

The Good Shepherd as a Model for Missional Leadership: An Intertextual Study of John 10 and Matthew 28

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ABSTRACT

An inter-textual study of the Good Shepherd in John 10 and missional model in Matthew 28 serves as a focal point for understanding pastoral leadership that is embedded in missional enterprises. By examining the pastoral and missional themes in these passages, this paper aims at developing a model for missional leadership that emphasizes sacrificial love, pastoral care and guidance through biblical analysis of the passages in focus and demonstrates how the self –sacrifice, relational and authoritative model of Jesus as the Good shepherd finds resonance in the commissioning mandate to make disciples of all nations. Hence, this essay argues for a holistic model of pastoral leadership that integrates compassionate care with active mission. In an era of increasing fragmentation in ministry emphasis, this synthesis provides a Jesus’ pattern for 21st-century ecclesia praxis leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges confronting today’s church demand a recalibration of leadership models. In an age where leadership is often measured by charisma or organizational success, the New Testament offers a counter-model—**the Good Shepherd** who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10), and **the Risen Lord** who sends disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28).

There are different challenges facing the contemporary church in Africa. One of the challenges is a two prong challenge: how to engage in effective mission while also providing authentic pastoral care. Some ministry contexts today tend to separate these responsibilities—some churches prioritizing aggressive evangelistic strategies at the expense of discipleship and nurture, while others focus so heavily on care that they neglect outward mission. This imbalance create a dichotomy between the great commission and pastoral care hence, there is the need for the church to return to Jesus’ pattern of shepherding and sending as highlighted in Matthew 28 and John 10.

In addition, this paper seeks to explore the inter-textual relationship between Matthew 28 and John 10, as a theological and pastoral response to these issues. It posits that Jesus’ identity as the Good Shepherd (John 10) and His role as the Missional Lord (Matthew 28) together form a cohesive paradigm for leadership that is both compassionate and commissioned. This synthesis presents a powerful and timely model for contemporary church leaders striving to balance care and mission in their leadership.

The purpose of this study is to connect the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in John 10 with the Matthean image of the Resurrected Jesus commissioning his disciples into missions, this serves as composite model for pastoral leadership that integrates both pastoral care and missionary enterprise, This paper is significant for theological educators, church planters, pastors, and ministry leaders seeking a biblically grounded framework for compassionate pastoral leadership and missional engagement.

2. INTERTEXTUAL METHODOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK

Inter-textual analysis as developed in literary theory and biblical studies refers to the ways in which texts echo, allude to, or inform each other. Julia Kristeva introduced the term to describe the mosaic nature of texts, and in biblical studies, inter-textuality has become a fruitful method for exploring thematic and theological coherence across canonically separate but ideologically connected passages.¹

Inter-textuality, a tool increasingly used in biblical studies, recognizes the web of scriptural relationships that allow texts to illuminate one another.² This essay employs canonical inter-textuality to read John 10 and Matthew 28 together, not as isolated New Testament narratives but as theological counterparts that together shape pastoral leadership. John 10 emphasizes intimate, sacrificial leadership while Matthew 28 commissions disciples for global mission. The synthesis offers a paradigm: pastoral care as the foundation of authentic mission. Reading John 10 and Matthew 28 in dialogue, not by asserting literary dependence, but by exploring thematic resonance and theological integration. This method allows us to discern a pastoral-missional model that emerges from Jesus' own identity and practice across Gospel traditions. Adopting a synchronic inter-textual approach to reading John 10 and Matthew 28 in dialogue allows us to discern a pastoral-missional model that emerges from Jesus own identity and practice across Gospel traditions.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66–68.

² Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:792–800

Hermeneutically, this paper engages in canonical interpretation, recognizing the coherence and unity of the Scriptures while allowing each Gospel to speak in its unique voice. Narrative criticism and theological exegesis are also employed to trace how the character of Jesus in these texts informs a model of leadership that is both caring and missional in its outlook.

3. JOHN 10: THE COMPASSIONATE SHEPHERD

In John 10:1–18, Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep, leads them, and lays down His life for them. This passage forms part of a larger contrast between Jesus and the false shepherds (cf. John 9), drawing upon rich Old Testament imagery of God as Israel’s Shepherd (cf. Ezekiel 34; Psalms 23). A Good shepherd is the one that takes good care of the flock and attend to their needs. The Pastors are challenged to be diligent to know the condition of their flocks and sacrifice for them as Jesus did in John 10. John 10 has provided some leadership themes to reflect upon. These are as follows:

Relational Knowledge: “I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (v.14) speaks to the deep, intimate bond between leader and follower.

Sacrificial Love: Unlike hirelings, Jesus lays down His life for the sheep (v.11), embodying servant leadership and self-giving care.

Protective Leadership: The Shepherd guards against predators, ensuring safety and security (vv. 12–13) of the sheep. Good shepherds protect the sheep. An example is David in the wilderness who fought the lion and the bear that intruded into the sheepfold and deliver the lambs from their mouth not minding the cost of his own life.

Inclusive Vision: Jesus speaks of “other sheep not of this fold” (v.16), signaling a mission beyond the immediate community—

a precursor to Gentile inclusion this implies cross-cultural mission. This portrait is more than metaphor; it is a theological statement about divine leadership. Jesus as Shepherd embodies covenantal care, vulnerability, and fidelity. His leadership is not utilitarian but deeply incarnational.³ His leadership here is not about control but presence, care, and redemptive suffering.⁴

4. MATTHEW 28: THE MISSIONAL GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16–20, known as the Great Commission, presents the risen Christ sending His disciples to make more disciples of all nations. This climactic conclusion to Matthew’s Gospel is missional in scope and theological in depth. The literal meaning of this passage is that anywhere you find yourself make sure you disciple people in Christ and as you do this I will be with always. This missionary statement by Jesus is essential for the Christians today. Christians are not to be passive but active participant in mission.⁵ The church should use various strategy to reach out to all people thus fulfilling the mandate Jesus has commissioned them.

From the passage in Matthew 28, let us examine some of the leadership principles we can find there: Firstly, we find Christological Authority:

Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (v.18) this is the foundation for all missional activities. The authority is given to Jesus whom he in turn delegated to his disciples when he commissioned them to go

³ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:792–800.

⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 191.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part Two* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 200–202.

and make disciples of all nations. The missionary activities is solely grounded on the commission in the sovereign reign of Christ.

Secondly, it is discipleship Focus: The statement by Jesus in Matthew 28:19 emphasized converts spiritual formation over mere conversion. The disciples are enjoined to make disciples of all ethnic groups and languages wherever they find themselves. This commission transcends geo-cultural barriers. It is imperative to “make disciples” (v.19) and not just convert.

Thirdly, it is Global in focus: The phrase “all nations” from the Greek perspectives *ethnos* means all ethnic groups. The Gospel is to be preached to all ethnic groups. This commissioning or the Gospel mandate goes beyond Jewish boundaries. It extends to the Gentiles mission thus fulfilling the Abraham promise.

Fourthly, it is instructional packaged: Jesus told the disciples to teach their converts and make them to observe all things he has commanded them. This implies doctrinal, ethical, and community formation. (“Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (v.20)

Finally, is the assurance of the abiding presence of Jesus: Jesus told the disciples “I am with you always” affirms the enduring presence of Christ through the Spirit with them? There is no room for fear or intimidation as we go about the work of the Lord.

This commission flows directly from the resurrection event and reorients the disciples from fear to mission. Jesus, having defeated death, empowers His followers to go forth in His name with His authority and presence.

Summary

In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus charges the disciples with a universal mission. The passage is grounded in His authority and presence.

Key Missional Aspects:

- **Universal Authority:** “All authority...has been given to me” (v. 18).
- **Global Scope:** “All nations” (v. 19).
- **Formational Goal:** Not just converts, but **disciples**.
- **Pastoral Element:** Teaching and baptizing involve nurturing, shepherding and formation.
- **Abiding Presence:** “I am with you always” (v. 20) links back to the shepherd’s nearness.

Missional leadership in this light is not programmatic but **relational and formational**.

5. INTEGRATING CARE AND MISSION IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

When reading through John 10 and Matthew 28 together, they reveal a comprehensive vision of leadership. The same Jesus who lays down His life for His sheep is the one who sends His followers to make disciples. Mission without compassion becomes mechanical and harsh. Care without mission risks insularity and stagnation.

The Good Shepherd is also the Great Commissioner. This integration of care and mission suggests the following principles for leadership:

Holistic Discipleship: Leaders must both nurture (John 10) and equip for mission (Matthew 28).

Servant Authority: Leadership should be based on self-giving love, not authoritarian control.

Missional Care: Pastoral care must prepare the flock for engagement with the world.

Community Expansion: Jesus' mention of "other sheep" and "all nations" points to inclusive, boundary-crossing ministry.⁶

This integration addresses contemporary church tendencies toward specialization. Instead, the Gospel invites a synthesis rooted in the person of Christ.

In summary

The Good Shepherd model corrects two extremes:

- **Care without mission** breeds insularity.
- **Mission without care** leads to burnout and superficiality.

Reading John 10 and Matthew 28 together shows:

- **Missional care:** The shepherd doesn't only guard the sheep but seeks others.
- **Pastoral mission:** Discipleship is not an event but a journey of love and learning.

This dual lens reflects the ministry legacy of **Rev. Dr. Akanji**, whose leadership balances doctrinal faithfulness, pastoral empathy, and strategic mission.

⁶ Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 83–85

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR 21ST CENTURY CHURCH LEADERS

Today's church leaders operate in a rapidly changing context where globalization, secularization, digital disruption, emotional fatigue, and doctrinal confusion are rife. These dynamics necessitate a leadership model that is theologically grounded, emotionally intelligent, and missionally focused. Church leaders are to be example of Christ to all; they are to care, guide and protect the flocks under them and strategically engage in mission activities. Let us examine some of the practical implications of this integrated model:⁷

Leadership Formation: Seminaries and Bible colleges should train leaders in both pastoral theology and missional praxis.

1. Team-Based Ministry: Sharing leadership responsibilities (Eph 4:11–13) can balance care and mission. Advocating for models of shared leadership where pastors are not burdened, and lay people are empowered
2. Congregational Culture: Churches should cultivate communities that care for one another deeply while reaching out actively.
3. Personal Discipleship: Pastors themselves must embody the dual identity of shepherd and missionary.
4. Contextual Challenges: urbanization, digital culture, burnout, church decline, generational gaps and consumer Christianity are contextual issues facing the church today.

The integration of care and mission ensures that the church is not only a place of healing but also a force for transformation in the world.

⁷ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 25.

7. CONCLUSION

This inter-textual study of John 10 and Matthew 28 presents a robust, Christ-centered model for leadership that integrates pastoral care with missionary commission. In Jesus, we find a Shepherd who knows and nurtures His flock, and a Lord who sends them out with power and purpose. Such a model challenges contemporary leaders to transcend false dichotomies and to embrace the fullness of their calling. As shepherds who send and missionaries who care, leaders today can reflect the character of Christ in both word and deed.

The integration of John 10 and Matthew 28 reveals a leadership model both pastoral and prophetic. The Good Shepherd does not only care—He sends. And the Sender remains the Shepherd who abides with his sheep always.

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