

# THE PSALMS AS A SOURCE FOR A REFORMED SPIRITUALITY: An Exegetical Analysis of Psalm 25 and its Reception in John Calvin<sup>1\*</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Early in the Protestant Reformation tradition, the book of Psalms played a prominent role in shaping personal and communal devotion. This article aims to carry out a case study based on Psalm 25, investigating how the message of this biblical text has contributed to developing a Reformed spirituality. To achieve this, the first part of the research examines the introductory issues of Psalm 25, such as the title and authorship, the historical context, and the *Gattung* of the psalm. Next, the author develops an exegetical analysis of the main sections of Psalm 25, considering the text's literary, syntactic, and semantic elements. Finally, the reception of this biblical passage in John Calvin is studied, analyzing how the reformer understood and applied Psalm 25 and the pastoral contributions from his exegesis of this psalm to a biblical and reformed spirituality.

**Keywords:** Psalms, Biblical Interpretation, Reformed Spirituality, John Calvin.

**RESUMO:** Desde cedo na tradição da Reforma Protestante, o livro de Salmos teve um importante papel na formação da devoção pessoal e comunitária. O propósito deste artigo é realizar um estudo de caso com base no Salmo 25, investigando como a mensagem desse texto bíblico tem contribuído para o desenvolvimento de uma espiritualidade reformada. Para atingir essa finalidade, a primeira parte da pesquisa examina as questões introdutórias do Salmo 25, como o título e a autoria, o contexto histórico e o *Gattung* do salmo. Em seguida, o autor desenvolve uma análise exegetica das seções principais

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do Salmo 25, considerando elementos literários, sintáticos e semânticos do texto. Por fim, estuda-se a recepção dessa passagem bíblica em João Calvino, analisando como o reformador entendeu e aplicou o Salmo 25 e as contribuições pastorais, a partir de sua exegese do salmo, para uma espiritualidade bíblica e reformada.

**Palavras-chave:** Salmos, Interpretação Bíblica, Espiritualidade Reformada, João Calvino.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of the book of Psalms reveals Israel's responsive personal relationship with their God in a unique way. It is not a pre-established mechanical involvement but a profound reflection by the Hebrew community on God himself, who is interested not only in healing but also in the suffering and afflictions of his people.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of Yahweh's salvific actions, Israel did not remain silent but turned to God, praising him, consulting him, and expressing their regret at the evils they were facing. The reason for this was well defined by von Rad: "Jahweh had no chosen his people, as a mere dumb object of his will in history, but for converse with him."<sup>4</sup> This dialogue took place in a poetically beautiful and artistic way, as a gift from God. It heightened the impact of the psalmists' statements and communicated their thoughts more effectively than an arid written dissertation.<sup>5</sup>

The book of Psalms was essential in developing biblical spirituality early in the Reformation. Luther's first lectures in Wittenberg (1513–1515) were on the Psalms.<sup>6</sup> In his *Preface to the Psalter* of 1528, he described the importance of the Psalms for cultivating an authentic Christian spirituality, in contrast to the legends of the saints, which were quite common in the medieval period.<sup>7</sup>

What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid such storm winds of every kind? Where does one find finer words of

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<sup>3</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Israel's Traditions* (Peabody: Prince Press, 2005), 355.

<sup>5</sup> Leland Ryken, *Words of delight: a literary introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 187–8.

<sup>6</sup> Jared Wicks, "The Beginning of Luther's Beginnings in the Psalms," *Lutheran Forum* 44, no. 3 (January 1, 2010): 30.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, "Preface to the Psalter," in *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 6, *The interpretation of Scripture*, edited by Euan K. Cameron (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 206-7.

joy than in the praise psalms and thanksgiving psalms? ... And that they speak these words to God and with God, this, I repeat, is the best thing of all. This gives the words double earnestness and life. ... the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation that person may be, finds in the psalms words that fit his or her case or situation—that suit him or her as if they were put there just for his or her sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find better words or wish for better.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, John Calvin saw the Psalms as a “canonical manual of piety,”<sup>9</sup> which teaches and inspires us to true spirituality.<sup>10</sup> In the Preface to his Commentary on the Book of Psalms, he called the book of Psalms “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul,” for “there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.”<sup>11</sup> Also, the reformer highlighted the value of the Psalms for developing a life of holiness and piety:

The Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every part of holiness, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross; and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will.<sup>12</sup>

Following Calvin’s perspective, the Reformed tradition recognized the importance of biblical psalms, whose use has remained central to Reformed worship and devotional life.<sup>13</sup>

Walter Brueggemann brings up an important warning about the risk of a devotional tradition of piety based on the Psalms that despises or disregards

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, “Preface to the Psalter”, 209-10

<sup>9</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Stephen G. Myers, *Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential* (EP Books: Darlington, 2019), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Pitkin, “Imitation of David: David As a Paradigm for Faith in Calvin’s Exegesis of the Psalms,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 847.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, translated by James Anderson (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), vol. 1, xxxvii.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, xxxix.

<sup>13</sup> Allan M. Harman, “The Psalms and Reformed Spirituality,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 53, no. 2 (April-July 1994), 56.

academic contributions to a better understanding of the biblical text.<sup>14</sup> A devotional reading that ignores the contribution of historical-grammatical exegesis or an arid academic interpretation that does not care about being transformed by the Scriptures are both dangerous. Therefore, it is necessary that “the devotional and scholarly traditions support, inform, and correct each other so that the formal gains of scholarly methods may enhance and strengthen, as well as criticize, the substance of genuine piety in its handling of the Psalms.”<sup>15</sup>

Aware of the relevance of the book of Psalms for Reformed spirituality and the need to use this important “canonical manual of piety” guided by the contributions of the historical-grammatical interpretation of the Psalter of ancient Israel, this article aims to carry out a case study based on Psalm 25, combining an exegetical analysis of this psalm and its reception in John Calvin. The purpose is to investigate how the message of Psalm 25 can contribute to genuinely developing Reformed and biblical piety.

## 1. INTRODUCTORY ASPECTS OF PSALM 25

A correct interpretation of Psalm 25 and a proper understanding of its importance for Christian spirituality requires, first of all, an analysis of introductory questions about the text, such as the title of Psalm 25, the context of the psalmist’s life, the structure and the *Gattung*<sup>16</sup> of the poetic text.

### 1.1 TITLE AND AUTHORSHIP

The title of Psalm 25 consists of the expression *l̄dāwid* (“Of David” or “To David”). The meaning of this superscript has been a source of constant debate. Arthur Weiser argues that the expression was initially used in Solomon’s temple cult as a direction for the use of the psalm in public worship “for David,” that is, for the public reading performed by the monarchs of the Davidic dynasty who played the same role as their predecessor in the cult and who were recipients of the promises made to David and of the “grace of kingship” (Ps. 18:50;

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> By *Gattung*, we mean the classification of the “literary type” of a psalm, which is identified by “formal characteristics, style, mode of composition, [and] terminology” (James Muilenburg, “Introduction,” in Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], v). Claus Westermann identifies seven main *Gattungen*: community psalm of lament, individual psalm of lament, community psalm of narrative praise, individual psalm of narrative praise, psalm of descriptive praise, liturgical psalm, and wisdom psalm (Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980], 25–8).

20:9; Jer. 30:9, 21).<sup>17</sup> Over the years in the post-exilic period, the expression no longer indicated a direction of its cultic use, but rather those psalms whose origin dated back to the pre-exilic period. Thus, the term would reference the psalms of the “tradition of David” of the first temple.<sup>18</sup>

As Robert Alter recognizes, the central issue is defining the semantic use of the preposition *l<sup>e</sup>*.<sup>19</sup> This Hebrew word can be translated in various ways, such as “to,” “of,” “concerning,” “dedicated to,” “in the style of,” or “according to the standard.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, while *l<sup>e</sup>* plus a name in the titles of various psalms “may refer to authorship, this is not necessarily or always the case.”<sup>21</sup>

Some possible meanings of *l<sup>e</sup>dāwid* are the following: “(1) ‘authored by David,’ whose musicianship is well attested (1 Sam. 16:17-23; 18:10; 2 Sam. 1:17-27; 3:33f.; 23:1-7; Amos 6.5); (2) ‘on behalf of David’ (Ps. 20, a prayer for the Davidic king on the eve of battle), or (3) ‘belonging to David,’ part of a royal collection, perhaps including David’s compositions.”<sup>22</sup>

There are psalms with explicit historical references that leave no doubt about Davidic authorship (see Ps. 3:7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142).<sup>23</sup> However, not all the psalms with the expression *l<sup>e</sup>dāwid* necessarily indicate David as its author. The expression is probably due to the significant role the monarch played in the development of Hebrew poetry and musicality (cf. 2 Sam. 23:1; 1 Chron. 15:16-24; Ezr. 3:10; Neh. 12:24; Amos 6:5). Thus, the expression can indicate that the psalm was inspired by David, written by him or according to his style or dedicated to the ruler of Israel.<sup>24</sup>

Unless there is a clear historical indication in the psalm itself or a New

<sup>17</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox, 1962), 96.

<sup>18</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, 96–8.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Alter, “Psalms,” In *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 245.

<sup>20</sup> F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs. *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 510–17. Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1991), 19; Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 28.

<sup>21</sup> Mark D. Futato, “Psalms,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, edited by Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 343.

<sup>22</sup> William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, *Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 444. Cf. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 26–7.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), 58–61; Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 977–8.

<sup>24</sup> See Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 982–3.

Testament reference to David's authorship (cf. Mark 12:36 with 110:1; Acts 4:24-25 with Ps. 2:1-2; Acts 1:20 with Ps. 69; Acts 2:25-28 with Ps. 16), it cannot be said with certainty that David is the author of a psalm that has the initial expression *l'edāwid*.

The suggestion of Davidic authorship<sup>25</sup> is as plausible as a writer from another period in Israel's history.<sup>26</sup> Although it is an individual psalm of lament, it is also aimed at the community gathering, as indicated by the plural and didactic expressions of verses 3, 8–10, 12–14, and the plea for God to redeem Israel from its afflictions in verse 22.

## 1.2 THE PSALMIST'S *SITZ IM LEBEN*

The context of Psalm 25 is challenging to determine, but most commentators agree that it generally describes a situation of sin, enemies, and suffering.<sup>27</sup> The psalmist expresses this lament during tribulation caused by his enemies (cf. 25:2-3, 17-19), trusting in divine care and direction (25:4-5, 12-15, 20-21). Although he does not directly relate his afflictions to personal sin, there is a strong suggestion that the psalmist perceives divine discipline behind the suffering and cries out for God's forgiveness based on his compassion and loyal love (25:6) and the Lord's character (25:11).

The composer of the psalm does not see discipline as a reason to despair (25:3, 20) but as an opportunity to be guided and instructed by Yahweh<sup>28</sup> because, despite his sins, the faithful fears the Lord (25:12, 14), is humble before him (25:9) and keeps Yahweh's covenant and precepts (25:10).<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the psalm, when the writer claims for Israel what he asked for himself (25:22), he transforms a personal petition into a lament for the whole congregation.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that the psalm was written during a national tragedy

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 413; VanGemeran, "Psalms," 33–4, 226; Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 48–9, 134; H. C. Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 5–7, 223.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 257–8; Broyles, *Psalms*, 133; James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 125.

<sup>27</sup> See Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 413; Mays, *Psalms*, 125–6; VanGemeran, "Psalms," 226; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 238; Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 133–4; Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 223.

<sup>28</sup> VanGemeran, "Psalms," 226.

<sup>29</sup> Johannes Schildenberger, "A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos," in J. Salvador, ed., *Atualidades Bíblicas* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1971), 214–19.

<sup>30</sup> VanGemeran, "Psalms," 226; Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 133.

and that the whole nation experiences the psalmist's pain, or its suffering is simultaneous with his pain.

### 1.3 THE PSALM'S *GATTUNG* AND ITS LITERARY STRUCTURE

Psalm 25 is an acrostic psalm, beginning each verse with a different letter in the sequence of the Hebrew Alphabet.<sup>31</sup> The analysis of the form of this psalm points to an Individual Psalm of Lament.<sup>32</sup> This writer follows the insightful proposal of Terrien<sup>33</sup> and Schildenberger,<sup>34</sup> who divide the psalm into five stanzas. The division is based on the symmetrical number of bicola/tricola in the stanzas, which should not be accidental. Stanzas I (25:1-3) and II (25:4-7) are reflected in IV (25:15-18) and V (25:19-21), while stanza III (25:8-14) has two parts (25:8-10 and 25:12-14)<sup>35</sup> with verse 11 as the center of the stanza and the whole psalm.<sup>36</sup> Stanzas I and V have three bicola/tricola, II and IV have four, while the two sub-stanzas of III have three each.

The final invocation of verse 22 on behalf of the Israelite nation fits in perfectly with other communal expressions in the psalm (“none who wait for you” [v. 3]; “sinners” [v. 8]; “humble” [v. 9]; “the man who fears Yahweh” [v. 12]), so it is an integral part of the text. It links the psalmist's plea and trust in Yahweh as a forgiver, guide, and protector to the plea and trust expected of the nation.<sup>37</sup>

- I. *Address to God: The psalmist declares Yahweh his trust in him and cries out for deliverance from his enemies as someone who hopes in God (25:1–3).*
- II. *Petition for guidance, instruction, and forgiveness: The psalmist pleads for guidance and instruction in Yahweh's law and forgiveness of his sins, appealing to divine faithfulness and loyal love (25:4–7).*
- III. *Expression of confidence: The psalmist clings to divine forgiveness, recognizing Yahweh as a Faithful and Gracious Guide who leads humble*

<sup>31</sup> Beth Tanner, “Psalm 25: Remember, Forgive, and Teach Me,” in Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, *Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 254.

<sup>32</sup> Westermann, *The Psalms*, 53; VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 226; Mays, *Psalms*, 125. Beth Tanner classifies this psalm as a “prayer of confidence.” See Beth Tanner, “Psalm 25,” 254.

<sup>33</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 253.

<sup>34</sup> Schildenberger, “A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos,” 214-218.

<sup>35</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 253.

<sup>36</sup> Schildenberger, “A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos,” 216.

<sup>37</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 125–6.

*sinner in their righteous ways, grants them prosperity and permanence in the Promised Land, and an intimate relationship with him (25:8–14).*

IV. *Petition for deliverance and forgiveness: Amid growing afflictions and suffering, the psalmist cries incessantly for deliverance and forgiveness from Yahweh (25:15–18).*

V. *Petition for individual and community redemption: Amid growing opposition and intense hatred, the psalmist clings to his righteousness and trust in Yahweh to ask God to save him from his enemies and rescue Israel from its afflictions (25:19–22).*

## 2. AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF PSALM 25

After examining the introductory issues of Psalm 25, this section will develop an exegetical analysis of this psalm with particular attention to the Hebrew text's literary, syntactic, and semantic elements.

### 2.1 ADDRESS TO GOD (PS. 25:1–3)

The psalmist begins his prayer by recognizing his total dependence on God. In a direct address to Yahweh, he poetically affirms the surrender of himself to God: “To You, Yahweh, I lift my life” (*’ēlēkā y<sup>e</sup>hwā nap̄šī ’esšā*) (v. 1). There is a synonymous parallel in this passage with the opening line of verse 2, “O my God, in You I trust” (*’ēlōhay b<sup>e</sup>kā bātahtī*). Therefore, the psalm's opening underscores the faithful's trust in his God,<sup>38</sup> in which “lifting one's life” to the Lord implies a surrender of oneself to him.

By the word *trust* he confirms what he had just said of the lifting up of his soul to God; for the term is employed either as descriptive of the way in which the souls of the faithful are lifted up, or else faith and hope are added as the cause of such an effect, namely, the lifting up of the soul.<sup>39</sup>

His whole life (*nap̄šī*)<sup>40</sup> is offered to Yahweh because he alone is recognized as capable of helping the psalmist in times of difficulty.<sup>41</sup> In the poetic literature

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<sup>38</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 227.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 414.

<sup>40</sup> Probably, here, the expression *nep̄eš* means “life.” See Luis Alonso Schökel, *Dicionário Bíblico Hebraico-Português* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1997), 443; Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 18–20.

<sup>41</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 124–5.

of Israel, trust in God is an expression of faithfulness to him (cf. *bāṭaḥ* in Ps. 86:2) and frees the individual from the fear of men (cf. Prov. 29:25; Ps. 56:4, 11).

This trust in Yahweh leads the psalmist to cry out to the Lord not to allow him to be put to shame (*'al-'ēbōšā*) or for his enemies to feast (*'al-ya'alšū*) on his humiliation (25:2). The psalmist's plea for God to deliver him from shame echoes the pious plea in the Psalms (cf. *bōš* in Ps. 31:1[2], 17[18]). This shame could involve public scorn and humiliation (cf. Ps. 35:4; 83:17[18]), usually invoked or directed at those who are ungodly or run after idols (cf. Ps. 6:10; 35:4; 83:17; 97:9; 109:28; 119:78; Isa. 20:5; 42:17; 44:9, 11).<sup>42</sup>

The theological reason for the psalmist's trust in God is presented with emphasis and certainty through the adverb *gam* ("certainly," "indeed"; cf. Judg. 9:49b; Isa. 26:12).<sup>43</sup> For the faithful, there is no doubt: those who hope in Yahweh will not suffer final public shame.

Hoping in the Lord implies total dependence on him for changes in circumstances,<sup>44</sup> waiting for God's salvation (Ps. 130:5; cf. Gen. 49:18; 40:1; Isa. 25:9) in the certainty that Yahweh is Good to those who trust in him (Lam 3:25). Therefore, the psalmist's cry is not a request for God to intervene in his situation specially and distinctively, but according to his usual intervention on behalf of those faithful to his covenant (cf. Ps. 37:34)<sup>45</sup>

The previous premise that those who hope in Yahweh will never be humiliated has a natural corollary in the final part of verse 3. This corollary aligns with the Deuteronomic Covenant: "Those who act treacherously without cause will be put to shame."

The verb *bāḡad* ("to be unfaithful"; "to act treacherously") portrays betrayal in different areas of life (Ps. 119:158; Prov. 23:28; Jer. 3:20; 9:2; Mal. 2:11, 14-15).<sup>46</sup> Psalm 25:3 emphasizes a particular nuance: betrayal in the social sphere, in which the *bōḡē dīm* act against their neighbor in a perverse (Isa. 21:2; 24:16; 33:1), deceitful (Prov. 11:3, 6; Jer. 12:1), and unjust (Prov. 11:3, 6) way. Their unjust action against the pious stems from unfaithfulness to Yahweh and from

<sup>42</sup> See John N. Oswalt, "bōš," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 98.

<sup>43</sup> L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: 1994–2000), 195–6.

<sup>44</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Goldberg, "bāḡad," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 89–90.

an ungodly heart (cf. Jer. 12:1, 6).<sup>47</sup> This wickedness is aggravated by the lack of motives (*rêqām*) for his perverse actions (25:3b; cf. Ps 7.4).<sup>48</sup>

### 2.3 PETITION FOR GUIDANCE, INSTRUCTION, AND FORGIVENESS (25:4–7)

Amid his suffering, the psalmist does not simply want deliverance from his misfortune but, above all, to know God and his will. In a bicola with direct synonymous parallelism, the believer cries out to God to make him know experientially (*hōdî ‘ēnî*)<sup>49</sup> Yahweh’s ways (*d<sup>e</sup>rākēkā*) and to teach him (*lamm<sup>e</sup>dēnî*) in the divine paths (*’ōr<sup>e</sup>hōtēkā*) (25:4). There is a learning that is not acquired simply by compiling information or by the simple work of reason, but comes from God as the only one capable of giving meaning to human existence and is acquired in dependence on him.<sup>50</sup>

Walking in the divine ways implies turning away from wickedness and living in deep communion with Yahweh (2 Sam. 22:22; Ps. 18:21 [22]; Isa. 58:2), listening to the divine law and practicing it (cf. Ps. 119:3, 27, 32, 33; Isa. 42:24). When related to God in a genitive construction, the term *’ōrah* is used practically as a synonym for Yahweh’s law (Is 2:3) and points to walking in faithfulness to the covenant (Ps. 28:17-18 [18-19]; Isa. 3:12).

Walking in God’s ways requires a spirit submissive to his instruction, as the imperative verbs in verse 5 indicate: “Guide me (*hadriqēnî*) ... teach me (*lamm<sup>e</sup>dēnî*)”.<sup>51</sup> The guidance for which the psalmist cries out is fundamental “in your truth” (*ba’āmittekā*), that is, God’s faithful and true self-revelation, by which he makes known his being, will, and purposes (cf. 1 Kings 17:24; 22:16; 2 Chron. 9:5; Ps. 26:3; Dan. 9:13; 10:21).<sup>52</sup>

This truth reveals God as the Savior (*yīš‘î*) of those who hope in him, among whom is the psalmist (*qiwwīlî* in 25:5). The author’s hope is persistent, constant

<sup>47</sup> The term is practically a synonym for *rāšā’*, as can be seen in Prov. 2:22; 21:18; Jer. 12:1.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 416.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the verb *yāda’* in Num. 12:6; 1 Sam. 2:12; 3:7; Jer. 9:24. See J. P. Lewis, “*yāda’*,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 366–7.

<sup>50</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup> These imperatives function as petitions from the inferior to the superior (See Carlos Osvaldo Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento* [São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1998], 73, 12.2).

<sup>52</sup> Generally, the appearance of the preposition *b<sup>e</sup>* with the noun *’ēmeḷ* indicates the divine word, which is the “truth” or the “faithful” word; in this case, the sense of “faithfulness” to the covenant is not typical (cf. 1 Kings 17:24; Ps. 26:3; Dan. 9:13; 10:21). In addition, the expressions “your ways” and “your paths” (v. 4) reinforce the meaning of “your truth” (v. 5a).

and tireless,<sup>53</sup> throughout “the whole day” (*kol-hayyôm*), and goes hand in hand with the obedience to his Savior God.<sup>54</sup>

The bicola in verse 6 begins with a cry for God to remember (*zēkōr*) the supplicant. This use of the verb *zākar* contrasts with the two uses of it in verse 7. The same verb has opposite meanings in both verses, pointing first to God’s mercy and then to his wrath. As John Calvin wisely observed:

When God is said to remember us according to his mercy, we are tacitly given to understand that there are two ways of remembering, which are entirely opposite; the one when he visits sinners in his wrath, and the other when he again manifests his favour to those of whom he seemed for a time to take no account.<sup>55</sup>

In verse 6, *zākar* refers to the same kind of use of the word in Exodus, when Yahweh “remembered” the covenant with Israel and saved it, when it cried out to the Lord for deliverance from the slavery imposed by the Egyptians (cf. Ex. 2:23-24; 6:5-6). The divine “remembrance” in verse 6 is an anthropomorphism, indicating not a previous forgetting, “but rather, a superintendence of events towards their desired, or promised, conclusion.”<sup>56</sup> The content of the remembrance is two divine attributes that are deeply connected to Yahweh’s covenant with his people: his mercies (*rahāmēkā*) and his “unfailing love” (*wahāsādēkā*).<sup>57</sup>

In this juxtaposition, the first word assumes the position of a governing term.<sup>58</sup> When both nouns occur side by side (*rahāmīm* and *hesed*), these words express God’s attitude of strong compassion and loyal love towards his people, which manifests itself in the granting of forgiveness and the condescending salvation of individuals or the whole community from the tribulations that surround them (cf. Ps. 51.1[3]; 40.11 [12]; Ps. 69.16[17]; 103.4; Isa. 63.7).

One of the expressions of divine compassion and unfailing love is his readiness to forgive the sins of his people (*rahûm* and *hesed* in Ex. 34.6-7; cf.

<sup>53</sup> Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 223; Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 418.

<sup>54</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalms,” p. 228.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 421.

<sup>56</sup> Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 76.

<sup>57</sup> Despite the option for the singular noun in my translation, הָסֵד is plural in the Hebrew text.

<sup>58</sup> H. J. Stoebe, “*hesed*,” in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 453.

Ps. 51:1[3]; 103:3-4),<sup>59</sup> so the psalmist cries out for God not to “remember” (*‘al-tizkōr*) his “sins of youth” or his “transgressions” (v. 7).

The verb “to remember” (*zākar*) is also used several times in the Old Testament as a metonymy of cause to describe the effect of divine punishment on his people because of their sins. This word appears as a parallel term for the verb “to punish” (*pāqad*): “... Yahweh will *remember* their injustices and *punish* their sins” (Hos. 9:9; cf. Hos. 8:13; Jer. 14:10).<sup>60</sup> This kind of remembrance is the focus of verse 7: “*Remember* not the sins of my youth or my transgressions” (ESV, italics added).

The “sins” (*ḥaṭṭō’wī*) are the deviations from the ways of God’s revealed will (cf. verb *ḥāṭā’* in Prov. 8:36; 19:2),<sup>61</sup> confessed by the psalmist as committed when he was younger, not strictly in his youth (cf. 1 Sam. 2:17; 2 Sam. 18:5).<sup>62</sup> “My transgressions” (*pēšā’ay*) point to attitudes of rebellion, like that of someone who rebels and betrays his superior in a covenant (2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5, 7). The psalmist, therefore, recognizes his condition as a sinner whose heavy and innumerable sins can only be forgiven by the divine *ḥesed* (cf. Ex 34:7; Ps 51:1[3]).

## 2.4 EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE (PART 1): YAHWEH AS THE GRACIOUS AND FAITHFUL GUIDE (25:8-10)

The third stanza presents an expression of trust in Yahweh. It praises the character of the God of Israel and his readiness to guide, forgive, and bless sinners who keep his covenant and fear his name.

Two sublime traits of Yahweh are highlighted: he is good (*tōb*) and upright (*yāšār*) (v. 8). These adjectives, often combined (Deut. 6:18; Ps. 125:4), reflect the goodness and moral uprightness revealed in the Law, which God expects of His people (Deut. 6:18; 12:28; 1 Sam. 12:23; 2 Chron. 14:2; Neh. 9:13; Ps. 125:4). Divine goodness indicates his gracious help to those who trust in him (Ps. 86:17; cf. Lam. 3:25)<sup>63</sup> and is linked to attributes such as love, forgiveness

<sup>59</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 228.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 270.

<sup>61</sup> G. Herbert Livingston, “*ḥāṭā’*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 277; James Limburg, *Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 80; Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), p. 277–8. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 306–7.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 77.

<sup>63</sup> Schökel, *Dicionário Bíblico Hebraico-Português*, 256–7.

and faithfulness (cf. Ps. 23:6; 86:5; 100:5; 107:1; 118:1). Righteousness, on the other hand, expresses God's moral justice (Ps. 64:10), in contrast to human impiety (Ps. 107:42), setting the standard of justice for Israel and humanity (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 6:18; 12:25; 1 Kings 11:38; Ps. 19:8).<sup>64</sup>

These attributes are linked to the natural consequence (*'al-kēn*)<sup>65</sup> of Yahweh's action in "guiding sinners through the way" (*yôre haṭṭā' im baddārek*) (25:8b). Just as a wise father guides his son through commandments and instructions (cf. Prov. 4:4,11; 5:13), Yahweh guides sinners (*haṭṭā' im*), including the psalmist (cf. Sl 25:7), by the good way (v. 8; cf. 1 Kings 8:36), which is Yahweh's way (v. 9: *darkô*), manifesting grace and faithfulness (v. 10).

In verse 5, the psalmist's plea for God to guide him (*hadrīkēnī*) and teach him (*lammēdēnī*) comes true: Yahweh "guides (*yadrēk*) the humble by the righteous precept and teaches (*wilammēd*) the humble in his way" (v. 9).<sup>66</sup> The humble (*'ānāwīm*) are the afflicted people who trust in the Lord (Ps. 10:12-14,17-18; 69:32[33]; 34:2; Isa. 29:19) and have a broken spirit (Prov. 16:19; Isa. 61:1). Combining suffering with piety, they depend on Yahweh,<sup>67</sup> who acts on their behalf and saves them (Ps. 76:10; 147:6).

In the parallelism of Psalm 25:9, "righteous precept" (*mišpāt*) and "his way" (*darkô*) are equivalent terms, indicating that Yahweh's "way" is his "righteous precept." The noun *mišpāt* encompasses Yahweh's sovereign right<sup>68</sup> and justice, reflected in the law and the order of creation (Ps. 89:14[15]; 99:4; 111:7; 33:5; 37:28; Jer. 9:24). As Supreme King, God decrees "righteous precepts" for His people (Deut. 33:10; Isa. 42:4; Jer. 8:7).

The author reinforces the idea in verse 10 by using "paths" (*'ārḥôt*) as a synonym for "way," both expressing the "righteous precept" in which God guides afflicted sinners.<sup>69</sup> In these paths, Yahweh reveals his character of "unfailing love and faithfulness" (*hesed we'emet*), indicating Yahweh's gracious love and

<sup>64</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 449.

<sup>65</sup> These two Hebrew words function as a conclusive conjunction (see this same use in Gen. 2:24; 10:9; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 18:49[50]; Jer. 31:3). See Schökel, *Dicionário Bíblico Hebraico-Português*, 495, E.1.

<sup>66</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 229. VanGemeren opposes the interpretation that verbs here are jussives.

<sup>67</sup> R. Martin-Achard, "'nh," in Jenni and Westermann, eds., *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 931–4.

<sup>68</sup> Robert D. Culver, "šāpāt," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 949.

<sup>69</sup> Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 225.

faithful commitment to his people,<sup>70</sup> manifested in salvation (Ps 40.10[11]; 115.1ff.) and protective care (40.11[12]; cf. Gen. 32.10).<sup>71</sup>

The experience of God's grace and faithfulness becomes concrete in the lives of "those who keep his covenant and his statutes" (*l'ēnōšerē b'eritō w'e'ēdōtāyw*) (v. 10b). In Psalms 119:2, 22, those who keep (*nšr*) the divine statutes (*'ēdūt*) are those who have an integral commitment to God ("seek him with all their heart").

## 2.5 EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE (CENTER): YAHWEH AS THE GRACIOUS AND FAITHFUL FORGIVER (25:11)

Verse 11 constitutes the center of the third stanza and the whole song, in which the confession of sin and the plea for divine forgiveness dominate.<sup>72</sup> Unable to obtain divine forgiveness on his own, the psalmist cries out for Yahweh to grant him grace based on Yahweh's name (*l'ēma'an-šimkā y'hwā*).<sup>73</sup> The expression "because of your name" (*l'ēma'an-šimkā*) refers back to the previous construction in verse 7: "because of your goodness" (*l'ēma'an tūb'ekā*).<sup>74</sup> Both function as a foundation for the supplication for forgiveness of sins.

The "name" (*šēm*) of Yahweh points to his existence, character, and reputation<sup>75</sup> and marks the revelation of his glory in Creation and Redemption (Ps. 8:1; 124:8; Ex. 19:5-6).<sup>76</sup> Because of his name, Yahweh saved and confirmed his covenant with Israel (Ex. 3:14ff; 6:2-8).<sup>77</sup> The theology of the covenant is embedded in the theology of the name (Ps. 25:11a), which unites word and deed. The God who calls himself Yahweh (causative) is the one who creates, renews, enlivens, and brings to fulfillment.<sup>78</sup>

When he made his glory pass before Moses, Yahweh revealed his name as

<sup>70</sup> Koehler, Baumgartner, Richardson, and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, 336–7.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 54; VanGemeren, "Psalms," 235.

<sup>72</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 255; Limburg, *Psalms*, 255.

<sup>73</sup> Luis Alonso Schökel and Cecília Carniti, *Salmos: Tradução, Introdução e Comentário*, vol. 1 (São Paulo: Paulus, 1996), 403.

<sup>74</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 230.

<sup>75</sup> Hermann J. Austel, "šēm," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 934; Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos*, vol. 1, 403.

<sup>76</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 107.

<sup>77</sup> Schildenberger, "A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos", 217.

<sup>78</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms*, 255; cf. Limburg, *Psalms*, 256.

follows: “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate, gracious and longsuffering, and great in mercy and faithfulness... who forgives iniquity [*’āwōn*], transgression and sin, though the guilty be not innocent...” (Ex. 34:6-7; cf. Ps. 25:11). Based on this revelation of the compassionate and faithful character manifested in the forgiveness of sins, the psalmist appeals to Yahweh: “Forgive my iniquity [*’āwōn*], for it is great” (25.11b).<sup>79</sup>

The reading of *sālah* (“forgive”) in the imperative, as a plea from the inferior to the superior, is grammatically plausible<sup>80</sup> and yields the best meaning of the text: “Forgive my iniquity.” This Hebrew verb (*sālah*) stands out for being used only when God is the practitioner of the action of “forgiving”<sup>81</sup> and portrays Yahweh’s radical mercy at times of deep idolatry or terrible unbelief practiced by Israel against the Ruler of the covenant (cf. Ex. 34:9; Num. 14:19-20).<sup>82</sup> Because of his compassion, Yahweh is entirely willing to forgive the sinner who turns from his evil ways and turns to him (cf. *sālah* in Isa. 55:7; Jer. 36:3).

## 2.5 EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE (PART 2): YAHWEH AS GUIDE AND BLESSER OF THOSE WHO FEAR HIM (25:12–14)

The second part of the expression of confidence begins with a question. The expression *mī-zeh* (25:12) is idiomatic and occurs in its emphatic use, giving force and direction to the phrase and establishing it in a close relationship with the one speaking (cf. Job 38:2; Ps. 24:8; Jer. 50:44; Lam. 3:37).<sup>83</sup> Here,

<sup>79</sup> Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 225.

<sup>80</sup> The verb *sālah*, in the second part of verse 11, is in the perfect aspect, but it is accompanied by a conversive *waw* (*w<sup>c</sup>sālahā*). Even though there is no preceding verb in the future tense or the imperative, the preceding causal clause (cf. v. 11a: *’ma’an*) allows the verb to be used in the future or imperative sense, as demonstrated by F. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew grammar* (New York: D. Appleton, 1851), 236, 124.6.d.1. Psalm 25.11 is used as an example by Gesenius in changing the temporal sense of the perfect aspect. Cf. John Calvin’s interesting argument in Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 425–6.

<sup>81</sup> Schildenberger, “A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos”, 217.

<sup>82</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “*sālah*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 626.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 261; Schildenberger, “A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos”, 217; Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento*, 33. This author disagrees with Schockel and Carniti’s proposal that the expression *mī-zeh* “asks for the identification of a character” (Schökel and Carniti, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 403). The very use of this expression in Psalm 25:12 reveals the fallacy of the claim, as well as other texts that do not require the identification of any character since they function as rhetorical questions whose answers are negative. See Job 38:2; Jer. 50:44; Lam. 3:37.

the demonstrative pronoun *zeh* has an almost adverbial function and should be read as “Who, *then*, is the man who fears the Lord?”<sup>84</sup>

The “fear of Yahweh” (*y<sup>e</sup>rē’ y<sup>e</sup>hwā*) is central to Old Testament Hebrew spirituality, uniting reverence for God<sup>85</sup> with fear of his judgment against disobedience (Ex. 18:21; Deut. 4:10; Josh. 24:14; Ps. 112:1; Jer. 5:22).<sup>86</sup> Required by God (Ex. 20:20; Deut. 6:13; Josh. 4:24; Ps. 33:8), the “fear of Yahweh” manifests itself in obedience to and delight in the divine commandments (Deut. 31:11-12; Ps. 112:1; Eccl. 12:13), aversion to evil (Prov. 8:13), rejection of idolatry (Deut. 6:14) and the exercise of justice before Yahweh (2 Sam. 23:3).<sup>87</sup>

Again, the psalmist highlights the image of Yahweh as the guide of human beings through the way by repeating the verb *yrh* (v. 12: *yôrennû*; v. 8: *yôre*) and the expression “in/through the way” (v. 12: *b<sup>e</sup>derek*; v. 8: *baddārek*). The difference lies in the syntactical object of the guidance: in v. 8, it is the “sinners” (*haṭṭā’im*); in v. 12, “the man who fears Yahweh” (*hā’iṣ y<sup>e</sup>rē’ y<sup>e</sup>hwā*). In the context of Psalm 25, both refer to the same class — “humble sinners” (vv. 8-9) and “the man who fears Yahweh” (v. 12) — who, by divine grace, learn to obey him.<sup>88</sup> The “way” symbolizes ethical and religious conduct in the light of divine revelation (cf. Job 34:21; Prov. 5:21; Jer. 32:19).

The faithful “stay in the good” (*b<sup>e</sup>tôb tālîn*) (v. 13a). The verb *lîn* has the basic meaning of “to spend the night,” “to lodge,” or “to stay” (cf. Gen. 19:2; 28:11; Judg. 19:13; 2 Sam. 12:16; Job 24:7)<sup>89</sup> and is used metaphorically in the text as an indication of the permanence of the righteous in the “good.” Indeed, the idea of rest or repose is also present (see Prov 19:23; Ps. 91:1),<sup>90</sup> but the emphasis is

<sup>84</sup> Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew grammar*, 228; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 261; VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 231.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Bowling, “*yārē’*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 400–1.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 431.

<sup>87</sup> Bowling, “*yārē’*,” 400–1; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 431.

<sup>88</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 427–8.

<sup>89</sup> Schökel, *Dicionário Bíblico Hebraico-Português*, 343; F. W. Gesenius, *Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament including the biblical Chaldee* (Andover: The Codeman Press, 1824), 329–30.

<sup>90</sup> Schildenberger, “A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos,” 217; Walter C. Kaiser, “*lîn*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 474.

on the *continuity and durability* of the man who fears the Lord *within* a blessed state (see the same metaphorical use in Job 41:22[14]; Ps. 49:12; Isa. 1:21).<sup>91</sup>

God's blessing is poured out not only on the man who fears Yahweh but also on his descendants (*zar'ô*), those who carry on his name and memory (cf. 1 Sam. 24:21; Isa. 48:19). The extension of God's grace to them harks back to the Mosaic statements that Yahweh shows his loyal grace to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10).

The climax of the blessed life granted to "those who fear" Yahweh (*lîrē'āyw*) appears in verse 14.<sup>92</sup> The opening word of the passage (*sôḏ*) has a wide range of meanings. It can indicate the "counsel" guiding the execution of a specific project (Prov. 15:22) or a "public assembly" (Gen. 49:6 par. *qāhāl*; Ps. 89:7; 111:1 par. *ēḏā*).<sup>93</sup> However, generally, it refers to advice or planning carried out in an intimate and private circle of people (Ps. 64:2[3]; 83:3[4]), thus used as a synonym for "secret" (Job 15:8; Prov. 11:13; 20:19; 25:9; Amos 3:7)<sup>94</sup> or "friendship"/"intimate relationship" (Job 19:19; 29:4; Prov. 3:32).<sup>95</sup>

When *sôḏ* is related to Yahweh, it refers to the "secret" or "counsel" that he reveals to his servants or in his heavenly council (Job 15:8; Amos 3:7; Jer. 23:18, 22).<sup>96</sup> It also refers to his "friendship" or "intimate relationship" (Job 29:4) with the righteous (Prov. 3:32). In Psalm 25:14, "intimate relationship" seems to be the primary meaning since *sôḏ* forms a parallel with "covenant" (*b'rît*), which occurs in the second couplet. The second noun expresses a commitment of mutual fidelity and love, whose complete fulfillment occurs in intimate friendship (*sôḏ*) between God and his people.<sup>97</sup>

The use of the verb *yāḏā* in the Hiphil ("to make known," "to make known") appears in the infinitive mode of Hebrew with the sense of gerund in English and indicates how God makes intimacy possible for those who fear him, that is, "by making his covenant known to them."<sup>98</sup> This knowledge includes the

<sup>91</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 533; Kaiser, "בָּיִת," p. 780-1; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 241.

<sup>92</sup> Leupold, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 225.

<sup>93</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 691.

<sup>94</sup> R. D. Patterson, "*sôḏ*," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 619.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 691.

<sup>96</sup> Mays, *Psalms*, 126–7.

<sup>97</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, 24; Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos*, vol. 1, 403.

<sup>98</sup> See its use of the Hebrew infinitive verb in Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento*, 83, 177.

requirements or precepts revealed in the covenant and its benefits in the enjoyment of Yahweh's grace and faithfulness toward his elect (v. 10; cf. Deut. 30:19–20).

## 2.6 PETITION FOR DELIVERANCE AND FORGIVENESS (25:15–18)

Faced with the trust expressed in God as the guide and friend of those who depend on him and hope in him (vv. 8-9, 12-14), the psalmist exercises this dependence by turning his eyes to Yahweh ('*ênay tāmîd 'el-y<sup>h</sup>wâ*) (v. 15).<sup>99</sup>

The eyes turned towards Yahweh imply the relationship of a servant to his master, in which the former waits with submissive expectation for the latter's demonstration of grace (cf. Ps. 123:1-3; 145:15).<sup>100</sup> This image carries the idea of placing one's trust and seeking refuge in God (Ps. 141:8), instead of vain trust in human strength (Lam. 4:17).<sup>101</sup>

The reason or explanation for their trust in Yahweh is in the second part of the verse: "For he delivers my feet from the snare" (*kî hû'-yôšî' mērešet raġlāy*) (v. 15b).<sup>102</sup> Although the basic meaning of the word *yāšā'* is "to go out" or "to bring out," it has a nuance of redemption or deliverance (cf. Ps. 68:6[7]; 107:28; 142:7). The verb *yāšā'* is often used to describe Israel's redemption from Egypt originating in Yahweh's saving acts (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 9:26, 29; Ps. 136:10–11).<sup>103</sup>

Calvin observes that the pronoun "he" in the second part of verse 15 is emphatic: it shows that the faithful "did not gaze around him in every direction, after the manner of those who ... devise for themselves various methods of deliverance and salvation, but that he was contented with God alone."<sup>104</sup>

The devotee then asks Yahweh to turn his face towards him (*p<sup>e</sup>nē-'ēlay*) and show his grace (*ḥānnēnî*) (v. 16a). The verb *pānâ* is logically an anthropomorphism, in which God is described as turning his face towards the oppressed or his faithful and acting on their behalf (Ps. 69:16[17]; cf; Lev. 26:9; 1 Kings 8:28). *ḥānan* is practically a synonym for *pānâ* here since it also indicates the divine attention towards the calamities of his people (cf. Ps. 31:9[10]) or the

<sup>99</sup> Schildenberger, "A estrutura temática e estrófica dos Salmos Alfabéticos", 217.

<sup>100</sup> VanGemeren, "Psalms," 232.

<sup>101</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, 241; Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos*, vol. 1, 403.

<sup>102</sup> The conjunction *kî* introduces an explanatory clause (See Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento*, 139–40).

<sup>103</sup> Paul R. Gilchrist, "*yāšā'*," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 393.

<sup>104</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 431–2.

gracious granting of undeserved blessings, such as children, prosperity and peace (cf. Gen. 33:5, 11; Num. 6:25-27).

The author of Psalm 25 describes his desolate condition: “The troubles of my heart are increasing” (*šārôṭ l'ēbābî hirhîbû*) (v. 17a).<sup>105</sup> These “troubles” are internal feelings, since they originate in the “heart” (*lēbāb*) of the composer,<sup>106</sup> but they are also a natural consequence of the external oppression he experiences from his enemies and his isolation from the community (vv. 3, 16; cf. *šārâ* in 1 Sam. 26:24).

If, previously, the psalmist had asked God to “deliver” him (verb *yāšā'* in Hifil) from the trap (v. 15b), now he prays that Yahweh will “deliver” him (verb *yāšā'* in Hifil) from his “afflictions”<sup>107</sup> (*mēšûqôṭay*) (v. 17b). This last term is parallel to “troubles of my heart” which occurs in the first part of the verse. Only Yahweh can save His people from adversity, and it is to Him that the composer of the psalm prays for help.

The psalmist leaves the acrostic order, not beginning the verse with the expected *qôph*, and uses the following letter, *reš*, at the beginning of verses 18 and 19. It is possible that other canonical texts influenced the choice of *râ'â* as the verb linked to the author’s tribulations and sufferings (cf. Ps. 9:13[14]; 10:14; 31:7[8]; 119:32; Lam. 1:9).<sup>108</sup> The word *râ'â* indicates a favorable consideration of Yahweh for the supplicant (Gen. 29:31-32; Ps. 138:6; 9:13[14]; Isa. 38:5),<sup>109</sup> which translates into liberating action (Ex. 4:31).<sup>110</sup>

At the beginning of the psalm, the believer declares that he “lifts” (*nāšā'*) his soul to Yahweh as an expression of dependence. Now, with this same Hebrew verb, he cries out for the Lord to “forgive” all his sins (*wēšā' l'ēkol-haṭṭō'wtāy*) (v. 18b). The verb *nāšā'* here indicates the divine act of “lifting and carrying away” the sins of men. It is an action so characteristic of Yahweh that it can be

<sup>105</sup> This author believes that the iterative sense of the Perfect aspect is the one that best suits the text, mainly because of the intensity with which the psalmist portrays the worsening of his suffering. See Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento*, 58, 3.1.

<sup>106</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 433.

<sup>107</sup> Gesenius, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament Including the Biblical Chaldee*, 385.

<sup>108</sup> Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos*, vol. 1, 398.

<sup>109</sup> Robert D. Culver, “*rā'â*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 823; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 906–7.

<sup>110</sup> Gesenius, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament Including the Biblical Chaldee*, 587.

defined as an attribute of his (Num. 14:18) because his capacity for forgiveness is incomparable (Mic. 7:18).

## 2.7 PETITION FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY REDEMPTION (25:19–22)

At the beginning of the last stanza, the psalmist pleads with God to look at his enemies: “Look at my enemies, for they are becoming numerous” (*r<sup>e</sup>’ē-’ôy<sup>e</sup>bay kî-rābbû*) (v. 19). In verse 2, he had already mentioned them, and they are certainly one of the primary sources of his suffering. Just as the anguish of the supplicant’s heart “increases” (*hirhîbû*) (v. 17), so his enemies “become numerous” (*rābbû*) (v. 19).<sup>111</sup>

The second part of verse 19 shows the close connection between enmity and hatred: “And with a hatred of violence they hate me” (*w<sup>e</sup>śin’at hāmās śēnē’ûmî*). The Old Testament presents hatred as “the opposition, ill-will, and aversion men have for fellowmen.”<sup>112</sup> The use of the verb *śānē’* with the noun of the same root *śin’â* emphasizes the greatness or perversity of the hatred felt by the enemies of the pious (cf. 2 Sam. 13:15; Ps. 139:22).<sup>113</sup>

Verse 20 presents the psalmist’s plea for God to protect him and deliver him from the danger and oppression he finds himself in. The first verb that occurs in the imperative of supplication points to the psalmist’s desire to have his life protected, sustained and cared for by Yahweh (cf. Gen. 28:15, 20; Job 29:2; Ps. 34:20; 37:28). The other verb *nāšal* emphasizes the longing for God to “pull him out” of his oppressive situation (cf. Gen. 31:9, 16).<sup>114</sup>

The psalmist then repeats his cry that God should not allow him to be humiliated before his enemies (*’al-’ēbôš*; cf. 25:2; 35:4; 83.17[18]).<sup>115</sup> The reason for his request is that he has taken shelter or refuge in Yahweh (*kî-hāšitî hāk*)

<sup>111</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 912. Both verbs are used in the Iterative sense of the Perfect aspect. See Pinto, *Fundamentos para Exegese do Antigo Testamento*, 58, 3.1.

<sup>112</sup> Gerard van Groningen, “*śānē’*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 880.

<sup>113</sup> E. Jenni “*śn’*,” in Jenni and Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, p. 1278.

<sup>114</sup> Milton C. Fisher, “*nāšal*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 594.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Commentary on 25:2.

(25:20b).<sup>116</sup> He hopes that “the LORD redeems the life of his servants, and of those who *take refuge in him* (*hāsā*) none shall be condemned” (Ps 34:22).

In the final verse, the psalmist expands his cry for his afflictions and sufferings to a public cry for the afflictions of the community of faith he is a part of: “O God, redeem Israel from all its troubles!”.<sup>117</sup> The last verse does not follow the acrostic structure of the Psalm. This literary device does not imply a disconnected or inappropriate later addition but rather a purposeful effect of joining the personal lament to the collective one and enabling any believer in Israel to appropriate the prayer.<sup>118</sup>

The verb *pādā* contains the basic meaning of “to achieve the transfer of ownership from one to another through payment of a price or an equivalent substitute.”<sup>119</sup> This word marked the liberation of Israel from Egypt, from the land of slavery, as if God were buying the nation of Pharaoh for himself (cf. Deut. 7:13; 13:6; 1 Chron. 17:21; Mic. 6:4).<sup>120</sup> Just as he had done in the past, the psalmist asks God to do it in the present, taking the nation out of its condition of suffering.<sup>121</sup>

The word *šārā* links the individual afflictions of the psalmist mentioned in verse 17 with those experienced by all of Israel in verse 22. The psalm concludes with a communal plea without a concrete answer but with the expectation (25:3, 5, 21) that Yahweh will rescue the faithful from their calamitous state and the nation from its pain and affliction (25:22).

### 3. CALVIN’S RECEPTION OF PSALM 25 AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO A REFORMED SPIRITUALITY

After the exegetical analysis of the biblical text, this section will investigate how Calvin understood and applied Psalm 25, drawing his contributions to developing a Reformed spirituality. The primary bibliographical material for

<sup>116</sup> E. Gerstenberger “*hsh*,” in Jenni and Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 464–5.

<sup>117</sup> *pādē ’ēlōhīm ’et-yisrā’el mikkōl šārōtāyw.*

<sup>118</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 232–3.

<sup>119</sup> William B. Coker, “*pādā*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by Harris, Archer Jr., and Waltke, 716.

<sup>120</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 804.

<sup>121</sup> In this case, the preposition *min* indicates the movement from a state of existence, i.e., out of the suffering condition. See Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew grammar*, 275, 2.a.

this last part of the research will be his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* and *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

### 3.1 LIFE OF PRAYER AND DEPENDENCE ON GOD

In commenting on the passage from Psalm 25:1-3, John Calvin draws attention to the psalmist's exclusive focus on God: "Unto thee, O Jehovah! I have lifted up my soul"<sup>122</sup> (25:1). The reformer observes that the faithful "directs all his desires and prayers to God alone."<sup>123</sup> At this point, the Christian is reminded that, when praying, he needs to have his "hope fixed in God" rather than relying on "worldly aid."<sup>124</sup>

If the "worldly aid" of the past could be "chariots" or "horses" (Ps 20:7), today, the Christian can be tempted to put his trust in new technologies, in the financial market, in a political figure or a friend's professional influence. In all these situations, Calvin exhorts the contemporary believer: "Let us be directed by this rule — not to distract our minds by various and uncertain hopes, nor to depend on worldly aid, but to yield to God the honour of lifting up our hearts to him in sincere and earnest prayer."<sup>125</sup>

By using the metaphor of the faithful's eyes turning towards the Lord (25:15), the psalm reinforces the need for supreme dependence on God that believers must cultivate. According to Calvin, this image reveals "the right manner of prayer, telling them that they should endeavour to keep their thoughts fixed upon God"<sup>126</sup> instead of "gazing around ... in every direction" in search of help from resources other than the Lord.<sup>127</sup>

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin also draws on Psalms 25:1 to teach about the importance of praying with a clear vision of the majesty of the God with whom we have fellowship. He states that "we are far removed from God, unless our thoughts rise upward: as it is said in the psalm, 'Unto thee, O

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<sup>122</sup> When analyzing Calvin's reception of Psalm 25 in this article, unless the version comes from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* or is indicated in parentheses, we use Calvin's version of the Sacred Text according to James Anderson's English translation in the *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. See Anderson's explanation about the Commentary's biblical text in James Anderson, "Introductory Notice," in Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, xvii.

<sup>123</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 413.

<sup>124</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 414.

<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 414.

<sup>126</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 431

<sup>127</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 431–2.

Lord, do I lift up my soul' (Psalm 25:1)."<sup>128</sup> This awareness of the need to "lift to God" in prayer should make the believer put aside "all earthly cares and affections," concentrating on his conversation with the Lord and not allowing his "thoughts to run to and fro."<sup>129</sup>

How can we keep our thoughts fixed on God and our minds focused on him when life is full of suffering and difficulties, "even in the most trying circumstances,"<sup>130</sup> like those faced by the psalmist? John Calvin identified two fundamental elements for a persevering prayer life. The first is to meditate on God's attributes. In Psalm 25:8, the believer reminds himself that "good" (*tôb*) and "upright" (*yāšār*) is the Lord. By "meditating on this truth" about God's attributes, the psalmist encouraged himself to persevere and gathered new strength so that "he may return with the more alacrity to prayer."<sup>131</sup> This meditation on the Lord's qualities works as fuel to preserve the prayer fire, without which our prayer life will "languish, and at length be entirely extinguished."<sup>132</sup>

The second element of an "earnest and attentive prayer" is "the recollection of God's promises."<sup>133</sup> Calvin highlights this second element when he talks about the memory that the psalmist brings to mind of the promises that God "will teach" the man who fears the Lord "in the way that he should choose." Psalm 25 is replete with reminders of Yahweh's promises (vv. 3, 10, 13-14), which explains his surrender to the Lord in prayer (v. 1) and his unceasing cry (v. 15).

Therefore, one of the fundamental aspects of a biblical and reformed spirituality in the light of Psalm 25 is a fervent and constant prayer, totally dependent on God, based on God's attributes and promises.

### 3.2 CONFESSION OF SIN AND HUMILITY

Based on Psalm 25:7, Calvin emphasizes that the "right and proper order of prayer therefore is ... to ask, at the very outset, that God would pardon our

<sup>128</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), III.xx.5.

<sup>129</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xx.5.

<sup>130</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 418.

<sup>131</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 422. Earlier, Calvin had stated that the psalmist "exercises his thoughts in meditation upon the goodness of God, that he may return with a renewed ardour to prayer" (pp. 421-2).

<sup>132</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 422.

<sup>133</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 427.

sins.”<sup>134</sup> As the psalmist pleads to God to forgive the sins of his youth (v. 7), he “acknowledges, in explicit terms, that he cannot in any other way become a partaker of the grace of God than by having his sins blotted out.”<sup>135</sup>

In three passages of the Psalm (Ps 25:7, 11, 18), the author reveals a strong awareness of his sins and pleads for Yahweh’s forgiving grace. The psalmist knew “that he could not expect to enjoy the divine favour, unless he were first reconciled to God by receiving a free pardon.”<sup>136</sup>

Turning his thoughts to the primary cause of his misery allows the believer to find the proper remedy of forgiveness that only God can grant.<sup>137</sup> Again, Calvin turns to God’s character as a critical foundation of our hope when we recognize our sins. How could we not be desperate for our sins? The solution is God’s “mercy” (or “unfailing love”) and “true” revealed, for example, in Psalm 25:10.

For this reason, the two things, mercy and truth, are uniformly conjoined in the Psalms as having a mutual connection with each other. For it were of no avail to us to know that God is true, did He not in mercy allure us to himself; nor could we of ourselves embrace his mercy did not He expressly offer it. ... ‘All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies’ (Ps. 25:10)<sup>138</sup>

By turning to God’s compassion and unfailing love in Psalm 25:6, the psalmist testifies that he trusts not to his merit as any ground of hope. All his joy and hope derive from the fountain of divine grace alone.<sup>139</sup> As the psalmist implored God to forgive his sins and found Yahweh’s truth and unfailing love, today, “we shall not prove that we have thoroughly shaken off our stupor until, groaning under the burden, and lamenting our sad condition, we seek relief from God.”<sup>140</sup>

Calvin refers to this humbled heart God produces in his children as “docility”<sup>141</sup> or “pious docility of mind.”<sup>142</sup> The reformer describes his conver-

<sup>134</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 419–20.

<sup>135</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 420.

<sup>136</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 433.

<sup>137</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 420.

<sup>138</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.iii.18.

<sup>139</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 419.

<sup>140</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.ii.7.

<sup>141</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 423.

<sup>142</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 427-8.

sion to the gospel similarly: “My mind [...] now was ready for serious attention. By a sudden conversion, *God turned and brought it to docility.*”<sup>143</sup> Thus, the docility of mind, as a result of not trusting our understanding or efforts but depending exclusively on the Lord’s truth and unfailing love for our forgiveness and communion with him, should be a characteristic of Christian spirituality.

The prospect of God’s glory in Christ makes the members of the Christian community deeply aware of their sinfulness (cf. Lk. 5:8-10) and, at the same time, of the great glory of his grace (1 Tim. 1:15-16), leading them to a constant attitude of humble confession before God. Believers, therefore, are called to weep over their sins and humble themselves before God to receive his forgiveness and mercy (Jas. 4:6-10; cf. Lk. 18:14). This is the key to the exalted bliss of communion with God (Jas. 4:10; cf. Ps. 25:14), and joy is only enjoyed by those who throw themselves on God’s infinite mercies:

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Ps. 32:1–2, ESV)

### 3.3 TRIALS AND SANCTIFICATION

Last but not least, Psalm 25 reveals that the afflictions and troubles of the Christian life are part of the sanctification process. When describing those whom God guides as *‘ānāwîm* (“poor” or “humble”) in verse 9, the author of the psalm probably had in mind “the afflictions which serve to restrain and subdue the frowardness of the flesh.”<sup>144</sup> After humiliating and afflicting his children, God “kindly stretches forth his hand to them, and leads and guides them throughout the whole course of their life.”<sup>145</sup>

Calvin uses the term “cross” to describe this process of trials and loving discipline God uses to mold and train his people in “humility and meekness.”<sup>146</sup> He acts this way as a wise and loving father while directing them along the path of life (Ps. 25:8, 10).

The confession of sins at the center of Psalm 25:11 shows that the psalmist’s afflictions have the didactic purpose of leading him to confession and reconci-

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted by Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers: 25th Anniversary*, revised edition (Nashville: Brodman and Holman, 2013), 180 (italics mine).

<sup>144</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 423.

<sup>145</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 423.

<sup>146</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 424.

liation with God. God deals with his people of the New Covenant in the same way, as Calvin observed:

And although the Lord has various ends in view in bringing his people under the cross, yet we ought to hold fast the principle, that as often as God afflicts us, we are called to examine our own hearts, and humbly to seek reconciliation **with him**.<sup>147</sup>

The author of Hebrews affirms that God disciplines and chastens his people through life's difficulties to make them partakers of his holiness and lead them to fruits of righteousness and peace (Heb 12.4-11), which leads him to exhort them: "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed" (Heb 12.13, ESV). Such language calls to repent of crooked, wrong paths (cf. Prov. 4:26-27). In a biblical and reformed perspective, moments of difficulty should promote Christian self-reflection and evaluation about sins that may be paralyzing the spiritual journey (cf. Heb. 12:12), which God expects us to confess before Him (cf. Jas. 5:15-16).

## CONCLUSION

The exegetical analysis of Psalm 25 and the interpretative and pastoral contributions of John Calvin helped better understand the meaning and application of the biblical text. According to the statement attributed to Melancton, "Scripture cannot be understood theologically unless it is first understood grammatically."<sup>148</sup> In other words, the historical-grammatical method must contribute and lead to an authentic and biblical life of piety. At the same time, a devotional reading of the Psalms must never do without its literary and historical-grammatical interpretation.

At the end of this research, it is possible to affirm not only that the book of Psalms, in general, but also Psalm 25, in a specific way, has several contributions to make to the development of a truly biblical and reformed spirituality. Amid the afflictions he faced, the psalmist modeled the kind of biblical piety expected of those who are part of God's people: exclusive dependence on the Lord, confession of sins, trust in God's forgiving grace, and, finally, a teachable heart to be sanctified by God amid life's trials.

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<sup>147</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 434.

<sup>148</sup> James Anderson, "Introductory Notice," vii.

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