taught is in accordance with the needs of jemat and the community. Teaching is given in the form of guidance to his congregation.<sup>46</sup> Coaching must be carried out continuously for the people who are shepherded, this is done so that the congregation is led to maturity of faith.

A pastor must perform his function of teaching God's Word to the congregation to be proficient in doing every living Word. Awareness of teaching is very important,

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<sup>44</sup> Tri Subekti, "Peran Gembala Sebagai Pengajar Terhadap Pertumbuhan Iman Jemaat," *REDOMINATE: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.59947/redominate.v1i2.87>; Robert Deinhammer. "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel in Its Significance for Political Theology: Systematic Considerations". *Indonesian Journal of Religious* 8, no. 2 (2025): 113-123. <https://doi.org/10.46362/ijr.v8i2.54..>

<sup>45</sup> Lewi Kabanga. "Pelatihan Peningkatan Efektivitas Pelayanan Jemaat Di Gereja Bethel Jemaat Sion Kemiri-Sentani". *SERVIRE: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 2, no. 2 (2022): 111-24. <https://doi.org/10.46362/servire.v2i2.119>; Sianipar and Herifeka, "Peran Gembala Menurut Yohanes 21:15-17 Studi Kasus Di GBI Big Jakarta," 172-173.

<sup>46</sup> Tri Subekti, "Peran Gembala Sebagai Pengajar Terhadap Pertumbuhan Iman Jemaat," 5.

because this task is one of the factors of growth in the church. If teaching is not carried out, it will have an impact on the growth of a congregation. In the Bible the true shepherd is Jesus Christ, who in His ministry prioritizes teaching His disciples, as well as the multitude who follow Him.<sup>47</sup> If the shepherd does not have the ability to teach God's word correctly then his sheep will walk according to his own ability, for a shepherd's job is to serve and provide good spiritual food according to the truth of God's word.<sup>48</sup>

The flock of sheep needs to be led to green pastures, it is done by a shepherd because it is the shepherd who knows the place and the quality to get the best food. A church pastor can lead his congregation to the true truth, guide them to better understand God's Word, this can be done by teaching, just as a teacher teaches his students it takes patience and skill.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a theological-exegetical analysis of John 21:15–17, this study concludes that the role and responsibilities of the pastor of the church are fundamentally rooted in the relationship of love that has been restored by God's grace. The shepherding mandate that Jesus gave Peter was not based on moral perfection or human competence, but on the love of Christ expressed through the willingness to shepherd His people. Thus, Christian shepherding is essentially a response of faith to God's grace that calls and entrusts His people to shepherds. An exegetical study of the term ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*) confirms that pastoral care includes a holistic responsibility, namely caring for, maintaining, protecting, and guiding the congregation on an ongoing basis. The active present imperative form in Jesus' command shows that shepherding is not a momentary or symbolic task, but rather a calling to be carried out consistently and continuously. Therefore, pastoral ministry cannot be reduced to mere administrative or teaching functions, but encompasses the entire dimension of the spiritual and communitarian life of the congregation.

This research also confirms that agape love is the theological and ethical foundation for pastoral ministry. Love of Christ is the basis of the legitimacy and orientation of pastoral ministry, which distinguishes Christian pastoral leadership from secular leadership models. In this context, shepherding is understood as participation in the active and transformative love of God, aimed at bringing about the restoration, spiritual growth, and steadfastness of the faith of the church. The contribution of this

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<sup>47</sup> James K. Lee. "One in the One Shepherd: St. Augustine and Pastoral Ministry." *The Heythrop Journal* 63, no.2 (2022), 232-244. <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13006>.

<sup>48</sup> Talizaro Tafonao, "Peran Gembala Sidang Dalam Mengajar Dan Memotivasi Untuk Melayani Terhadap Pertumbuhan Rohani Pemuda," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 2, no. 1 (2018): 2548-7868, <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v2i1.85>.

research lies in the affirmation of shepherding as a pastoral practice rooted in the grace of restoration and the relationship of love, as shown in John 21:15–17. This finding adds richness and insight to the field of pastoral theology by placing pastoral care not merely as an ecclesiastical office, but as a theological vocation born of an encounter with the restorative Christ. Thus, this research is expected to provide a solid and relevant theological foundation for pastors in carrying out pastoral ministry in the midst of the challenges of today's church.

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