

A Practical Handbook for Pastoral Friends

# THE CALL TO CARE

Geoff & Mary Norridge and friends





What some church leaders say about...

# The Call to Care

## A Practical Handbook for Pastoral Friends

Geoff and Mary Norridge are gold mines of wisdom and insight in how to care for God's people, born out of decades of listening to and learning from the Good Shepherd. This excellent book contains much of this wisdom gleaned over years and is produced here in a way that is both accessible and inspiring. This is a timely book, full of timeless principles.

**RICHARD & ANNA ELLWOOD**

TEAM LEADERS, SALT & LIGHT ADVANCE CHURCHES, UK

*The Call to Care* is profound, but not heavy; challenging, but not discouraging; practical, but not prescriptive. I appreciate how Geoff and Mary's personal testimonies and insights are blended with the experiences of others, offering practical tools grounded in a rich understanding of Scripture. This makes it very readable and accessible. They talk about being a 'pastoral friend' and that is the whole tone of the book. They don't come as experts telling us what to do, but as friends sharing accumulated wisdom. That better equips us to walk with those in our broken and confused world who are turning to God and the church to find help and meaning. It is a very timely book, and I thoroughly recommend it.

**SUE CATHIE**

COMMUNAUTÉ CHRÉTIENNE DE BRUXELLES, BELGIUM

Geoff and Mary Norridge have long embodied the spirit of pioneering leadership grounded in deep dependence on the Holy Spirit. This practical and biblically-rooted handbook reflects decades of faithful pastoral experience and offers a rich blend of theology, wisdom and applied tools for those called to care. Their authentic voice and collaborative approach shine through every chapter, equipping both seasoned leaders and everyday believers to become pastoral friends in a rapidly changing world. I wholeheartedly commend this book as a timely and Spirit-led resource for the Church today.

**REV DR GUICHUN JUN**

YOIDO PENTECOSTAL RESEARCH TUTOR AND OCMS STAGE LEADER

OXFORD CENTRE FOR MISSION STUDIES, UK



We worked with Geoff and Mary on the leadership of Oxfordshire Community Churches for many years. All that they impart in this superb manual of pastoral care is not theory, but practice proven over years of pastoring many people in our group of churches, and equipping others to care for their friends. This is wonderful material, which can be used by individuals, or which could be the subject of discussion material for pastoral teams. How great to have this deposit from them of a life message that has been worth its weight in gold to so many people!

**STEVE & LORRAINE THOMAS**

EUROPEAN TEAM LEADERS, SALT & LIGHT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

This book is a timely and thorough resource that equips believers to respond to God's essential call to care for and shepherd his people. It offers biblically grounded, practical guidance for nurturing both the young and old in their journey with Jesus. With wisdom, insight and a rich collection of tools, Geoff and Mary help strengthen God's people by empowering others to walk with Jesus' heart and in his design for true pastoral care.

**DOUG & DENISE KREIGHBAUM**

LEADERS, COAST-TO-COAST (C2C) FAMILY OF CHURCHES, KANSAS CITY, USA

Geoff and Mary, my Bible College teachers of three decades ago, have always been equippers of God's Word. This pastoral manual carries their heart of building and equipping the Body of Christ. It is a comprehensive guide to pastoral care within the church. I found reading it was a wonderful experience. Every person involved in pastoral care needs to have a copy of this handbook, whether pastor, elder, small group leader or pastoral friend.

**JOEMON JOSEPH**

TEAM LEADER, SALT & LIGHT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL  
SENIOR PASTOR, GATEWAY MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL, INDIA

A broken, hurting world needs shepherds, lots of them, who will love and care for them as Jesus does, and attract them to Jesus by loving them like Jesus. That's the missional perspective on pastoral ministry that this book champions, and it's dangerous! Please don't read it if you want to stay safe, in church, with nice people just like you. This book will get you going, looking, seeking alongside the Good Shepherd. It's about a love that is self-sacrificing, generous and brave. Another thing we love about the book is it's authentic; Geoff and Mary have lived what they have written. The pages drip with the distilled wisdom of experience and provide practical encouragement for all who care for others or aspire to. It's indispensable!

**DR RICK & LIZ THOMAS**

PASTORAL TEAM LEADERS, 'TAKING GROUND' GROUP OF CHURCHES, UK



Geoff and Mary Norridge's resourceful book provides Christ-centred pastoral care, integrating biblical wisdom, practical strategies and real-life experiences. It equips readers to support others through many life issues as well as encouraging their spiritual growth. This book is a valuable guide for re-imagining pastoral care beyond the church by demonstrating Christ's love in everyday settings.

**DR ANDERSON & LYDIA MOYO**

TEAM LEADERS, MOMENTUM SPHERE OF CHURCHES, UK

*The Call to Care* gives us the principles of pastoral care as well as providing leaders and pastoral friends with the nuts and bolts to care for God's people. This is a much-needed book and should serve as a text-book in our churches and in our Bible schools.

**STANLEY & ESME MEHTA**

FOUNDERS, GATEWAY MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL, BENGALURU, INDIA

When people at large in many nations suffer from identity crises, mental health problems and scarcity of caring resources, Geoff and Mary offer the church the benefit of their hard-won experience and insight. They have cared for people well over decades and this book is a gift to leaders who seek to equip the saints, especially the shepherds and pastoral carers, to serve God's people well.

**ALED GRIFFITH**

TEAM LEADER, SYNERGY CHURCHES, UK

In *The Call to Care*, Geoff & Mary Norridge and Friends have gifted the church a precious heritage that will strengthen pastoral carers in their service for the Lord. The Word-based principles espoused in this manual, together with the strong emphasis on practical application, speak of authors who have lived what they teach. The emphasis throughout on both the shepherd/carer and the care of the people is in line with the charge to take heed to ourselves and to all the flock (Acts 20:28). The daunting task of the Holy Spirit-given charge to care for God's people seems that much more achievable with this manual helping us along the way.

**PERCY & FELICIA KADZIYANIKE**

LEADERS, S&L INUKA AFRIKA CHURCHES

LEADERS, FAITH MINISTRIES, ZIMBABWE



# The Call to Care

**A Practical Handbook for Pastoral Friends**

Geoff & Mary Norridge  
and friends



FLGW Publishing  
Oxford, UK





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Published by FLGW Publishing  
The King's Centre, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES, UK  
[flgw.publishing@gmail.com](mailto:flgw.publishing@gmail.com)

Printed by Book Printing UK [www.bookprintinguk.com](http://www.bookprintinguk.com)  
Remus House, Coltsfoot Drive, Peterborough, PE2 9BF, UK

Printed in Great Britain

Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher and authors assume no responsibility for errors or omissions. Neither is any liability assumed for damages resulting from the use of information contained herein.

ISBN 978-1-0369-3185-8





*Dedicated to  
Barney Coombs  
(1937 – 2018)  
A father in the Lord  
and always with a pastor's heart*





*‘We are all mere beggars  
showing other beggars where to find bread.’*

Martin Luther  
(1483 – 1546)



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# Introduction

*The LORD is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*The LORD is good to all;  
he has compassion on all he has made.*

*Psalms 145:8-9 (NIV)*

Isn't it amazing how a single encounter with the Lord can significantly change the course of a person's life?

In the summer of 1975, we attended our first-ever Bible week in the English Lake District. The main speaker was Canadian Bible teacher Ern Baxter, and his theme for the week was '*The King and His Army*', drawing from the Old Testament story of Saul and David. At the end of one session, Ern felt that the Lord wanted to speak to some people and encouraged those not to rush off but to wait on the Lord. Geoff was one of those.

He remembers where he was sitting, at the back of the marquee, when he became aware of the Holy Spirit's presence resting on him. As Geoff waited in silence, he clearly heard the Lord speak to him – not in an audible voice, but nevertheless clearly: '*Geoff, look after my sheep.*'

By that time, we had been living in community with our friends, Dave and Chris Richards for almost two years. From a weekly charismatic meeting in our shared home, a house church was established and grew rapidly. (The lounge could seat a hundred at a squeeze.) Subsequently, Dave left his teaching post to be a full-time pastor; in due course, Geoff followed suit.

It was all very exciting; but we actually knew very little about 'looking after God's sheep'. Over the years that followed, through a variety of means, including Bible study, books, conferences and Bible weeks and, of course, people (too numerous to mention), we learned more of the ways of the Lord. In spite of our lack of experience, ignorance and many mistakes, we saw





him graciously save, set free and heal many people as they grew in maturity – including ourselves.

After a couple of decades, it was Geoff's privilege to lead a team which developed and ran a Pastoral Training Course to equip anyone in our UK network of churches, *Salt & Light Ministries*, with a heart to care. The course ran for ten full Saturdays a year; in addition, each month participants would meet with an elder of their church and complete written assignments. Lectures were delivered by the team; we drew in specialists to cover areas such as depression, stress management and pastoral theology. In all, we ran fourteen courses in ten cities and towns across England, ranging from Newcastle in the north-east to Exeter in the south-west. Over 600 people completed the course and even now, several years later, we still get feedback from participants about the value of the course. Some of the material in this book includes modules developed for those courses.

## THE AIM

This is a handbook, not a story – although a lot of stories are included by way of illustration.

It has practical resources and ways to care for and equip God's people individually. We believe that it will be a useful reference book for you over many years.

It is intended to...

- encourage anyone with a heart to care to be a 'Pastoral Friend' to one, two or a few
- be a reminder to pastors, elders, leaders, small group leaders and pastorally-motivated people of pastoral attitudes, ways and means

Any book like this cannot cover every aspect of pastoral care; that would require a small library! So, like any authors faced with such a challenge, we've had to be selective. We've tried to pick those aspects which we have found to be particularly helpful in nearly six decades of pastoral care.

## Biblical basis

Each chapter has an introductory Bible passage. Please don't ignore it or skip over it – it sets the scene for what follows.



As far as possible, each aspect is clearly biblically-based. The New International Version (NIV) is mainly used, but other Bible translations and paraphrases are used where they add clarity.

## **Names**

By way of illustration, many real-life stories are included. Sometimes the person's actual name is used, but where that is not appropriate, names have been changed.

# **STRUCTURE**

## **Preface**

There are reports of remarkable Holy Spirit activity in very many parts of the earth, especially with Generation Z. We begin the book with a prophetic sense that *'there is a sound of heavy rain'* (1 Kings 18:41). The long-promised harvest is at hand; now is the time to train and equip those who are willing to nurture and disciple new-born believers.

## **Prologue**

Our starting point is a clear biblical foundation of pastoral theology by Bible-teacher, Mike Beaumont, using Psalm 23 as framework. Pastoral theology is, quite simply, the application of Christian truth to pastoral situations; it will help us to keep Christ-centred.

## **Section I: An Overview of Pastoral Care**

We see that pastoral care reflects the heart of Father God – so it is a high calling. Our example is, of course, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who demonstrated that it is a personal calling that involves nurturing and guiding God's people. It's not limited to addressing needs but includes equipping believers for service and fostering unity within the church.

This overview section ends with some guidelines of how to become a Pastoral Friend.

## **Section II: Ten Sayings to Care by**

These ten essential sayings have echoed through our brains these many years; they are primarily about thinking and attitudes.

The first five concern our personal relationship with the Lord and how we view ourselves; the second five are to do with how we view people and how we relate to them in a pastoral setting.



### Section III: Ten Pastoral Tools

We have chosen just ten of the many ‘tools’ which are useful in caring for the Lord’s people. They range from ways to help someone develop their walk with Jesus to some basic relational and counselling skills and how to bring freedom from spiritual influences.

Most are tools which the person being cared for can also embrace and apply to their own lives. All of them have a wide application and require dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

### Section IV: Ten Relational Matters

For the final section, we have chosen ten special topics, each one written by someone who has personal experience and expertise. They include practical guidelines of how to express pastoral care in specific life stages or times of crisis.

## INTRODUCING OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

Our guest contributors have each proven the faithfulness of God over many decades. What they bring to this book is borne out of their particular giftings and expertise, along with their personal rich life experiences, some of which have been or still are very challenging.

**MIKE BEAUMONT** has over 50 years’ experience as a pastor, Bible teacher, lecturer, author and broadcaster, working with churches and seminaries around the world. He has written Bible reference books and Bible editions, and is published in 25 languages. He and his wife Liz are long-time friends and co-workers with Geoff and Mary. They make their home in the Teesside area of north-east England.

**DR JO HARGREAVES** is a psychotherapist, writer and speaker who integrates theology and therapy to help people pursue emotional and spiritual wholeness. As founder of *Faith Filled Therapy*, Jo creates spaces where neuroscience and Scripture intersect, offering insight into mental health, identity and spiritual formation. Jo and her husband are pastors in *Alive Church*, Lincoln, UK

**ALISON BANCROFT** lives in Oxfordshire, UK, where she runs a construction company. For several years she was part of the pastoral team in an Oxford-based Bible College. She enjoys pastoring and mentoring in her local church



and works as a counsellor. Alison is particularly interested in the overlap between Christian spirituality and counselling.

**MARK NORRIDGE** has over 20 years' experience in church leadership and church planting. Having worked as an engineer, he studied theology and became a bi-vocational church planter. Along with his wife Maddy, he co-leads *River Collective*, a movement of churches in Northamptonshire. He is Principal of *King's School of Theology*, delivering part-time theological training that equips all of God's people for life and ministry.

**JOHN ELLWOOD** spent most of his working life in education. In particular, he spent thirty years at *The King's School*, Witney (an independent Christian school) in a wide variety of roles, from classroom teacher to Principal. He has also been involved in church leadership with Oxfordshire Community Churches, alongside his wife, Celia, for many years.

**CELIA ELLWOOD** was born and brought up in Cheshire but has lived in Oxfordshire since moving there in 1974 to work with *Open Doors*. She is married to John and they have four children and ten grandchildren. She and John have been in leadership roles in Oxfordshire Community Churches for over 40 years. They have been good friends with Geoff and Mary for almost 50 years.

**CATHIE VINCENT** has had a life marked by a big 'Yes' to Jesus and the love of community. As a seasoned educationalist, with experience in all spheres of education, she was invited to help set up the new *Iris University* in Pemba, Mozambique with Heidi and Rolland Baker. Now based back in the UK, she travels and teaches with her husband. They make their home in Wiltshire, UK.

**SARAH BAILEY** taught in a London primary school before joining the staff team at her church. Debilitating chronic health conditions followed a viral infection. Although predominantly housebound, Sarah remains active in church, co-leading a small group and sharing her prophetic gift and heart for intercession in and beyond her church family. Sarah lives in Oxfordshire, UK.

**COLIN GREEN** studied education and theology before being a teacher in a Christian school for 34 years. Then God called him to full-time ministry as a chaplain to the bereaved. In the first 18 years of that, he conducted over 2,000 funeral services, overwhelmingly for people on the fringe of church



life or with no church connections at all. Colin is often assisted by his wife, Sheila, who is trained in theology and counselling

## OUR PRAYER

We firmly believe that there is nothing so wonderful – nor a greater privilege – than ‘*serving the purposes of God in our own generation*’ (Acts 13:36). We pray that this book will be both a provocation and an inspiration to you, the reader, to ‘*volunteer freely on the day of the Lord’s power*’ (Psalm 110:3).

Geoff and Mary Norridge  
Oxford, UK

October 2025

# PREFACE

Geoff Norridge









## Preface

# *Climate Change: The Sound of Heavy Rain*

Geoff Norridge

*'Up on your feet! Eat and drink – celebrate!  
Rain is on the way; I hear it coming.'  
1 Kings 18:41 (MSG)*

There's a sound rising across the whole earth. It's a sound in the Spirit. Are you hearing it? It's the sound of heavy rain. There have been whispers for a while, but now it is increasing in volume. What was a cloud the size of a man's hand is growing ever larger (1 Kings 18:44).

In America early in 2023, a remarkable thing happened at Asbury University. A regular chapel service ended, but then a small group of students continued to pray and worship. It turned into a 24/7 sixteen-day event. About 50,000 visitors came to the small town of Wilmore, Kentucky, (population about 6,000) to be part of what was happening in the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

In the decade to 2025, Christians in India increased from 2.5 per cent to about 5.8 per cent of the population. Missiologist Peter Wagner says that some parts may be as much as 25 per cent Christian. *Operation Mobilisation*, a large missionary group in India, has seen significant growth to include 3,000 congregations. This is a notable increase from the 300 congregations they had previously. The Indian church is growing at a faster rate than the Hindu population.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past four decades, Christianity has grown faster in China than anywhere else in the world. A Boston University research professor



estimates that the Christian community there has grown from 1 million to 100 million.<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the 20th century, the vast continent of Africa was home to less than 10 million Christians. By 2000, there were more than 383 million. In 2020 more Christians lived in Africa than any other region of the world. It is estimated that now over 734 million Christians live there.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking at the end of 2023, the Iran government Minister of Culture described the fall in mosque attendance in the Islamic Republic of Iran as ‘highly alarming’. A senior cleric revealed that 50,000 out of 75,000 mosques nationwide had been closed as a consequence.<sup>5</sup> The charity, *Open Doors*, estimates that there are over 800,000 practising Christians among a population of 90 million.<sup>6</sup> Other estimates range from one to three million. In May 2025, the UK’s *Bible Society* reported that, in spite of the ban, as many as 2,000 Iranians a day were embracing Jesus. Even the Iran Government admits that Christianity is growing and Islam is shrinking.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to the anticipated slowdown, the Christian global population is projected to climb from over 2.52 billion in 2024 to more than 3 billion by 2050.<sup>8</sup> (The current world population is about 6 billion.)

## Generation Z

It seems that it’s those in Generation Z (Gen Z or Zoomers – the ones born between 1997 and 2010) that are responding remarkably to the Gospel. Gen Z’s identity has been shaped by the digital age, climate anxiety, a shifting financial landscape and COVID-19. They’re known as ‘digital natives’ – the first generation to grow up with the internet.

In secular France, so many students in Toulouse have responded to the Gospel that a young Catholic priest, Father Antoine Laviale, said that one of his problems was coping with the numbers asking to be baptised. Many have been baptised by total immersion. Laviale said, ‘We must learn not to cling to tradition, but to the Lord Jesus Christ.’ In 2024, 40 wanted baptism; at Easter 2025, 800 were baptised and a further 1,000 at Pentecost.<sup>9</sup>

In early 2025, many UK national newspapers carried long articles about the rapidly growing interest of Zoomers in Christianity. *The i Paper* carried the headline, ‘*Bible sales rise as Generation Z gets into the Holy Spirit*,’ reporting Bible sales rising by 87 per cent between 2019 and 2024. It continued that only 13 per cent of Gen Z would say they are atheist, compared with 25 per cent of Gen X.



In late 2018, *Bible Society* conducted a survey of 19,000 adults in England and Wales; at the end of 2024, they carried out another survey, this time with 13,000 adults. The report, *A Quiet Revival*, published at Easter 2025, was extensively reported by the UK media. It showed that church attendance had risen from 8 per cent in 2018 to 12 per cent in 2024, an amazing 50 per cent increase. Gen Z was leading the massive rise in church attendance. Six years previously, 4 per cent of Zoomers attended church, but in 2024 it had increased to 16 per cent, a remarkable four times as many. In addition, more men than women were attending.<sup>10</sup>

In an explanation of why is this happening, the report identifies a ‘change of climate’ with a notable shift in the cultural attitudes towards Christianity in the public eye. There has been a shift away from hostility to apathy and, eventually, to openness and the quest for belonging.<sup>11</sup>

There *is* a change of climate: it’s the sound of a heavy rain!

In a podcast, Stephen Foster, rector of St Aldates Church, Oxford, reported a significant move of God among 16 to 35 year-olds. Some young people with no church background turned up at a youth night. One of them, a 17 year-old girl, related ‘a crazy dream’ she’d had the night before; she’d heard a voice saying that she should read about Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. She woke up in the middle of the night, thinking, ‘I don’t think we even have a Bible in the house. I don’t know how I’m going to do it.’ There on the bedside table was a Bible open at Luke’s Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

We could continue with the signs of greater Holy Spirit activity in our own group of churches (albeit not on the same scale as some of those stories). They include increased attendances, reinvigorated worship, more new birth, more baptisms, an asylum-seeker baptised in the Spirit and immediately speaking in tongues, healings, deliverances, early teens encountering the Spirit, senior school students setting up Christian Union groups in their schools, young people on fire for Jesus and growing interest in going to the mission field. The stories are coming in thick and fast.

### **Workers for the harvest**

The report, *A Quiet Revival*, found that 37 per cent of Gen Z are interested in learning more about the Bible. Anglican theologian, Rev Dr Ian Paul discussed the report in a podcast with its co-author, Dr Rhiannon McAleer, lead researcher at *Bible Society*. She said:



There is a great need for discipleship. These young Christians are showing tremendous enthusiasm, interest in the Bible and high faith confidence, but there are some warning signs. They are more likely to say that they struggle to find people to learn from and struggle to find appropriate resources around the Bible. If we're looking at sustainable growth, we need to be putting in the work now. We know from wider research that churches that grow are churches that plan to grow.

There is an openness in the population, particularly younger people, who are approaching the Bible and Christianity with less cultural baggage than previous generations; they are open to learning more and to finding meaning...

You don't need to have all the answers, but you do have to plan for discipleship.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus said to his disciples, '*Wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest*' (John 4:35) and '*Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field*' (Matthew 9:37-38).

The harvest can be reaped; but among the workers needed are those ready to nurture new-born believers, to pastor and care for them and to disciple them. NOW is the time to train and equip such people.

The Psalmist wrote:

*Your people will volunteer freely on the day of Your power;  
In holy splendour, from the womb of the dawn,  
Your youth are to You as the dew.*

Psalm 110:3 (NASB®)

There is a change of climate: it's the sound of a heavy rain!

### **Food for Thought**

1: Do you personally perceive the spiritual 'change of climate'? How does it impact your approach to pastoral care?

2: There's a surge of interest in Christianity among Gen Z. How might you be involved in discipling and supporting this generation?

3: The need for workers is clear. How can you personally prepare to care for and disciple new believers in your setting?





# PROLOGUE

Mike Beaumont

## **INTRODUCTION**

Some people shy away from theology, thinking it's only for academics and leaders (and, of course, theologians). But theology simply means 'the study of God', and everyone has a theology: what they believe (or don't believe) about the existence of God – and that's the beginning of theology.

Pastoral care without a biblical basis is little different to its secular counterpart. If we are to care for God's people in God's way, then we need a biblical pastoral theology.

Pastoral theology is, quite simply, the application of Christian truth to pastoral situations; it will help us to keep a Christ-centredness in our care of a Fellow Believer.

So before we look at practical aspects of pastoral care, our starting point has to be to lay a clear biblical foundation of Pastoral Theology – and for that, we welcome our first guest contributor, Mike Beaumont.



## Prologue

# *Following the Good Shepherd: A Theology of Pastoral Care*

Mike Beaumont

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is  
— his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*Romans 12:2 (NIV)*

When the Apostle Paul wanted to challenge divisions between Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome, he didn't start by addressing bad attitudes, but by giving them good theology.

The first 11 chapters of Romans, his letter to them, are profound theology, paving the way for his practical and pastoral applications of it in chapters 12—16.

Likewise, when he wanted Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their differences (Philippians 4:2-3), he didn't start by sharing good counsel, but by laying out solid theology centred in Christ.

When John wanted to encourage Christians and urge them to stand firm in a time of great persecution, he did it by showing them in Revelation that Christ is firmly seated on his throne and that nothing – absolutely nothing, not even the worst the devil can come up with – can get him off that throne.

Good pastoral care starts always with good pastoral theology.





## WHAT IS PASTORAL THEOLOGY?

Pastoral theology is, quite simply, the application of Christian truth to pastoral situations. The trouble is, we live in a culture today that is very suspicious of the idea of ‘truth’. ‘My truth’ and ‘your truth’ – fine. But THE truth? Such claims to exclusivity are rapidly rejected. That scepticism has a way of infiltrating the church, with Christians themselves sometimes doubting whether there is such a thing as eternal truth that applies to all people in all times and in all situations. But if we truly believe that the Bible is God’s Word – and if we don’t, we’re in trouble, for that opens the door to us picking the bits we like and rejecting the rest – then the answer is, *‘Yes! There is such a thing as eternal truth.’* Pastoral Theology seeks to re-establish that conviction through providing believers with a firm foundation so they can become the person that God wants them to be.

### It all starts in the mind

‘Theology’ simply means ‘studying about God’; and the more we study him and get to know him and his ways, the more our issues get resolved and the more Christ-like we become. Our lives flourish, not through the endless pursuit of experiences, but through solid theological understanding. That’s why the apostles always targeted the mind first as the way into facilitating genuine and lasting heart-change. It’s as we allow our minds (not our feelings or emotions) to be renewed that we are transformed (Romans 12:2).

Pastoral theology, then, is simply about helping people to understand God and his ways better through engaging with his Word. By so doing, they can confront what needs to change and so reach maturity in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

### Pushing people into God!

Pastoral theology pushes people into God to find their answers, rather than trying to find them in other people or things. It does this by establishing strong biblical foundations in their lives and churches, showing them that answers to personal, communal and even national problems can be found in a right theological understanding of God, his purposes and his ways.

There are many ways of doing this. But one of the easiest – and certainly one of the easiest to remember – is to do it out of the best-known psalm, Psalm 23.



## PSALM 23 – A FRAMEWORK FOR PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Each verse in Psalm 23 is rich with life-changing truth about God:

Verse	What it tells us about God
<i>The Lord is my shepherd,</i>	The God of covenant relationship
<i>I shall not be in want.</i>	The God of endless supply
<i>He makes me lie down in green pastures,</i>	The God who gives rest
<i>he leads me beside quiet waters,</i>	The God who refreshes
<i>he restores my soul.</i>	The God of restoration and healing
<i>He guides me in paths of righteousness</i>	The God of guidance and righteousness
<i>for his name's sake.</i>	The God who always has purpose
<i>Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,</i>	The God who tests us for our good
<i>I will fear no evil,</i>	The God of faithfulness and protection
<i>for you are with me;</i>	The God who is always there
<i>your rod and your staff, they comfort me.</i>	The God who disciplines us
<i>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.</i>	The God who provides and honours
<i>You anoint my head with oil;</i>	The God of anointing
<i>my cup overflows.</i>	The God of abundance
<i>Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,</i>	The God who brings blessing
<i>and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.</i>	The God who gives eternal security

All this is rich truth and is life-changing! So let's take a closer look at it.



## THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD (VERSE 1)

At the very heart of pastoral care stands the need to get people to understand that it is *God himself* who cares for us. If they can get hold of this, then it will utterly transform their attitudes to what they face, to what comes their way, to the problems life throws up. Whatever it is, God has committed himself to shepherd us through it!

This picture of God as our shepherd goes back to Old Testament times (e.g. Genesis 48:15; Psalm 28:9, Isaiah 40:11, Ezekiel 34:11-16) – and with that, the fact that God's people are his sheep – cared for, provided for and secure (e.g. Psalm 100:3). The New Testament continues this theme, revealing Jesus as '*the great shepherd of the sheep*' (Hebrews 13:20); and Jesus himself, of course, said he was '*the good shepherd*' (John 10:1-18).

### A Covenant God

In telling us exactly who this shepherd is, the Hebrew of Psalm 23:1 uses not the generic word for 'God' (*el* or *elohim*), but rather the covenant name of God, 'the LORD' – '*Yahweh*'. This was the name revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 3), a revelation that changed his life. The name means '*HE IS*' and is a reminder, not only that God is always there in every time and place and situation, but that his very being is unchanging and unchangeable, trustworthy and dependable. It is *this* God who makes covenant (binding, unbreakable agreement) with us and so will never let us go.

That day, Moses encountered a big God who is over us. Once we have found a big God who is over us, then we will never succumb to what is around us.

### 'Covenant' and 'Grace'

The concept of covenant is central to the Christian faith. It lies at the very heart of God's *being* (he is, after all, a Trinity) and God's *doing*, for he operates out of covenant in all he does. This covenant is always a covenant of grace – that is, God always takes the initiative. That's how it has been since Adam and Eve first messed up. God responded to their disobedience with a promise of redemption that was unconditional, highlighting that human works cannot earn his favour. That's reflected in every subsequent covenant – whether with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, or the new covenant in Christ; every one of them is a covenant of grace.