

Effective Verbal Persuasion in Prayer, Business, and Teaching

Russell Jay Hendel
Department of Mathematics
Room 316, 7800 York Road
Towson Maryland, 21252
RHendel@Towson.Edu

ABSTRACT

What verbal techniques – persuasion, explanation and evaluation – yield superior results? Answers to this question are taken from the education, business and prayer literature. We show that the best verbal approaches i) focus on the future, ii) attribute causes that are internal and controllable like effort, iii) advocate sub-goals that are specific and achievable short term and iv) use imagery focusing on emotions of mastery and enjoyment. Three theories – attribution theory, goal setting theory and imagery studies – are used to justify the results.

Keywords: Goal Definition, Sub-goal Definition, Measurability, Self-efficacy, Business Evaluation, Teacher Evaluation, Prayer, Attribution Theory, Imagery Techniques, Verbal Persuasion

1. GOALS

There are a variety of disciplines and situations where one has to verbally encourage people. Three obvious examples are:

- **Education:** An instructor, examining a student's written product, wishes to advise on good areas and on errors, areas needing improvement. What is the *best* way the instructor can accomplish this verbal indication?
- **Business:** A business manager examining the products of a subordinate wishes to advise on good areas, and errors, areas needing improvement. What is the *best* way the instructor can accomplish this verbal indication?
- **Prayer:** A person is praying for success in certain areas of life. The person praying has before them a variety of different prayers. Which types of prayers are *best* for ensuring success?

These three bullets point in the direction of the goal of this paper, to present best verbal persuasion techniques. To motivate giving more detail to the paper's goal, consider the obvious answer, "Being positive, yields superior results."

This paper goes to the next step beyond "being positive." In Section 2, we present three examples with two competing verbal persuasions, each of which is positive. These examples facilitate exploration of attributes other than positivity.

In Section 3, we begin to answer the question of best verbal method by presenting the theory of self-efficacy, roughly, self-confidence. Self-efficacy is the single most important personality characteristic driving personal success. It is generally agreed that prior successful past performances are in turn the most important predictor of self-efficacy. Consequently, we make explicit that this paper focuses on non-experts, people who do not yet have success experiences. Their self-efficacy cannot be driven by successful past performances.

Rather, their self-efficacy can be driven by role models, verbal persuasion and imaginal experiences. This paper will focus on proper verbal persuasion and imaginal techniques. We present principles governing the best verbal and imaginal approaches.

Although we use the term verbal *persuasion*, this term includes explanations, strategies for success, as well as evaluation. It might also be worthwhile to clarify the sense in which prayer is used in this paper. First, we restrict prayer in this paper to the prayers encountered in the Psalms [2]. We have chosen the Psalms since they present a wide variety of prayers by a wide variety of authors in a wide variety of situations.

We perceive prayer as a two-dimensional phenomenon. There is a dimension of God in prayer. This paper does not address God. But clearly, the word "God" may occur only a few times in a Psalm. The rest of the Psalm has a purely verbal dimension and deals with images, verbal development of a plea, and verbal development of background and hopes.

Biblical scholarship [10] tends to see this verbal dimension as reflective of writing genres common in the time of the writing of the Psalm. The point of view in this paper, is that the verbal dimension of prayer is reflective of psychological principles ensuring success. There has been some recent scholarship emphasizing psychological vs. genre approaches [6]. Thus, this paper studies the verbal, not the Divine, dimension of prayer from a psychological, not a poetic, point of view.

One more point should be clarified about prayer. It might seem incongruous to include conversations between teachers and students, or supervisors and subordinates, with prayer, which is not really a dialogue. But one can regard prayer as a dialogue between man and God, or as self-talk in God's presence. Self-talk is a well-established category of verbal persuasion.

The discussion of prayer leads to another important aspect of this paper. We do not have a definitive literature answering all aspects of the questions, "What is the *best* verbal persuasion method to ensure success? What is the *best* imaginal technique for success?" The theory is young with some experiments offering contradictory results. There are some theories explaining what is best: self-efficacy (Section 3), attribution theory (Section 4), and goal setting or measurability (Section 5). There are also some papers on imaginal techniques (Section 6) though this theory is in its infancy.

This paper points to directions of future application and research. As a simple example, while there is literature on the best imagery to ensure sports success and business success, imaginal techniques are not used in education. Thus, a major method of improvement is being ignored. It is hoped that this

paper sparks interest in further research and application.

2. THREE EXAMPLES

In this section, we present three examples, each example with two competing positive verbal persuasions for improvement. In each case, experiments show one method superior to the other. The results are not obvious.

Example 1 [16]: A group of patients in hospitals with cardiac problems is divided into two groups:

- Group 1, expresses positive gratitude on their treatment in the hospital.
- Group 2, expresses positive optimism on their capacity to recover.

Which group is more likely to recover more fully?

Example 2 [7]: A group of students in a class is divided into three groups. The instructor grades homework of the three groups as follows:

- Group 1 receives letter grades without verbal comments.
- Group 2 receives verbal or written comments on how to improve their written products without letter grades.
- Group 3 receives both verbal or written comments with a letter grade.

Which group will perform better in future assignments?

Example 3 [8]: A group of managers is reviewing weight-lifting capacity of their trainees. The managers are divided into two groups as follows.

- Group 1 is told exactly what their work products and efforts produced.
- Group 2 is lied to; they are told they have achieved more productivity than they actually have.

Which group of trainees will perform better in the future?

Results: The results for the above three examples are as follows:

- Forward looking optimism is superior to backward looking gratitude. The optimistic cardiac patients do better than those with gratitude – less readmission and more exercise.
- The students who exclusively received comments did the best. The students who received comments and letter grades performed similarly to those who exclusively received grades. The comments approach is superior because it provides specificity (Section 5) and attributes results internally to the student's effort (Section 4).
- Surprisingly, on the average, trainees who were lied to about their productivity did better than those who were spoken to accurately.

Prayer: An important goal of this paper is to show that the verbal dimension of prayer follows the rules for verbal persuasion in education and business. Two of the principles we just mentioned – looking towards the future and detailed specificity of goals (comments vs. a letter grade) – are found in numerous Psalms.

Many Psalms end with optimism for God answering prayers. Occasionally this is accomplished through a sudden switch between future to past: e.g., i) God please save me (future),

followed by ii) Praise be God who has [already] saved me (past).

The bulleted list below contains a few examples from the Psalms [2]. Many more examples exist. For reasons of space, we simply cite a terminal verse in the Psalm to illustrate an emphasis on the future, similar to the gratitude-optimism experiment. Future is indicated by italics. The interested reader is encouraged to read the entire Psalm. Many of these Psalms open on a note of extreme helplessness and despair.

- Ps 4:9 I *will sleep* peacefully because you alone God, *establish* me securely.
- Ps 6:9 Sinners, *stay away* from me because God has [*already*] *heard* the voice of my tears.
- Ps. 10:15,17 Break the arm of the wicked and evil; let him seek his evil without finding it; ...The desires of the meek you have [*already*] *heard*, God, *prepare* their hearts, Your ear *will* listen.
- Ps. 13:6 As for me, in your kindness I *will* hope, my heart *will* rejoice in your salvation, I *wish to sing* to God because of His support of me.
- Ps 20:10 God, please save; ...The King *will answer* us on the day we call to him.

Next, we provide illustrative verses showing detailed methods to achieve salvation vs. just praying for salvation (cf. Example 2, letter grade vs. detailed comments). Many Psalms present terse and dense descriptions of stages to victory (specific comments), not just statements of victory (a “grade” of victory). A good example is found in the opening verses of Psalm 80 1:5. We bullet the list of verbs below. Note, the rich collection of steps needed to achieve victory or salvation.

- *Please listen, Shepard of Israel*
- *Please come, Sitter on the Cherubim*
- *Please arouse Your might*
- *Please come to our salvation*
- *God, return us,*
- *Brighten Your Face*
- *Let us be saved.*

3. SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is a term introduced in the last half of the last century by Alfred Bandura who founded social cognitive theory [3,4]. Bandura introduced the agentic perspective: people are their own agents who transform their future behaviors using a variety of forces including their self-efficacy, their belief that with their current skills and “capabilities they can organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.” Self-efficacy is not just a person's recognition of the skills they possess but rather the belief, or confidence, of what they can accomplish with their current skills.

Self-efficacy is important because it is one of the most important psychological constructs accounting for achievement.

Self-efficacy itself has drivers or causes. Bandura listed four causes or drivers of self-efficacy; these were later expanded to six drivers. They are: 1) successful past performances, 2) vicarious experiences (role models), 3) verbal persuasion, 4) physiological states, 5) emotional states and 6) imaginal experiences.

Successful past performances are considered the most important source of self-efficacy. Successful performances lead to greater self-efficacy, which leads to further successful performances.

As indicated in Section 1, this paper focuses on the beginner stages prior to accumulating successful past performances. Verbal persuasion, including imaginal experiences, are important sources of self-efficacy.

This is particularly important for students, business subordinates and people praying. These people have not yet achieved many successes. They are learners. They frequently feel helpless and insecure. The proper verbal persuasion and imagery powerfully influence their motivation thereby enabling them to achieve success.

In the next few sections, we will examine several theories – attribution theory, goal-setting theory and imaginal theory – that identify principles leading to superior results

4. ATTRIBUTION THEORY

In this section, we discuss attribution theory [25]. Attribution theory when combined with verbal persuasion and imaginal techniques increases success. As in Section 2, we present several interesting experiments.

Many authors have discovered and rediscovered attribution theory. Attribution theory is the theory of how people explain or attribute causes to success or failure. Four common sources of explanation are 1) ability, 2) luck, 3) effort and 4) task difficulty. The fundamental idea of attribution theory is that *how* a person attributes success or failure influences further success or failure.

Attribution theory posits three dimensions of attribution: A) *locus* – Is the cause of success or failure internal, something I do, or external, something someone else does? B) *stability* – Is the cause of success or failure something stable that will continue or is it something unstable that will change? C) *controllability* – Is the source of success or failure something I have control over or is it something I do not have control over?

The following examples illustrate the theory. In these examples, the more successful verbal persuasion is consistent with the prediction of attribution theory.

Example i) [20]: (Mischievous) little kids were given candy before recess. Researchers counted how many candy wrappers were on the floor and how many in the trash can. Being normal little kids, there were more on the floor. Two treatments were given to two classes.

Treatment 1: Adults came in and lectured students about the virtue of neatness. Notice, this is an external attribution; one should be neat because adults think it virtuous.

Treatment 2: Adults came in and told the students how neat the room looked and attributed that neatness to the kids. Notice this is an internal attribution; the kids are neat because that is the way they are.

Results: Treatment 2, the verbal persuasion based on an internal attribution, achieved superior results. The superiority was assessed by giving candy before recess and counting how many

candy wrappers were on the floor and how many in the basket. The percentage of wrappers in the basket increased relative to the initial count prior to the verbal persuasion treatment based on internal causes.

Example ii) [20]: Three verbal treatments were given to students studying mathematics.

Treatment 1: “You know the math well.” “You are working very hard.” “You are trying more; keep at it.” Notice how these attributions are internal and controllable.

Treatment 2: “You should be good at math.” “You should be getting better grades in math.” “You should be doing well in math.” Notice how the attributions are internal but not controllable; the student (internal) should be good but for some reason (beyond control) is not doing as well as they should.

Treatment 3: “I’m proud of your work.” “I’m pleased with your progress.” Notice how this is an external attribution; it is the teacher, external to the student, who is pleased.

Results: The internal controllable attributions produced the most success in future examinations. In general, attributions to effort – internal, unstable, and controllable attributions – produce the greatest results. The external attributions – “I’m proud of your work” – did produce some improvement (over groups who received no treatment) but it was the smallest improvement.

Example iii) [23]: Three groups of women were given the same facts about the importance of mammograms. Three treatments of verbal persuasion were used. They are indicated in the italicized sentences below by the underlined words:

Treatment 1: *You can ask if the mammogram detected very small masses not detectable by self-examination.* Notice, the emphasis on “You can ask”, an internal attribution.

Treatment 2: *Your doctor can ask if the mammogram detected very small masses not detectable by self-examination.* Notice the emphasis on “Your doctor can ask”, an external attribution.

Treatment 3: *Mammograms can reveal very small masses not detectable by self-examination.* Here there is no controllability. Although the mammogram can reveal this, we are not told who will review the mammogram. Thus, obtaining the information is beyond our control.

Results: Treatment 1 resulted in more future mammograms among the women than treatment 2, which resulted in more future mammograms than treatment 3.

Comparing the verbal persuasions in the three treatments, we see that internal attributions were superior to external attributions.

Example iv) [17]: Researchers found (without too much difficulty!) a group of kids who loved to draw with magic markers. The children were separated into two groups. Each group received a different verbal persuasion.

- Group 1: They were not told anything.
- Group 2: They were told they would receive a reward for their drawing.

The two groups were then assessed by how much they drew.

Results: After a week, the group that was promised rewards drew *less* than the group who were not promised rewards!

The explanation for this unexpected result is that the first group drew because they enjoyed it. Their motivation was internal – *I* like to draw. As soon as an external reward was given, the motivation was no longer purely internal. Attribution theory predicts that external attributions can diminish outcome as it indeed did here. This phenomenon is called overjustification.

Example v) [12]: The preceding examples focused on the internal-external dimension of attribution theory. The following example focuses on the stability dimension.

A group of anxious freshman was being spoken to by college staff. Two treatments were given.

Treatment 1: Freshmen were told that since they are new to college; grades will improve in their 2nd year after they adjust, during their first year, to college academics.

Treatment 2: The Freshmen were told nothing.

Results: Group 1 did better in the 2nd year. The treatment, telling them that their grades would improve in the 2nd year, attributed 1st year grades to an unstable cause, being a new freshman. Because the cause was perceived as unstable, these students were more likely to succeed in the 2nd year.

Example vi) [12]: Graham shows that attribution theory sometimes prefers counter-intuitive treatments. Based on attribution theory, she gives the following advice.

- a) Withholding help: Sometimes it is better to withhold help from an inquiring student. Why? Because the teacher's gesture of help is perceived by the student as indicating that the teacher considers the student to lack the ability and initiative to solve the problem themselves. That is, the teacher's help suggests lack of internal attributions and controllability by the student.
- b) Anger vs. pity: Sometimes it is better to be angry at student failures rather than to show pity. Why? Because pity implies to the student that the student has a stable lack of ability; contrastively, the anger implies to the student that they could have done something to prevent the failure (controllability and instability). For example, had the student used more effort (unstable, controllable and internal) the student might have succeeded.
- c) Blame vs. praise: Blaming for failures indicates a teacher perception that the student could have done better. Contrastively, sometimes, praise for success, particularly if not much effort is needed, implies that the teacher perceives the student as having a low level of ability (and hence they should be praised when they succeed even at an easy task).

Some further comments on the skillful use of attribution should be made.

Sometimes, failure *is* due to lack of innate ability, a stable cause, for example for the mentally retarded. Sometimes the learning disabled and hyperactive also have intrinsic lack of innate ability. In such cases an emphasis on effort, "try harder" is counterproductive [13].

Example vii) [13]: Even when effort is the correct approach to improvement, care has to be taken in administering it. The following two treatments illustrate possible problems with encouraging effort.

Treatment 1: Give students relatively easy exercises. When they fail, train them to blame the failure on effort and try harder (This is called "attribution retraining").

Treatment 2: Give students relatively easy exercises interspersed with some more difficult exercises which they are not expected to solve. When they fail, train them to blame the failure on effort and try harder.

Results: The attribution retraining resulted in superior performance (for both groups) on easy tasks. However, at the first sight of difficult tasks, Group 1, "gave up." Contrastively, Group 2, persisted in the face of difficult tasks.

The implication of this is that simply arranging a laboratory setting where effort succeeds is not sufficient. The students have to be exposed to realistic exercises

Example viii) [22]: This final experiment shows that there are pros and cons to using attribution theory. Two groups of people were given a pill which they were told interfered with motor activity. In reality the pill did not interfere. The two groups then attempted to perform certain experiments which required motor activities. Each group had high-motivation people who attributed success and failure to effort as well as low-motivation people who attributed success and failure to external factors or ability.

Treatment 1: When the pill was given, the:

- High-motivation group gave up at the appearance of failure (since they were told that the pill inhibited motor activity and the high-motivation people believed success is due to effort).
- Low-motivation group expended more effort when they experienced failure (since they were no longer afraid of being blamed for failure which they could attribute to the pill).

Treatment 2: When the pill was not given, the opposite occurred:

- The high-motivation group increased effort at the sight of failure, consistent with their belief that failure was due to lack of effort and that more effort would remedy the situation.
- The low-motivation group gave up at the sight of failure since they believed failure was due to innate ability and once they saw they couldn't succeed there was no point in trying further.

Prayer: Using the results of this section we can understand why many Psalms end with an internal note. It is not enough to be saved by God (external); goals we must do actions (internal). In the following bulleted list, note how the salvation of God (external) is supplemented by the acts of man (internal). The contrast of God and person is emphasized using italics.

- Ps. 73: 27-28: Because indeed, those who are far from *You* will be destroyed; *You* have cut off all who deviate from *You*. But as for *me*, nearness to God is for *me*, good, *I* place in *God* my trust, in order that *I* can tell all *Your* works.

- Ps 78:9-11: Because a cup (of poison) is in *God's* hands...the wicked of the world will sip and drink from it. But *I, I* will tell forever, *I* will sing to the God of Jacob. And all horns of the wicked *I* will cut off. May the horns of the righteous be [thereby] elevated.
- Ps 79:11-13 The constriction of the prisoner will come before *You*...return to our neighbors seventy-fold their shame that they shamed *You*. But as for *us*, we are your nation...*we* will thank you forever; in each generation *we* will tell *Your* praise.

We have focused, in this section, on attribution theory as formulated by Weiner [25]. There are competing theories including, learned helplessness [1,13], self-perception [5], and expectancy-valency theory [9]. We have chosen to focus on attribution theory as formulated by Weiner since Weiner's model "incorporates the antecedents of attributions, the dimension or properties of causes as well as specific causes per se, and both affective and cognitive consequences of particular self-ascriptions. Hence, this theory is more complete than other attributional conceptions" [12].

5. SUB-GOAL DEFINITION, MEASURABILITY

An important factor for both business and teaching success is breaking a task into a sequence of sub-goals. Theory has taught us that when a task is broken into certain subtasks and these subtasks have certain attributes, the teaching or business enterprise is more likely to succeed. The literature does not have a uniform name for this; it is called goal definition, sub-goal definition and measurability.

The idea of sub-goal theory is that a person who breaks up a task into sub-goals will have superior results to a person who tackles the task holistically. Every such breakup into sub-goals can be described verbally and is one form of verbal persuasion.

Simply breaking up a task into any sub-goals will not necessarily improve success. Rather, to achieve success the sub-goals must have certain attributes. Five attributes of good sub-goal creation stand out. A handy mnemonic for these five attributes is SMART, *specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and achievable in a short time* [18].

Locke and Latham [18] studying many business settings found five additional attributes needed for goal setting: *Clarity, Challenge, Commitment, Feedback and Complexity*. However, a close examination of these extra five attributes show relationship to the original five attributes or to self-efficacy. More specifically the Locke-Latham attributes can be understood as follows:

- *Clarity* – This is typically related to measurability. A measurable goal – e.g. reduce error by 5% – is clearer than a general goal – e.g. get better.
- *Commitment* – This is typically related to imaginal techniques, an important aspect of self-efficacy. The treasure map technique [11], where a person has a strong vivid picture of terminal success is considered an important method to achieve commitment.
- *Feedback* – This is simply verbal persuasion, a topic covered in the last section. To get feedback simply means that someone you respect a lot tells you what you are doing right, and steps to correct what you are doing wrong.
- *Challenge, Complexity* – This is something not reducible

to other concepts but it is not clear how to accurately define it. The idea is that a goal that is too easy or too difficult will not produce good results. So the goal should be moderately difficult. However, achieving moderate difficulty in sub-tasks is still not fully understood.

As in the previous sections, we illustrate the theory with an example with competing treatments. Zimmerman and Kitsantas [26] devised five strategies to teach high-school girls dart throwing. The five strategies were verbal persuasion in the form of verbal instruction to the girls. They are as follows.

- No sub-goals: No goals were given to the girls
- Outcome goals: Girls were told to try to achieve the highest score.
- Sub-goals (Process goals): The overall task of dart throwing was broken into three specific sub-goals of i) sighting the goal, ii) achieving the proper throwing position, iii) following-up with a throw. Notice how each sub-goal is specific and achievable in a short time.
- Adjustment: The girls were told to adjust their current throw relative to their last throw. For example, if their last throw was too far to the right they should compensate by aiming to the left.
- Stratified goal: The girls were instructed to first concentrate on sub-goal mastery using the techniques mentioned in approach C and then concentrate on obtaining the highest possible score, sub-goal B.

Results: The girls receiving verbal persuasion treatment E achieved the highest score, followed by the girls receiving treatments D, C, B, A respectively. What this very well designed experiment shows is that superior verbal persuasion can take the form of communication of effective sub-goals.

One reason for selecting this dart-throwing example is because it shows the difficulty in formulating a complete theory of sub-goal definition. Two characteristics of sub-goal definition, numerical measurability and de-emphasis on outcomes (high scores), are absent in the stratified sub-goal approach, approach E, and yet it produced the highest results.

The Psalms frequently use sub-goals in their prayers. We conjecture that the breakup of tasks prayed for into sub-goals is not just a poetic technique but a motivational technique thereby accounting for the efficacy of the Psalms.

Example: Psalm 13 has 4 parts each of which is developed with sub-goals. Goals are underlined; sub-goals are italicized.

- How long, God, will you a) *forget me*, b) *hide your face from me*, c) *leave me to my own plans*, d) *let my enemies be above me*.
- God: a) *see me*, b) *answer me*, c) *enlighten me*.
- Lest: a) *I die* b) *my enemies overpower me*, c) *my enemies rejoice at my stumbling*.
- And I, to you: a) *have faith*, b) *rejoice*, and c) *sing*.

Let us clarify. Consider IV. The Psalmist wishes to sing to God. That is an overall goal. But he is frightened. So he breaks up the goal into sub-goals each of which is easier to achieve. The first sub-goal is affirming faith, say through prayer. Then he wishes to rejoice (perhaps have a feast dedicated to God). And then he will be in a position to compose songs. The other Psalm themes are interpreted similarly.

The point to emphasize here is that by breaking up the goal of

singing to God into three subtasks each of which is specific and attainable short time, the Psalmist will have a superior chance of achieving success, that is, singing/composing songs to God.

Of the three theories mentioned in this paper – attribution, sub-goal definition, and imaginal experiences – sub-goal definition seems to be the most widely applied. It is used in education [26], business [18], and prayer. As we already remarked, although many of its characteristics are known, a complete theory still remains elusive.

6. IMAGINAL EXPERIENCES

Business and prayer use imaginal techniques; however, education has not yet availed itself of this technique. Imaginal experiences simply refer to images one has about projects. Imaginal experiences are considered one cause of self-efficacy. As we saw above, sub-goal theory, in the business world, advocates the treasure map technique to encourage commitment [11]. Psalms and prayer are full of beautiful and evocative imagery. The sports literature also emphasizes the importance of imaginal techniques; confident athletes use imaginal techniques [21]. There is even a Sports Imagery Questionnaire showing the importance of imagery [14].

As in previous sections, the emphasis is not just on positive images but on imaginal treatments that work best. A beautiful paper by Moritz, Hall, Martin and Vadocz, “What are Confident Athletes Imagining”, discusses five treatments of imaging [21]:

- **Cognitive General (CG):** e.g. imagining continuing with the project (game) or imagining all aspects of the project.
- **Cognitive Specific (CS):** e.g. imagining doing certain sub-goals (i.e. specific skills) perfectly.
- **Motivation General, Mastery (MG-M):** e.g. imagining oneself tough or overcoming challenges during execution of the project.
- **Motivation General, Arousal (MG-A):** e.g. imagining the excitement of enjoying the game, or of successfully handling stress during the project (game).
- **Motivation Specific (MS):** e.g. imagining oneself receiving congratulations or awards, upon winning.

This experiment differs from experiments in previous sections. There, the research question was which treatment results in superior results. However, in this section, the research question is which imaginal techniques are used more by highly confident vs. low confident athletes. The reason for using confidence vs. performance is that it is more objective since “winning” is often dependent on many variables. It is interesting that the results obtained here by correlating imaginal techniques with confidence are slightly different if imaginal techniques are instead correlated with self-efficacy (The definition of self-efficacy is more restrictive than the definition of confidence). This shows that the theory of imaginal techniques is still in its infancy. With this background we discuss results.

Results: Highly confidence athletes and low confident athletes have no significant difference in CG, CS and MS, that is, in imagining congratulations, continuation or specific skills.

However, high confident athletes are significantly better at MG-M and MG-A, imagining the emotions of the game – enjoyment and overcoming stress, or imagining mastery – being tough and overcoming obstacles. The implication may be that people who use MG-M and MG-A will have superior performances.

Prayer: We apply these results to prayer, the Psalms being noted for their frequent vivid imagery. Psalm 23, has been praised by many authors as the nightingale of the Psalms, the pristine Psalm for affirming faith and overcoming tragedy [24]. There is general agreement that this Psalm encourages faith. Note the use of 4 images in 6 verses as well as the use of sub-goals.

- **Shepard image:** *God is my Shepard: i) I lack nothing, ii) He lies me in verdant pastures, iii) He guides me by gentle streams, iv) my soul relaxes, v) he leads me on measured circuit.*
- **Death Valley image:** *Even when walking in the valley of shadow-death, i) I fear not, since, ii) You are with me, iii) Your rod and staff comfort m.*
- **Set table:** *i) You prepare for me a table, ii) You anoint my head with oil, iii) my cup is saturated*
- **God’s house:** *i) Good and kindness pursue me, ii) I will sit in Gods house my entire life.*

Note how this Psalm illustrates MG-A, general mastery of arousal emotions; the Psalmist describes a variety of MG-A emotions: tranquility, overcoming death, enjoying a table, sitting in God’s house.

Summary: Although there is no complete theory of imaginal experiences we do have papers that point to specific techniques to enhance the use of imaginal experiences. We cited one paper based on the categories in the Sports Imagery Questionnaire. Such papers would explain the “success” of Psalm 23, which in its 6 short verses is rich in imagery and emotional hues of life.

7. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper we have presented a variety of situations and shown that specific verbal and imaginal techniques yield superior results over others. More specifically, *a person who wishes to advise – a subordinate, student or congregant – should: i) advocate optimistic focus on the future, ii) emphasize attributions or causes that are internal, unstable and controllable, iii) break tasks into challenging subtasks that are specific, attainable and achievable short time and iv) paint rich pictures of behavioral mastery and emotional satisfaction.*

We have indicated several times that although theory does exist, it is not complete. Consequently, we conclude this paper with a speculative example.

The example comes from the sacrificial offerings described in the Bible in the book of Leviticus. It is well known that this system was corrupt. The Bible in several books attacks the hypocrisy of sinning and bringing an offering and describes sexual extortion from women bringing offerings. The medieval philosopher Maimonides dismisses the entire offering section of the Bible as a concession to the slave mentality of the time; in other words the offerings have no intrinsic spiritual value [19].

But others have suggested that despite the hypocrisy and extortion, originally, the Biblical Author had a good intent in placing offerings in the Bible. The approach used for explaining the biblical offerings is symbolic imagery. The offerings in a Temple setting create a rich imaginal experience, which in turn motivates the offering bringer to a higher spiritual state [15].

Example [15]: A person inadvertently committing certain sins,

or spiritual errors, is required to bring a sin-offering. The offering symbolically illustrates sinner effort for repentance by the blood-throwing ceremony. Blood, symbolizes the force of life. The rules for blood-throwing are as follows

- Offering of an ordinary person: Blood is *placed* at the top of the altar on all sides.
- Offering of a poor person: Blood is *thrown upward towards the altar top* (but not necessarily reaching it)

Symbolically, this corresponds to the following verbal advice to the sinner, which is communicated through images.

- Offering of an ordinary person: Remember and imagine the *high position* you already have. Use this image to bring yourself back to your high status
- Offering of a poor person: Strive for *further progress*.

We next emphasize the speculativity of this example. It would suggest an experiment in which people who committed an identical error (e.g. a business error resulting in monetary loss) were divided into two groups and given two treatments:

- Group 1: Imagine the high achievements in your past.
- Group 2: Set goals to achieve a higher status.

We then predict that the ordinary people in Group 1 and the poor people in Group 2 would outperform the others.

But there is no such experiment. Rather, there is much research to be done. We think this is a fitting note on which to conclude this paper. In concluding we note that a careful examination of this situation assumes a socio-economic-based status response. Such distinctions do exist in the literature. For example, Furnham [9], in examining attribution styles about employment distinguishes between employed and unemployed groups of people:

- *Employed people* tend to attribute employment and/or unemployment to individualistic internal attributes, both stable and unstable. For example, unemployment might be due to lack of certain skills.
- *Unemployed people* tend to attribute unemployment to external societal events, fatalistic interpretations.

The studies are not black and white; gender, motivation and skill levels influences attributional beliefs and one's recent employment experience does also.

Furnham [9] also points out differences in mental health (e.g. depression) between employed and unemployed people. Furnham concludes "social support agencies should pay particular attention to the explanations the unemployed give for their joblessness. These explanations may be used to anticipate their depressive reactions, and it may even be possible to manipulate them, with certain beneficial consequences. Methods of helping the unemployed should be closely linked to people's beliefs about the bases of their own joblessness and unemployment in general and the extent to which they believe the causal factors to be controllable or modifiable. Thus, one very salient approach may be to help change the unemployed's thinking about the causes of their situation in ways calculated to benefit them, individually and collectively."

Such studies point to psychological treatments in general, whether of depression, guilt from sin, or other states, by focusing on attributional styles of perceived causes. We believe this a fruitful direction for future research.

The following table summarizes the experiments and treatment

contrasts studied in this paper.

Setting	Preferred treatment	Inferior treatment	Brief explanation and/or reference
Verbal responses to cardiac recovery	Optimism on future success	Gratitude on past treatment	Future outlook superior over past outlook[16]
Verbal responses to student homework	Step-by-step comments on things done right and ways to improve	Letter grades in addition to verbal comments on ways to improve	Comments attribute success/failure internally; grades are external [7]
Managers informing employees of the results of their work products	Lie to employees and tell them they produced more than they actually have	Tell employees exactly what they produced	Lying to employees is a form of verbal persuasion which increases self-efficacy [8]
Praying for future salvation	Emphasis as if God already heard prayers e.g. Sinners, <i>stay away</i> from me because God has [<i>already</i>] heard the my tears	Simply pray for future salvation	Emphasis on God <i>already heard</i> (Psalm 6:9) corresponds to future optimism vs. past gratitude
Prayer for salvation	Detailed step-by-step prayer is superior	General prayer for salvation	e.g. Ps80 1:5. God a) Listen, b) Come to us, c) Arouse Your might, d) Save us, e) return us home, f) brighten Your face on us
Getting kids not to litter floor with candy wrappers	Praise children on having achieved a great deal in neatness	Lecture children on virtues of neatness	Attributing success internally to children superior to attributing success to following external adult values (virtue of neatness)[20]
Encouraging mathematics students to improve	<u>You</u> know your subject well; <u>you</u> are working hard; <u>you</u> are trying more; keep at it	<u>I</u> am proud of your work; <u>or you should</u> be good at math	Internal controllable attributions (<u>you</u>), superior to external attributions (<u>I</u>) [20]

Setting	Preferred treatment	Inferior treatment	Brief explanation and reference
Encouraging women to obtain mammograms	<u>You</u> can use the mammogram to detect very small masses	<u>Your doctor</u> can use the mammogram to detect very small masses.	Internal attributions (<u>you</u>) superior to external attributions (<u>your doctor</u>) [23]
Encouraging children who like to play with magic markers to continue	Do nothing	Given them monetary rewards	The reward is external and hence overjustifies the playing with markers. The love of markers is purely internal [17]
Encouraging incoming college Freshman to do better in 2 nd year	Tell them, "Grades typically improve in 2 nd year because you are new in 1 st year"	Tell them nothing	By stating that new students may do poor, failure is attributed to an external unstable cause (newness) so it is less likely to repeat [12]
Helping students	Withhold help and tell them to look up themselves	Give them help they need	(Sometimes) giving them help sends message that they lack ability to do it themselves.; telling them to do it themselves encourages internal attribution [12]
Anger vs. pity	Getting angry at failing students	Giving pity to failing class	(Sometimes) pity sends a message that students lack innate ability and hence must be pitied; Getting angry sends a message of internal attribution – you can succeed [12]
Blame/ Praise vs. silence	Blame students on failure or praise them on success	Silence	(Sometimes) blame is seen as attributing internal control of student (and hence (s)he must be blamed) [12]

Setting	Preferred treatment	Inferior treatment	Brief explanation and/or reference
Training people to attribute failure to lack of effort	Provide easy success tasks with occasional difficult tasks; when they fail encourage more effort	Exclusively provide easy success tasks; when they fail encourage more effort	If they always succeed (inferior treatment) then at first time of failure they will give up. Training has to be realistic [13]
Praying for salvation	Include intent of personal acts Cf. Ps 73: 27-28 <i>I place in God my trust, in order that I can tell all Your works.</i>	Exclusively ask for God's intervention	By stating personal intent an internal attribution is added to prayer making it more efficacious
Learning to throw darts	Instruct students to focus on steps – a) sight goal, b) position, c) throw; after mastery aim for high scores	Concentrate on getting highest score; or, concentrate on steps of sight, position and throw	The more defined the goal with clear and easily masterable substeps, the higher the performance [26]
Prayer for salvation	Detailed steps <u>And I, to you: a) have faith, b) rejoice, and c) sing.</u>	General. <i>God, I will have faith in you</i>	Prayer more efficacious when accompanied by clear substeps each one a separate accomplishment
Imaginal experiences for a sports event	Imagining oneself tough and overcoming obstacles during game	Imagining receiving applause and an award at the end	Superior to imagine i) internal effort vs. external applause; ii) difficulty vs. easy acceptance
Prayer for salvation	Include images of success and overcoming stress	Only include images of success	<u>Death Valley image:</u> <i>Even when walking in the valley of shadow-death I fear not ...</i> <u>Set table:</u> i) <i>You prepare for me a table,</i> ii) <i>you anoint my head with oil,</i> iii) <i>my cup is saturated</i> (Psalm 23)

8. REFERENCES

- [1] L. Abramson, M. Seligman, and J. Teasdale, "Learned Helplessness in Humans: Critique and Reformulation", **Journal of Abnormal Psychology**, Vol. 87, 1978, pp. 49-74.
- [2] R. Alter, **The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary**, London: Norton, 2007.
- [3] A. Bandura, **Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control**, New York: Freeman, 1997.
- [4] ---, "Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective," **Annual Review of Psychology**, 52, 2001, 1-26.
- [5] D. J. Bem, "Self perception theory." In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), **Advances in Experimental Social Psychology**, Vol. 6, pp. 1-62, NY: Academic Press, 1972.
- [6] W. Brueggemann, "The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function." In R. Jacobson (Ed.), **Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship**, pp. 1-25. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.
- [7] R. Butler, "Enhancing and Undermining Intrinsic Motivation: The Effects of Task-involving and Ego-involving Evaluation on Interest and Performance", **British Journal of Educational Psychology**, Vol. 58, 1988, pp. 1– 14.
- [8] P.A. Fitz-Simmons, D.M .Landers, J.R. Thomas, and H. Van Der Mars, "Does Self-efficacy Predict Performance in Experienced Weightlifters?" **Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport**, Vol. 62, 1991, pp. 424-431.
- [9] A. Furnham, "Unemployment Attribution Theory and Mental Health: A Review of the British Literature", **International Journal of Mental Health**, Vol. 13, 1984, pp. 51-67.
- [10] M. Futato, **Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook**, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2007.
- [11] S. Gawain, **Creative Visualization**, Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002.
- [12] S. Graham, "A Review of Attribution Theory in Achievement Contexts", **Educational Psychology Review**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1991, pp. 5-39.
- [13] L. Grimes, "Learned Helplessness and Attribution Theory: Redefining Children's Learning Problems", **Learning Disability Quarterly**, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1981, pp. 91-100.
- [14] C. Hall, D. Mack, A. Paivio, and H. Hausenblas, "Imagery Used by Athletes: Development of the Sport Imagery Questionnaire", **International Journal of Sport Psychology**, Vol. 29, 1998, pp. 73–89.
- [15] S. Hirsch (I. Levy, translator), **Hirsch Commentary on the Torah**, (2nd ed.), NY: Judaica Press, 1989.
- [16] J. Huffman, E. Beale, C. Celano, S. Beach, A. Belcher, S. Moore, L. Suarez, S. Motiwala, P. Gandhi, H. Gaggin, J. Januzzi, "Effects of Optimism and Gratitude on Physical Activity, Biomarkers, and Readmissions after an Acute Coronary Syndrome: The Gratitude Research in Acute Coronary Events Study", **Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality Outcomes**, Vol. 9, 2016, pp. 55-63.
- [17] M. Lepper, D. Greene, and R. Nisbett, "Undermining Children's Intrinsic Interest with Extrinsic Reward: A Test of the "Overjustification" Hypothesis", **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, Vol. 28, 1973, pp. 129-137.
- [18] E. Locke, G. Latham, K. Smith, and R. Wood, **A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- [19] Moses Maimonides, **The Guide for the Perplexed**, L.A., CA: Empire Books, 2013.
- [20] R. Miller, P. Brickman, and D. Bolen, "Attribution versus Persuasion as a Means of Modifying Behavior", **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, Vol. 31, 1975, pp. 430-441.
- [21] S. Moritz, C. Hall, K. Martin and E. Vadocz, "What are Confident Athletes Imaging? An examination of Image Content", **The Sport Psychologist**, Vol. 10, 1996, pp. 171-179.
- [22] W. Proudfoot and P. Shaver, "Attribution Theory and the Psychology of Religion", **Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion**, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1975, pp. 317-330.
- [23] A. J. Rothman, P. Salovey, C. Turvey, and S.A. Fishkin, "Attributions of Responsibility and Persuasion", **Health Psychology**, Vol. 12, 1993, pp. 39-47.
- [24] B. Strawn, "The Lord is my Shepard," **BibleOdyssey.org**, <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/lord-is-my-shepherd.aspx>
- [25] B. Weiner, **An Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion**, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986.
- [26] B. Zimmerman and A. Kitsantas, "Developmental Phases in Self-regulation: Shifting from Process Goals to Outcome Goals", **Journal of Educational Psychology**, Vol. 89, 1997, pp. 29-36.