



‘From want to dwelling’: A stylistic analysis of Psalm 23

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 23 is frequently approached as a short devotional text whose meaning is self-evident, yet its reassuring effect depends on carefully patterned language. This study offers an integrated stylistic reading of the psalm as a movement from lack to settled dwelling, showing how reassurance is built clause by clause rather than asserted in general terms. Using the King James Version as the textual base, the analysis segments the psalm into labelled clauses and codes each unit for lexis, syntax, evaluation, figuration, and cohesion. The discussion draws on foregrounding theory to account for parallelism and deviation, on critical stylistics to track naming and agency through transitivity, on cognitive metaphor to explain how pastoral, journey, and household frames structure inference, and on appraisal theory to trace stance and intensity. Findings show that a compact lexicon clustered around shepherding and hospitality turns belief into concrete scenes; repeated clause frames portray divine agency as steady provision; and a strategic pronoun shift at the valley reconfigures distance by moving from third-person report to second-person address at the moment of threat. Evaluation is sparse but climactic, with fear denied, comfort asserted, and abundance scaled toward the closing promise, while cohesive reference chains and spatial prepositions stage a coherent passage from pasture to table to house. The paper clarifies how a small set of linguistic choices produces the distinctive calm rhythm and durable consolatory force of the psalm. It offers a compact stance trajectory model that can support teaching and close reading in stylistics classrooms.

Keywords: Cognitive Metaphor, Foregrounding, Psalm 23, Stance, Stylistics

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar and frequently recited texts in the Bible, used in public worship, private devotion and pastoral care. Its six verses are often remembered for their message of trust and reassurance, yet that effect depends very closely on the way the psalm is written. In a small space, the text brings together an extended metaphor of shepherding, a journey motif that moves from pasture to valley to house, a marked shift in address from third person (“he”) to second person (“thou”), and a dense pattern of lexical and syntactic repetition that gives the voice a calm, measured rhythm. Stylistics provides an appropriate framework for describing these choices because it relates patterns in lexis, syntax, evaluation, figuration and cohesion to their shaping of readers’ responses.¹ Studies of religious

¹ Richard Bradford, *Stylistics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Jean-Jacques Weber, *The Stylistics Reader from Roman Jakobson to the Present* (London: Arnold, 1996); Nina Nørgaard, Rocio Montoro, and Beatrix Busse, *Key Terms in Stylistics* (London & New York: Continuum, 2010).

discourse further show how repeated wording, formulaic structures and evaluative framing help organise belief, stance and consolation in recognisable verbal forms.² When Psalm 23 is viewed through this lens, it appears not simply as a declaration of trust but as a carefully patterned piece of discourse that builds assurance clause by clause, using both familiar and foregrounded features to guide attention and feeling.

Much of the existing writing on Psalm 23 is theological or devotional in orientation and tends to comment on the language in general terms rather than subjecting it to detailed analysis. Where stylistic features are discussed, they are often treated in isolation: some studies focus on metaphor, others on parallelism or on the semantics of individual key terms, without tracing how these features interact with grammatical patterning, evaluative meanings and cohesive ties across the whole psalm.³ Stylistic and discourse-analytic work offers tools for bringing these levels together, yet clause-by-clause readings of Psalm 23 remain relatively few.⁴ The well-known shift in verse four from third-person reference (“he”) to direct address (“thou”) is frequently mentioned, but is seldom examined as a patterned instance of foregrounding that coincides with the darkest point of the journey (“the valley of the shadow of death”) and reconfigures the relation between speaker and addressee.⁵ In a similar way, the network of images associated with pasture, guidance, table fellowship, anointing and permanent dwelling plainly resonates with broader biblical traditions and intertexts,⁶ but is rarely analysed alongside the evaluative and cohesive resources that invite readers to inhabit a stance of security and belonging.⁷ Without explicit clause segmentation, transparent coding and cross-level integration, claims about intimacy, confidence and persuasion in Psalm 23 tend to rest on intuitive impressions rather than on systematic linguistic evidence.

Accordingly, this paper argues that Psalm 23 achieves its enduring consolatory force through a tightly integrated pattern of lexical framing, parallel clause structure, and a strategic mid-psalm shift from third-person report to second-person address. The study develops a detailed clause-based analysis of Psalm 23, using the King James Version (KJV) as its textual basis, to show how the stylistic organisation of the psalm underpins its function as a source of comfort. It draws on foregrounding theory to track patterns of parallelism and deviation, on cognitive approaches to metaphor to explain how schemas such as GOD IS SHEPHERD and LIFE IS JOURNEY structure the representation of guidance, risk, and destination, and on critical stylistics and appraisal theory to examine how naming, transitivity, and evaluative lexis construct an ideology of benevolent care and secure belonging.⁸ Three closely related objectives guide the analysis: first, to demonstrate how lexis, syntax, evaluation, figuration, and cohesion work together to build assurance; second, to examine how the shift from third person reference to direct address in verse four reshapes stance and the implied relationship between speaker, God, and audience; and third, to identify the foregrounded patterns of parallelism and deviation that focus attention on the valley scene and on the final claim to dwell “in the house of the Lord for ever.” These objectives are pursued through three research questions that ask how the multilevel linguistic patterning of the psalm constructs assurance, how the shift of the pronoun alters the dynamics of address and intimacy, and how repetitions and departures from the pattern mark moments of danger and resolution.

² Amma A Adjei, Lawrence Ewusi-Mensah, and Cynthia Logogye, “Style in Religious Discourse: An Analysis of the Beatitudes,” *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research* 4, no. 5 (2016): 35–46; Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor, *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2013).

³ Adjei, Ewusi-Mensah, and Logogye, “Style in Religious Discourse: An Analysis of the Beatitudes”; Weber, *The Stylistics Reader from Roman Jakobson to the Present*.

⁴ Bloor and Bloor, *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*.

⁵ Christiana Gregoriou, “The Linguistic Levels of Foregrounding in Stylistics,” *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, 2014, 87–100; Dan McIntyre, “Using Foregrounding Theory as a Teaching Methodology in a Stylistics Course,” *Style* 37, no. 1 (2003): 1–13; Willie Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding,” in *Handbook of Empirical Literary Studies* (De Gruyter, 2021), 145–76; M. Zakirova, “The Stylistic Nature of the Theory of Foregrounding in the Literary Text,” *Bulletin of Science and Practice* 10, no. 8 (August 15, 2024): 493–99, <https://doi.org/10.33619/2414-2948/105/63>.

⁶ Cynthia S. Y. Chau, “Thematic, Axiological, and Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter” (2023); Maria Grazia Dongu et al., “Intertextuality: Intermixing Genres, Languages and Texts,” 2021; Jan G Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*, vol. 47 (Brill, 2021); Dinah Wouters, *Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen’s Books of Visions* (Springer, 2022).

⁷ G. Yule, *The Study of Language*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2014).

⁸ L. Jeffries, “Critical Stylistics,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (Routledge, 2023), 436–50; Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John*.

The subsequent sections review relevant scholarship, outline the methodological procedure, and present and discuss the findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work in stylistics provides the main foundation for a clause-level reading of Psalm 23. Stylistics understands style as motivated linguistic choice realised at several levels of language, rather than as decorative embellishment added after meaning has been decided.⁹ From this perspective, formal features such as lexis, syntax, figuration and cohesion are taken to bear directly on interpretation. Studies of religious discourse apply these assumptions to sermons, prayers and scriptural texts, showing that patterned repetition, parallelism and evaluative wording often help to support belief, aid memory, and consolidate communal identity.¹⁰ Research on scriptural rhetoric goes further to suggest that networks of images, contrasts in stance and shifts in pacing guide readers toward particular construals of divine action and human response, so that theological effect is inseparable from linguistic patterning.¹¹ Reference handbooks in stylistics and pragmatics provide the descriptive vocabulary for this kind of analysis and repeatedly insist that claims about effect should be grounded in observable textual evidence and replicable procedures.¹² Against this background, Psalm 23 is a particularly suitable text because it combines very simple vocabulary with strong structural patterning and a marked shift in address at the midpoint, allowing these general insights about religious discourse and style to be examined within a compact and widely familiar poem. The choice of the King James Version (KJV) in the present study follows from this concern for pattern: its relatively stable lexical choices and rhythm have shaped much of the psalm's reception and offer a consistent base for clause-level description.

More specifically, stylistic scholarship highlights foregrounding, parallelism, and cohesive patterning as resources that make short texts memorable and interpretable. Foregrounding is often explained as the way repeated norms and purposeful deviations guide attention, and this is useful for Psalm 23, where recurrence of the "He + process + me" clause frame establishes regularity and a later shift in person draws focus.¹³ Work on lexical semantics and schema-based interpretation also supports attention to pastoral, journey, and hospitality frames that render care and belonging in material and spatial terms.¹⁴ Finally, accounts of syntax and parallelism in poetic discourse show how patterned clause structures can create cadence and cohesion while still allowing salient variation at key moments.¹⁵

Studies that focus more directly on biblical poetry and the Psalms build on these stylistic categories while adding further observations about genre and tradition. They consistently underline the role of balanced lines, patterned repetition and concrete imagery as primary carriers of meaning, arguing that parallelism not only structures thought into manageable units but also regulates interpretive pace and facilitates memorisation in oral and liturgical settings.¹⁶ In this connection, conceptual metaphor research shows how familiar social experiences, especially kinship and shepherding, are mapped onto theological meanings, so that abstract notions of guidance, risk or blessing are grasped through embodied scenes of walking, eating and dwelling.¹⁷ Intertextual studies then extend this picture by tracing how motifs such as "shepherd," "table," "oil," "house" and "enemies" recur across different books of the Bible, hymns and later devotional writing, allowing a brief psalm to activate a wide

⁹ Weber, *The Stylistics Reader from Roman Jakobson to the Present*.

¹⁰ Adjei, Ewusi-Mensah, and Logogye, "Style in Religious Discourse: An Analysis of the Beatitudes"; Bloor and Bloor, *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*.

¹¹ Todd Boulware, "Irony in Luke's Gospel: Christological Revelation, God's Superior Kingdom, and a Charismatic Theology of the Spirit" (Liberty University, 2025).

¹² Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key Terms in Stylistics*.

¹³ McIntyre, "Using Foregrounding Theory as a Teaching Methodology in a Stylistics Course"; Gregoriou, "The Linguistic Levels of Foregrounding in Stylistics."

¹⁴ Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key terms in stylistics*; Yule, *The study of language*.

¹⁵ Bradford, *Stylistics*; Weber, *The stylistics reader: From Roman Jakobson to the present*.

¹⁶ Adjei and Ewusi-Mensah, "Style in religious discourse: an analysis of the Beatitudes"; Weber, *The stylistics reader: From Roman Jakobson to the present*.

¹⁷ Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, vol. 47.

resonance network in performance and reception.¹⁸ Foregrounding scholarship has shown how departures from established patterns within this network, such as a change in pronoun, tense or clause structure, often carry disproportionate interpretive weight, while work in Critical Stylistics links choices of naming, transitivity and evaluation to implied ideologies of care, authority and belonging.¹⁹ Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that the stylistic organisation of psalms is integral to their religious function and not merely a surface feature.

However, when these studies are viewed side by side, a gap becomes visible. Many analyses concentrate on a single feature, such as metaphor, parallelism, intertextuality, or evaluation, and offer rich insights at that level, but rarely show in detail how lexical fields, clause frames, cohesive patterns, and evaluative scaling work together within each clause of a specific psalm. The shift in Psalm 23 from third person reference (“he”) to second person address (“thou”) is often mentioned as a turning point, yet it is rarely treated as a foregrounded move that interacts with parallelism, metaphor, and appraisal at the precise narrative moment of danger in “the valley of the shadow of death”.²⁰ Similarly, while the image network of “pasture,” “water,” “path,” “table,” “oil,” “cup,” and “house” has been traced across biblical and post biblical traditions, it is uncommon for these intertextual observations to be linked in a systematic way to the appraisal resources that encode “goodness,” “mercy,” fearlessness, and abundance.²¹ As a result, broader claims about intimacy, confidence, and persuasion in the psalm often rest on intuitive impressions rather than on an integrated account of how its clauses are structured and related.

In response to this gap, this study draws together several strands of existing work into a single clause-based procedure. From the foregrounding theory, it adopts the view that repeated clause frames and the mid-psalm pronoun shift are central resources for managing attention and meaning.²² From critical stylistics, it borrows operational categories such as naming, transitivity, evaluation, and intertextual reference, keeping discussion of care, authority, and hospitality tied to specific lexical and grammatical choices.²³ From cognitive stylistics and conceptual metaphor studies, it retains the idea that frames such as GOD IS SHEPHERD, LIFE IS JOURNEY, and BELIEVER IS HOUSEHOLD MEMBER organise imagery and inference across the poem.²⁴ Finally, drawing on appraisal theory, it traces how attitude, engagement, and graduation combine to construct a consistent stance of assurance.²⁵ What is distinctive here is not any single theoretical tool, since each has been applied to religious or biblical texts before, but the way the paper brings them together at the clause level to explain how Psalm 23 builds reassurance. Having reviewed this scholarship, the next section outlines the methodological framework and analytical procedures used in the study.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyses Psalm 23 in the King James Version (KJV).²⁶ The KJV is used because its regular cadence, formulaic verb forms such as “maketh,” “leadeth,” and “runneth,” and long liturgical history

¹⁸ Dongu et al., “Intertextuality: intermixing genres, languages and texts”; Chau, *Thematic, Axiological, And Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter*; Wouters, *Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen's Books of Visions*.

¹⁹ McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics”; Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*.

²⁰ McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Gregoriou, “The linguistic levels of foregrounding in stylistics”; Zakirova, “The stylistic nature of the theory of foregrounding in the literary text.”

²¹ Dongu et al., “Intertextuality: intermixing genres, languages and texts”; Chau, *Thematic, Axiological, And Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter*; Wouters, *Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen's Books of Visions*; Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics.”

²² McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Gregoriou, “The linguistic levels of foregrounding in stylistics”; Zakirova, “The stylistic nature of the theory of foregrounding in the literary text.”

²³ Jeffries, “Critical stylistics”; Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*.

²⁴ Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, vol. 47; Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key terms in stylistics*; Yule, *The study of language*, 4th ed.

²⁵ Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics.”

²⁶ *King James Bible*, vol. 19 (1996).

make clause boundaries, parallelism, and evaluative lexis easy to trace, and because many readers who know the psalm know it in or through this version. The text is treated at three levels: verse, clause, and semantic frame, with the clause as the main unit. Each of the six verses is divided into clauses (labelled V1a, V1b, to V6b), and each clause is coded for lexis (semantic fields of pastoral care, journey, and hospitality; concrete and abstract nouns; verb type such as material, mental, relational, or verbal; and evaluative items such as “goodness,” “mercy,” and “righteousness”), syntax (clause type, recurrent patterns such as “He” plus process plus “me,” coordination and prepositional strings, and the shift from third person reference to second person address in the valley line of verse 4), evaluation (attitude, engagement, and degree, including the refusal of fear in “I will fear no evil,” the comfort in “they comfort me,” the certainty marker “surely,” and the intensified “my cup runneth over”), figuration (metaphor, personification, and metonymy, mapped through source and target pairings such as GOD IS SHEPHERD, LIFE IS JOURNEY, and BELIEVER IS HOUSEHOLD MEMBER), and cohesion (reference chains for “I,” “he,” and “thou,” repetition of items such as “leadeth,” “goodness,” and “mercy,” and connectives and prepositions like “for,” “beside,” “through,” “before,” and “in” that organise the movement from pasture to house). All coding is anchored at the clause level, and the clause map used for analysis is presented in Table 1.

Tables later in the paper bring together counts and examples, and for ease of reference the full text of the psalm is reproduced below, immediately before the clause map used in the analysis. Because many readers regard the psalm as sacred, discussion focuses on linguistic patterning rather than doctrinal claims, and any comments on stance or implied ideology are linked directly to observable forms in the text. With this framework in place, the next section presents the findings and discussion.

Psalm 23 (KJV)

A Psalm of David

1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Table 1: Clause segmentation of Psalm 23 (KJV) into labelled clauses

Verse	Clause label	Text
V1	V1a	The LORD is my shepherd;
V1	V1b	I shall not want.
V2	V2a	He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
V2	V2b	He leadeth me beside the still waters.
V3	V3a	He restoreth my soul:
V3	V3b	He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
V3	V3c	for his name's sake.
V4	V4a	Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
V4	V4b	I will fear no evil:
V4	V4c	for thou art with me;
V4	V4d	thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
V5	V5a	Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
V5	V5b	Thou anointest my head with oil;
V5	V5c	my cup runneth over.

V6	V6a	Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
V6	V6b	And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

These clause labels (V1a to V6b) are used as the basic units of reference in the analysis.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lexis: semantic fields and evaluatives

To begin with, Psalm 23 relies on a compact, concrete vocabulary organised around three fields that form a pastoral, journey, and household triad. The pastoral field gathers terms such as “shepherd,” “pastures,” “waters,” “rod,” and “staff,” which present care as a pictured routine rather than an abstract claim. The journey field centres on “paths” and “valley,” with “the shadow of death” naming risk with striking economy. The household field adds “table,” “oil,” “cup,” and “house,” shifting the scene from movement to welcome and residence. In stylistic terms, these lexical choices activate familiar schemas and invite readers to provide inferences from shared experience rather than explicit propositions.²⁷ Intertextual work also explains why this small lexicon carries disproportionate weight: shepherding and hospitality motifs recur widely in biblical discourse and devotional practice, so each item can trigger a broader network of associations in communal hearing.²⁸

Moreover, the verb choices are few but decisive. Forms such as “maketh,” “leadeth,” “restoreth,” “prepareth,” and “anointeth” cast the divine as the consistent agent and the speaker as guided beneficiary. Instead of arguing for that relationship directly, the psalm builds it through process type and participant roles, which is precisely where critical stylistics locates viewpoint and value.²⁹ Repetition sharpens the effect: “leadeth” recurs across verses two and three, creating a small echo that foregrounds accounts linked to salience and predictability in short ritual lines.³⁰

In particular, the evaluative items are sparse but strategic. “Goodness” and “mercy” set the value frame, “paths of righteousness” assign positive appraisal to the route, and “I will fear no evil” denies negative affect at the point of greatest danger. Intensification is rare and pointed: “my cup runneth over” scales abundance, while “surely” compresses certainty into a single closing marker. This profile fits appraisal accounts of liturgical persuasion, where attitude is signalled, rival stances are not entertained, and graduation rises at climactic points to secure alignment.³¹ In the same vein, the pastoral lexicon presents divine care as ordinary provision, a place to rest, a guide who knows the route, and a host who confers honour in public, so trust is grounded in familiar scenes rather than abstract definition.³²

Table 2: Main lexical sets in Psalm 23 (KJV) and their stylistic functions

Set	Items (examples)	Count of types	Stylistic function	Example (KJV)
Pastoral care	shepherd, pastures, waters, rod, staff	5	Concrete care and protection; frames competence	“The LORD is my shepherd” V1; “beside the still waters” V2
Journey	paths, valley, shadow of death	3	Stages: movement and risk	“in the paths of righteousness” V3; “through the valley of the shadow of death” V4

²⁷ Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, **Key terms in stylistics**; Yule, **The study of language**, 4th ed.

²⁸ Dongu et al., “Intertextuality: intermixing genres, languages and texts”; Chau, **Thematic, Axiological, And Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter**; Wouters, **Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen's Books of Visions**; Van der Watt, **Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John**, vol. 47.

²⁹ Bloor and Bloor, **The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction**; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics.”

³⁰ McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Gregoriou, “The linguistic levels of foregrounding in stylistics”; Zakirova, “The stylistic nature of the theory of foregrounding in the literary text.”

³¹ Bloor and Bloor, **The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction**; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics.”

³² Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, **Key terms in stylistics**; Yule, **The study of language**, 4th ed.

Household hospitality	table, oil, cup, house	4	Honour, welcome, belonging	“Thou preparest a table before me” V5; “I will dwell in the house of the LORD” V6.
Guidance and provision verbs	maketh, leadeth, restoreth, preparest, anointest	5 types, 6 tokens*	Assigns agency; reliability via recurrence	“He leadeth me beside the still waters” V2; “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness” V3; “Thou anointest my head with oil” V5
Evaluatives and intensifiers	righteousness, goodness, mercy, surely, fear no evil, runneth over	6	Sets value frame; scales assurance	“my cup runneth over” V5; “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me” V6

Syntax and parallelism

Moving forward, the syntax of verses two and three relies on a repeating clause frame, “He” plus process plus “me.” Phrases such as “He maketh me to lie down,” “He leadeth me,” and “He restoreth my soul” create a measured cadence that supports memory and projects steadiness, since the agent and beneficiary remain in view without elaboration.³³

In continuation, prepositions and adjuncts stage the route with economy: “beside the still waters,” “in the paths of righteousness,” “through the valley,” “before me in the presence of mine enemies,” “in the house of the LORD,” and “for his name’s sake.” These small items partition the psalm into clear scenes and provide a spatial logic that listeners can map without strain, showing how syntax can organise discourse in short devotional lines.³⁴

Importantly, the key syntactic turning point is the shift in verse four from third-person reference to direct address: “for thou art with me.” Foregrounding theory predicts the effect: repeated frames establish a norm, and a break draws attention at the moment of hazard.³⁵ The next clause, “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,” sustains second-person reference and anchors comfort in concrete implements, so intimacy remains high while the pastoral frame holds. Verse six returns to declarative assurance with “surely” and “I will dwell,” converting enacted intimacy into public promise. In short, parallel lines build predictability, while the mid psalm turns to direct address to intensify closeness under threat.

Figure 1. Stance trajectory by person in Psalm 23 (KJV)

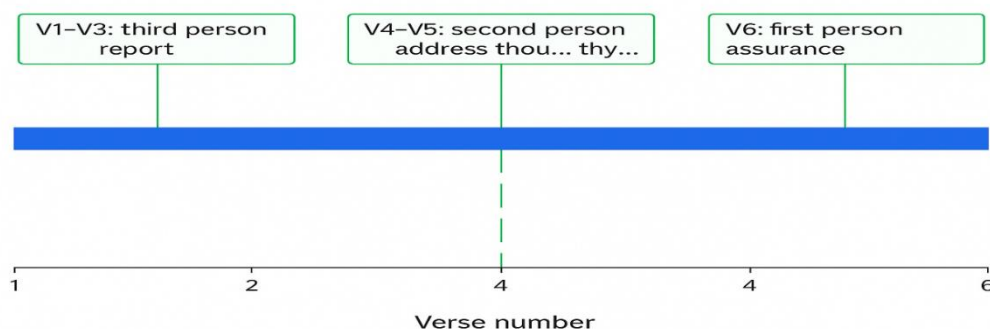


Figure 1. Stance trajectory by person

³³ Bradford, *Stylistics*; Weber, *The stylistics reader: From Roman Jakobson to the present*; Adjei and Ewusi-Mensah, “Style in religious discourse: an analysis of the Beatitudes.”

³⁴ Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key terms in stylistics*.

³⁵ McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Gregoriou, “The linguistic levels of foregrounding in stylistics”; Zakirova, “The stylistic nature of the theory of foregrounding in the literary text.”

Evaluation and stance through Appraisal

From an appraisal perspective, the psalm's stance becomes traceable in a disciplined way. Attitude is positive and steady: "He restoreth my soul" implies efficacy, "they comfort me" names the result of care, and "I will fear no evil" denies negative affect at the core threat. Engagement remains monoglossic, since the voice entertains no rival positions; in the valley, it narrows distance through direct address rather than opening debate. Graduation rises at key points: "my cup runneth over" heightens the force of provision, "surely" tightens commitment in the closing promise, and the recurrence of "leadeth" amplifies steadiness across the early verses.³⁶ Consequently, these resources guide readers from narrated trust in the third person to enacted trust in the second person, and finally to resolved trust at the closure.

Table 3: Appraisal resources: attitude, engagement, and graduation with clause citations.

Category	Token or construction	Verse label	Function
Attitude: affect (security)	I will fear no evil	V4b	Denies negative affect under threat
Attitude: affect (comfort)	thy rod and thy staff they comfort me	V4d	Encodes solace through concrete implements
Attitude: appreciation	paths of righteousness	V3b	Positively values ordered guidance
Attitude: judgment (competence)	He restoreth my soul	V3a	Implies effective agency
Engagement	Monoglossic commitments; direct address	V1–V6; V4c	Presents stance without rival voices; narrows distance
Graduation: force	my cup runneth over	V5c	High force scalar of abundance
Graduation: focus	Surely	V6a	Tightens commitment at closure
Graduation: recurrence	He leadeth	V2b, V3b	Repetition strengthens perceived steadiness

Figuration: metaphor, personification, metonymy

Three entrenched metaphors organise the poem. 'God is shepherd' projects pastoral work onto divine agency, bringing entailments of guidance, protection, and provision. Life is a journey that frames experience as movement through terrain with risk and goal, signalled by paths, valleys, and the staging prepositions beside, through, and in. A believer is a household member who frames belonging and honour through the table, oil, cup, and house. Cognitive stylistics shows that such mappings let readers import everyday practice into interpretation with minimal effort, which suits short devotional lines.³⁷ Biblical scholarship confirms that shepherding and kinship metaphors shape identity and belonging in scriptural discourse, which explains the rapid uptake of these images in communal performance.³⁸

Personification extends agency to the tools of care. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me treats instruments as sources of solace, grounding comfort in familiar objects rather than abstract qualities. Metonymy compresses settings into emblematic items: table for hosted honour, oil for consecrated welcome, house for enduring presence. Intertextual work shows that these items reverberate across texts and traditions, so a short poem can activate a large semantic field for a community that recognises the echoes.³⁹

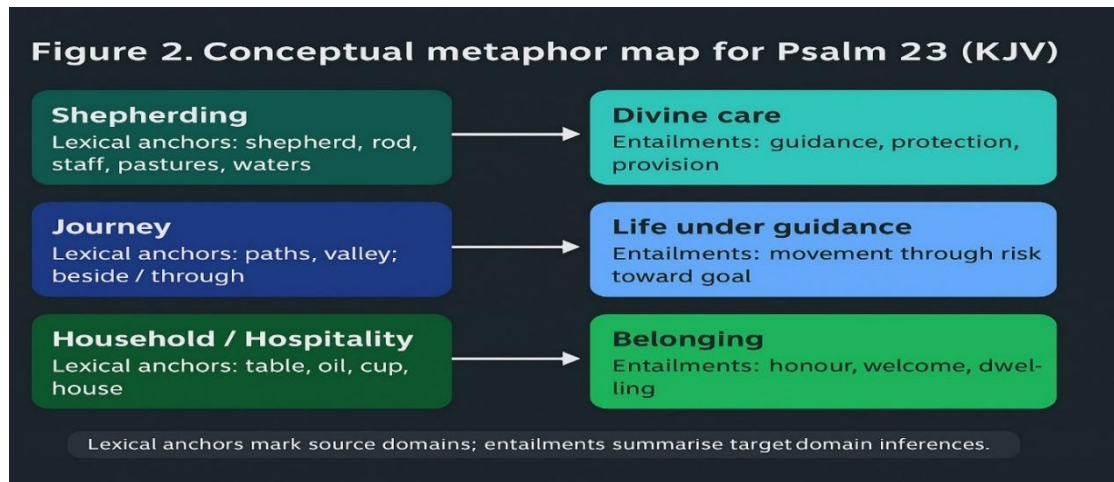
³⁶ Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Jeffries, "Critical stylistics"; Yule, *The study of language*, 4th ed.

³⁷ Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key terms in stylistics*; Yule, *The study of language*, 4th ed.

³⁸ Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, vol. 47.

³⁹ Dongu et al., "Intertextuality: intermixing genres, languages and texts"; Chau, *Thematic, Axiological, And Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter*; Wouters, *Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen's Books of Visions*.

The metaphor sets clusters around care, journeying, and belonging and supports an ideology of provision and responsibility that coheres with the transitivity profile noted above, where the divine is agent, and the speaker is beneficiary.⁴⁰



Cohesion and coherence

In the context of cohesion, the psalm's scenes are bound into a single pilgrimage. Reference chains track roles and the stance pivot: "I," "he," and "thou" keep the relationship between speaker and addressee in view, and the move to "thou" in verse four functions both as a foregrounded deviation and as a cohesive signal of narrowed distance. Repetition is selective: "He leadeth" recurs in verses two and three to centre guidance, while "goodness" and "mercy" in verse six echo the value field and close the loop. Conjunctions and prepositions structure movement and commitment, with "for" supplying reasons, "though" conceding peril, and "surely" sealing the promise. The prepositions "beside," "in," "through," and "before," and the phrase "in the house of the LORD," map rest, order, passage, public honour, and residence. Temporal and modal forms such as "shall," "will," and "for ever" project assurance forward. Overall, these cohesive resources help readers experience the psalm as a coherent movement from provision to lasting belonging.

Table 4: Cohesive devices by verse with function.

Device	Instance	Verses	Function
Reference by person	I, he, thou	1–6	Tracks roles; marks stance shift at V4
Repetition	He leadeth	2, 3	Keeps guidance central
Lexical echo	goodness and mercy	6	Reprises value frame in closure
Conjunction, ground	For	3, 4	Supplies reasons for guidance and presence
Conjunction, seal	Surely	6	Seals commitment at the end
Concession	Though	4	Admits peril while maintaining trust
Prepositional staging	beside, in, through, before, in the house	2–6	Maps rest to order to peril to honour to residence
Temporal and modal projection	shall, will, forever	6	Extends assurance into the future

Integrated interpretation: stance, ideology, audience effect

Across the levels, a single script becomes clear. Lexis supplies scenes that are easy to picture. Parallel syntax gives those scenes a steady beat, and foregrounding explains why one break in the pattern at the

⁴⁰ Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Jeffries, "Critical stylistics."

valley concentrates meaning and narrows distance.⁴¹ Appraisal shows how confidence is scaled and secured: fear is denied, comfort is asserted, abundance is intensified, and commitment is sealed at the end.⁴² Figuration braids pastoral work, movement, and household welcome into a single story of care that draws on everyday practice and a long scriptural network.⁴³ Cohesion binds the journey from pasture to path to valley to table to house so that the final promise sounds structurally warranted.

The implied ideology is sovereignty understood as care. Agency is distributed so that God is the guide and host, while the speaker is the led guest and, finally, a household member. This distribution is not theorised in the psalm; it is enacted by naming, transitivity, evaluative placement, and cohesive staging, which are the very sites where critical stylistics locates viewpoint and value.⁴⁴ The design is suitable for congregational use. The poem does not invite debate; it rehearses a stance in language that is easy to remember and speak together. This explains its durable use in grief and danger and fits broader observations on how patterned discourse in religious settings shapes shared assurance.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

This study asked how lexis, syntax, evaluation, figuration and cohesion work together to build assurance in Psalm 23, and how the shift from third person to second person shapes stance and audience effect. The analysis shows that the concrete lexicon of the psalm forms a pastoral–journey–household triad that turns belief into scenes rather than abstractions. Parallel clause frames in verses two and three project steadiness; a single marked deviation to direct address at the valley concentrates intimacy and trust; selective evaluatives set and scale the value frame; entrenched metaphors map everyday practice to theological meaning; and cohesive ties stage a passage that ends in secure residence. Taken together, these features produce a coherent voice of confident reliance rather than a loose collection of comforting lines.

In general, the consolatory effect of the psalm rests on a coordinated repetition with one strategic relational change. Recurrent frames such as “He maketh me,” “He leadeth me,” and “He restoreth my soul” normalise guidance, while the move to direct address in verse four (“for thou art with me”) intensifies intimacy precisely at the point of danger. The closing hospitality imagery then converts that intimate protection into public honour and lasting residence, completing the movement from want to dwelling and presenting trust as something practised through patterned language.

Further studies could apply the same clause-based procedure to other psalms and to modern translations of Psalm 23, to see how shifts in lexis and grammar alter stance and assurance. A parallel line of study could bring this analysis into dialogue with reader responses from different worship traditions, testing how far the patterns identified here are noticed, valued or reinterpreted in actual reception.

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⁴¹ McIntyre, “Using foregrounding theory as a teaching methodology in a stylistics course”; Van Peer et al., “Foregrounding”; Gregoriou, “The linguistic levels of foregrounding in stylistics”; Zakirova, “The stylistic nature of the theory of foregrounding in the literary text.”

⁴² Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*; Jeffries, “Critical stylistics.”

⁴³ Nørgaard, Montoro, and Busse, *Key terms in stylistics*; Yule, *The study of language*, 4th ed.; Van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of metaphor in the Gospel according to John*, vol. 47; Dongu et al., “Intertextuality: intermixing genres, languages and texts”; Chau, *Thematic, Axiological, And Rhetorical Formations: A Discourse and Intertextual Analysis of Jude and 2 Peter*; Wouters, *Allegorical Form and Theory in Hildegard of Bingen’s Books of Visions*.

⁴⁴ Jeffries, “Critical stylistics”; Bloor and Bloor, *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*.

⁴⁵ Adjei and Ewusi-Mensah, “Style in religious discourse: an analysis of the Beatitudes”; Boulware, *Irony in Luke’s Gospel: Christological Revelation, God’s Superior Kingdom, and a Charismatic Theology of the Spirit*.

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