

Christian Education for Life: Using Prayer for Problem Solving

a talk – January 27, 2018 – by Craig Rusbult, for
Southern California Christians in Science
(a chapter of the **American Scientific Affiliation**)

for more information (a talk-Abstract,
Web-Page Outline, two web-pages with details),

<http://designprocessineducation.com/prayer>

Notice: instead of “**proces**” it’s “**process**”,
fixing my typographical error in the talk-Abstract.

This mistake (not my first) is a good transition to
asking, in Slide 7, “Why am I studying this topic?”

Why am I studying this topic?

I'm motivated by remembering the many times I've
said "oops",
and then asked "WHY didn't I do it better?"
so I could learn from my failure-experiences.

Usually the answers-to-myself were that I had...
not enough attention to PROCESS,
and not enough PRAYER.

We'll examine
PROCESS first,
and PRAYER (+ education) later,
after a transition
to connect PROCESS with PRAYER.

(connecting PROCESS and PRAYER, with **1 + 2**)

1. What is PROBLEM SOLVING ?

With my broad definition (it's useful for education),

a PROBLEM

is any opportunity to “make things better”

in any way, in any area of life, so

PROBLEM SOLVING

includes almost everything we do in life.

God wants to help us improve everything we do,
so {as shown during the talk using a hand-waving
“Venn Diagram” with arms stretched **wide** & **wider**},

almost everything is included within **everything**,

so... **God wants to help us
improve our Problem Solving.**

2. HOW does God help you improve?

God can help you improve more effectively **when you cooperate** with Him, and one way to cooperate is to **PRAY**.

WHAT does God want you to improve?

God wants to help **improve everything** you do.

Therefore, IF you want to cooperate with God by also wanting to "**improve everything** you do,"

THEN you will want to **pray for everything**,

as Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6,

"Don't worry about anything.

***Pray about everything.**"*

so... **pray about your problem solving**.

living a worldview:

A person's *worldview* is **their view of the world, used for living in the world.**

A person who is a *theist*, who believes (unlike an atheist) that **God exists**, and (unlike a deist) that **God actively “does things”**, has a *theistic worldview*.

But whenever a theist lives (in their thinking-and-actions) **as if God is not active, they are not living their worldview.**

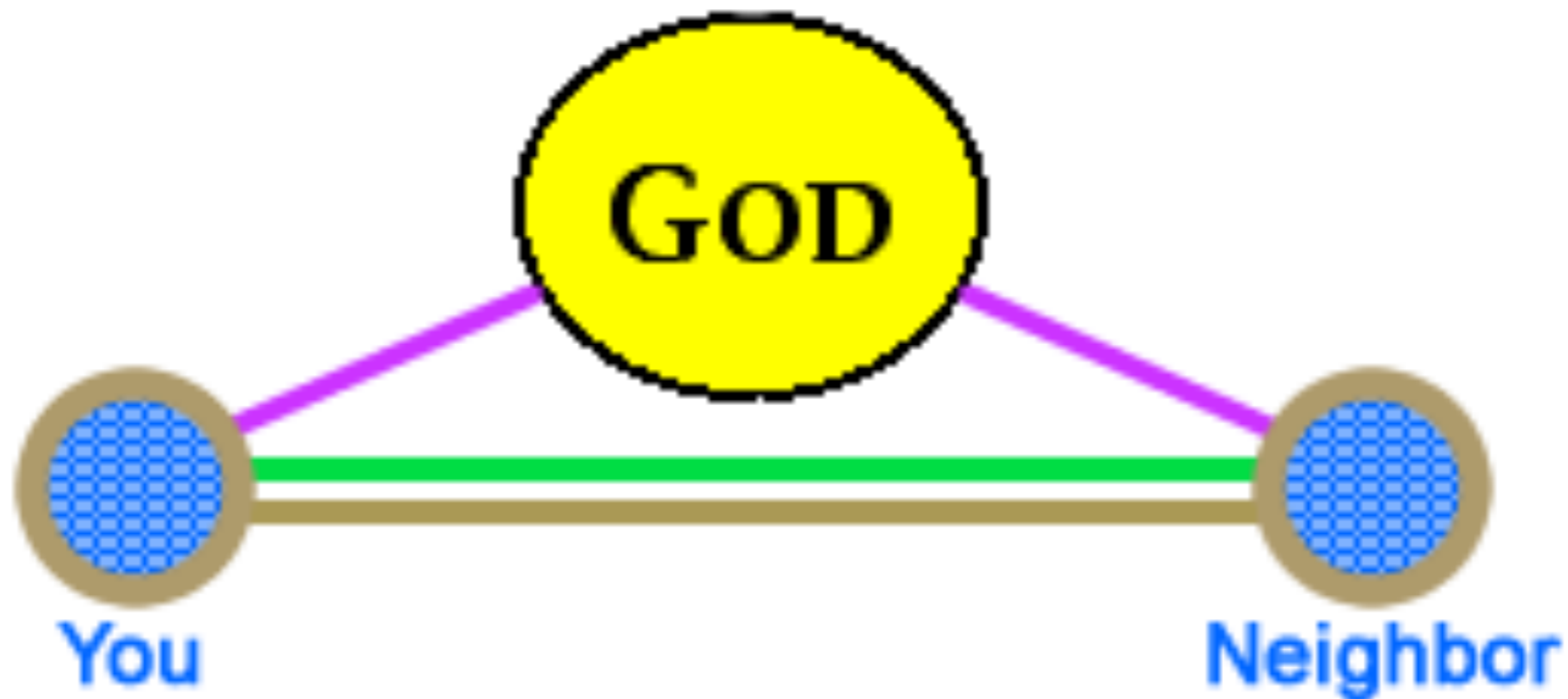
They are not using "their view of the world" {or at least what they claim to believe} for "living in the world."
Instead they are using an atheistic/deistic worldview {so is this what they actually believe?} **for their everyday living.**

If you are a Christian with a theistic worldview, are you...

living with God or living without God?

In ALL of our human **situations** and **relationships**,
we always should include **God**,
in **prayer** and in **other ways**:

with God,



living with God or living without God?

But in our human **situations** and **relationships**,
too often we **exclude God**,
in prayer and in other ways:

without God,



my justifiable humility:

I consider myself (maybe over-confidently) to be *expert* in ***describing problem-solving PROCESS***, *semi-expert* in ***proposing ideas for EDUCATION***, *moderately competent* in ***writing about PRAYER***, with ideas I hope you'll find interesting & useful, but with many loose ends, rough edges, IOU's, only a *teachable novice* in ***doing PRAYER*** — I'm justifiably humble with no "holier than thou" claims.

I have **justifiable humility** about

PRAYER

and

USING PRAYER FOR EDUCATION.

Your Process of Problem Solving:

It's "Your Process..." — not "THE Process..." — because problem-solving process varies, depending on **the person and their situation**.

There is no “correct process” for solving problems, but... we do know **strategies to more effectively use problem-solving actions**, to form a flexible process of problem solving that's analogous to the *goal-directed flexibly improvised actions* of a hockey player but not the *rigidly choreographed actions* of a figure skater.

If you hear a “rigid choreography” argument **against “principles for PROCESS”**, ask if they would make the same strawman-argument **against “principles for PLAYING HOCKEY”**, with **principles for flexible goal-directed improvising**.

Problem-Solving PROCESS:

My simplest “model” for problem-solving process:

- **Choose an Objective** (for a **Problem** to solve),
- **Learn More** (to understand **Problem-Situation**)
- **Define Goals** (for a satisfactory **Problem-Solution**)
- **creatively Generate Options** (for a **Solution**),
- **critically Evaluate Options** (for a **Solution**).

This is Model #1 in my “family” of 5 models that all describe the same process, but with different perspectives and different levels of detail.

Other models (not #1) describe, with details {see Slides 28-29},

- how we DO experience-based Evaluation, and
- how we USE Evaluation (done with **critical** thinking) to stimulate & guide Generation (**creative** thinking); plus
- 4 Ways to USE Experiments (to Inform, Evaluate, Generate).

{ note: **GRAY FONT** shows “optional for the talk” sections. }

In my simplest model-for-process, you:

- **Learn, Define Objective and Define Goals,**
 - **Generate Options and Evaluate Options**
- in creative-and-critical cycles of Design Thinking**
with **flexible** goal-directed improvising, so you...

DEFINE a Problem and SOLVE this Problem:

Learn so you understand more accurately-and-thoroughly,
Define your Objective, Define your Goals for a Solution,



One reason for my problem-solving failures (“oops”) was **not paying attention to **Problem-Solving PROCESS**.**

During your **PROCESS of problem solving, and (to help you learn from your experience) **after it**, to “*think about your thinking*” with **metacognition**, with **reflection**, you can ask **PROCESS-questions**.**

Using my simplest model you can ask, “am I ...”

LEARNING about the Problem-Situation? (e.g., with people, am I using empathy and self-empathy to understand what **they** want and what **I** want so – if I want this – **we** can get a better **win-win** result?)

needing **more information** from Mental & Physical Experiments?

choosing **Problem-Objectives** (what to “make better”) wisely, because (as Ben Franklin said) “time is the stuff life is made of” so I’m asking “what is the best use of my **time**?” to use my **life** wisely.

defining **Goals** so my **Problem-Solution** will “make it better” ?

not paying attention to **Problem-Solving PROCESS** (continued)

Using my simplest model you can ask, “am I ...”

doing adequate **Creative Thinking** (to Generate Options) with Research, Revision, Analysis, Guided Generation, Free Generation?

doing adequate **Critical Thinking** (to Evaluate Options)
by logically comparing Predictions & Observations with Goals? or
by logically comparing Predictions & Observations with each other?

using Experimental Information (**Predictions & Observations**,
generated in **Mental Experiments & Physical Experiments**) in all
ways it can be used? (to Evaluate, stimulate-and-guide Generation,
and Generate New Experimental Information).

btw — In this talk, when I say “**you**”
it’s intended to be general (not personal), so “**you**” means
you and/or **me** and/or **us** and/or **them** (i.e., students or others).

Now, we'll have a brief interlude to describe

my goals for the talk:

I want to...

share ideas with you (about prayer & education),
get ideas from you (about prayer & education),

especially about ...

- education questions:** Should we encourage students to pray
- in **Christian schools?** (and if yes – **how, when, where, ...?**)
 - in **public schools?** (or with “non-religious” mindful meditation?)

And of course, as with all ideas you hear, you should use wise
FILTERING: **you decide** what you want to study more closely,
what you may want to use (with your own adapting) or won't use.

For an **overview**, trying to **avoid misunderstandings**,

here is

a review of **problem-solving PROCESS**:

During a process of problem-solving, we...

Define (Objective, Goals) & Solve (Generate-and-Evaluate Ideas);
use flexible goal-directed improvising – hockey (not figure) skater.

To “pay attention” we ask questions about each part of process.

With my {educationally useful} broad definition of *problem*,
problem solving = making things better = improving.

For an **overview**, trying to **avoid misunderstandings**,

here is

a **preview** of **PRAYER**:

WHY should we pray? (to be used by God, to pursue His goals).

HOW does God “do things”? (human actions + Divine Actions; we should acknowledge this by asking God to “influence results”).

pray for all ≠ pray constantly (usually we focus on our actions).

TIME and TIMING (pray short or long, before-during-after action).

process-of-prayer varies (depends on person and their situation).

WHAT might God help us improve? (character, understandings, relationships, love, compassion, wisdom, quality of actions, results of actions) (but improving isn't being made perfect, so be humble).

WHETHER - does God help us improve? (logical evaluations of evidence {from Bible, experience, science} for each WHAT-claim).

Questions about Education for Life:

- education questions:** Should we encourage students to pray
- in **Christian schools?** (and if yes – **how, when, where, ... ?**)
 - in **public schools?** (or with “non-religious” mindful meditation?)

HOW – with direct instruction? discussions? activities? or...?

WHEN – during “quiet times”? start of year? throughout year?

WHERE – in classroom(s)? chapel service? dorms? or...?

How do your answers change for different ages?

(pre-K, elementary, middle school, high school, college)

How can we motivate students (or ourselves) to pray more?

For me, a major obstacle to praying more is ideas about USING TIME:
I want to be active so I’m “GETTING THINGS DONE” instead of praying.
(a strategy: I put prayer on my “exercise grid” for self-accountability.)

This talk is mainly about Christian Education, but we also can think about Public Education:

In **public schools**, should we encourage (or even allow)...

- **praying** that is Christian, Judeo-Christian, monotheistic, or generic?

- **activities** (like “mindfulness” or “meditation” or “mindful meditation”)

that are similar to prayer in some ways, **but claim to be non-religious?**

- should Christians meditate? and if yes, how? maybe by supplementing awareness-of-self (in mindful meditation) with awareness-of-God (in prayer)?

Worldview Neutrality in Public Schools (from [my web-page about neutrality](#))

asymmetry: In trying to achieve worldview-neutrality, a major problem is the inherent asymmetry between expressions of theistic and non-theistic views. **An event cannot be described theistically unless this is done explicitly, but "not theism" is communicated implicitly yet strongly when the possibility of theistic action is omitted from every description of every historical event.**

neutrality: If an educational curriculum always assumes "there is no theistically active God," is this worldview-neutral? Is a constant assumption that “God has been absent from history” really neutral? Does the absence of a *theistic worldview-perspective* produce a neutral-and-balanced treatment of this perspective? Or will an absence of God in all discussions of the world encourage students to live as if God is absent from the world?

God “does things” by combining Human Action + DIVINE ACTION:

This dual action is illustrated in Exodus 17:11,
*“As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning,
but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.”*

The situation-results depended on
human actions (Moses praying + Joshua fighting)
plus **God's actions to influence the results.**

God wants us to acknowledge that He is powerful,
that He is able (and willing) to influence results.

You can ask God to “bless” the results of your actions
— because you truly believe that “what happens”
depends on what you do and what God does —
in a **quick prayer**, in a short time, taking only 1 second.
And, of course, you also can do this during a **longer prayer.**

HOW to use prayer during Human Actions (#1)

IF God wants to help you improve everything you do,
and IF God uses prayer to help you improve,
THEN you should pray for everything.

But...

pray for everything does NOT mean pray constantly,
because
you often want to focus on your human actions.

You can improve the quality of your thinking & doing
by deciding when-and-how to think about your thinking
– including your prayer-thinking oriented toward God –
by deciding when you want to turn it “on” and “off”,
by effectively regulating your metacognition.

HOW to use prayer during Human Actions (#2)

You decide the TIME and TIMING of your prayers.

TIME — You can pray for
a long time (as in a “quiet time”), or
a short time (during your think-and-do actions)
as in a quick “help me” prayer when you ask God
to help you improve the quality of your actions
and the results of your actions, when you quickly
acknowledge your faith-belief that “what happens”
depends on **what you do plus what God does.**

TIMING — You can pray
before an action (to help you prepare for it) and
during the action (*do metacognitive regulation*) and
after the action (to learn more from your experience).

HOW – Your Process of Praying:

It's "Your Process..." — not "THE Process..." —
because process-of-praying varies, depending on...

- **the person**: prayer is just being with God, and the ways you do this (decided by you & Him) are different than the ways another person does it.
- **their situation** because people flexibly adjust.

There is no “correct process” for PRAYING,
because a process-of-prayer depends on
who is praying, and **their situation**,
so there are many ways to pray.

For similar reasons,
there is no “correct process” for PROBLEM SOLVING.

HOW – options for your process of praying:

In your **flexible process of praying**, some of the many *factors to vary, or things to include*, are ... **TIME** (short or long)* and **TIMING** (before & during & after action), **worship**, **petition/intercession** (asking-with-faith for self & *others*), **alone** or **with others**, **using a prayer list**, while **reading the Bible**, and more.

* your prayer-TIME can span a wide range, from a 1-second “help me” thru 10 seconds (as in “count to 10” before getting angry) to 1 minute, or hours.

You can **ask God to show you how to pray more effectively**, and **how to improve your thinking-and-actions** (now or later) by showing you what He wants you to **mentally do** and **physically do**.

WHY does God want to help you improve?

God wants you to help Him "make things better" in the ways He wants, to pursue His goals that usually (but not always) also are **your goals**.

Using Prayer does NOT mean Using God,
instead the proper attitude (for a praying Christian)
IS wanting to be used by God,
IS NOT wanting to use God.

On the next page, questions about ...
Kingdom! Prosperity? Abiding!

WHY does God want to help you? (continued)

— so you can help Him pursue **His Kingdom** —

4 Spiritual Laws: #4 is to seek a Christ-Directed Life
by keeping Christ on the throne of your Life
because you want Him **to be your King,**
because you want **to be used by Him,**
to help Him* pursue the Kingdom of God.

(* along with others who also accept Him as King)
(together, we are **pursuing** but **not yet achieving**)

What about a “**Prosperity Gospel**” ?

does God **sometimes** help you achieve your own goals? **YES**

does God **always** help you achieve your own goals? **NO**

(YES+NO due to **partial overlap** of **your goals** with **God's goals**)

{ if you “abide in Christ” more completely, you increase the overlap }

WHAT – what can God help you improve?

as a Christian, **you can expect God to help you improve...**
your character (if you “hunger...”, wanting to “be transformed”),
your understandings (of God, yourself, and other people),
your love for God & people (actualized in attitudes & actions),
your compassion for others (loving them as you love yourself),
your compassionate actions (trying to “make it better” for them),
your wisdom (in making decisions about your attitudes & actions),
your learning (from your living-experiences today and in the past),
your thinking-and-actions (now and – when you **learn** – later),

AND

the results (of how you affect the life-situations of yourself & others)
because the results depend on **what you do plus what God does.**

what won't happen:

With prayer (or without it), **God can help you improve,**
BUT He will not make you perfect during Life. Therefore,
appropriate humility (not too little, not too much) **is justifiable.**
(don't claim “God gave me The Answer” for justifiably-controversial questions)

WHETHER – can (does) God help us improve?

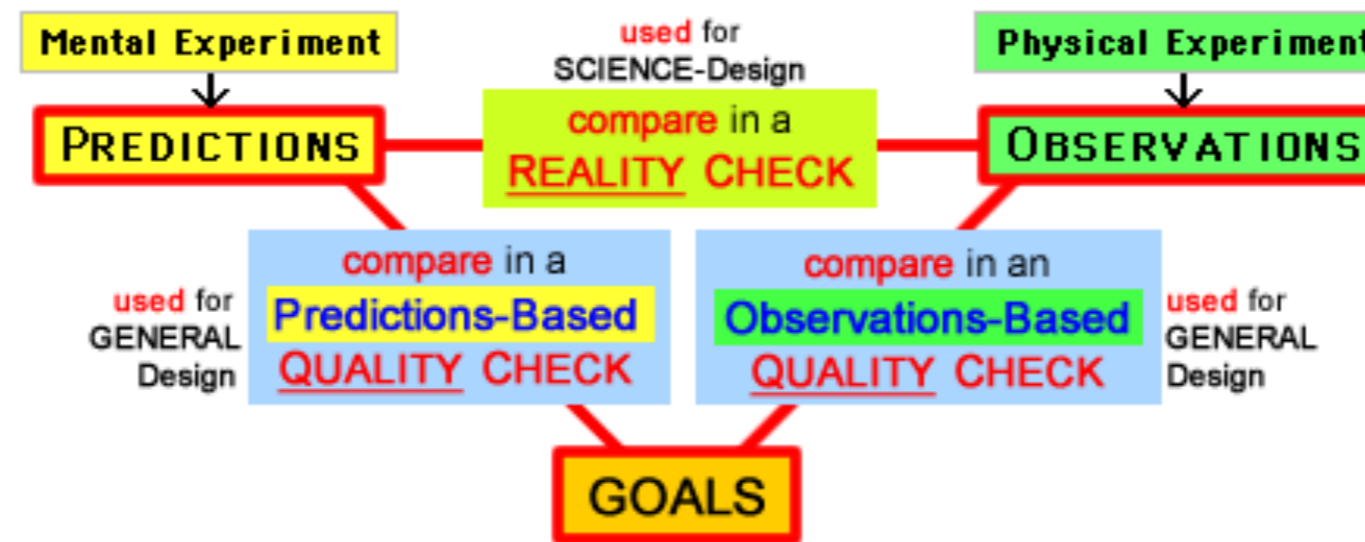
some reasons (by using prayer-ideas in this talk) to say **YES**:
if **you pay attention** to your **PROCESS** of Problem Solving,
if PRAYER → **God does provide** useful insights, and/or
if just “**pausing to relax-etc**” is naturally refreshing, and/or
if **placebo effect** (you expect improving, so you get it).

We should **logically evaluate** different kinds of **evidence**:
biblical, **traditional**, **experiential**, **scientific**.

EVALUATION-COMPLICATING FACTORS:

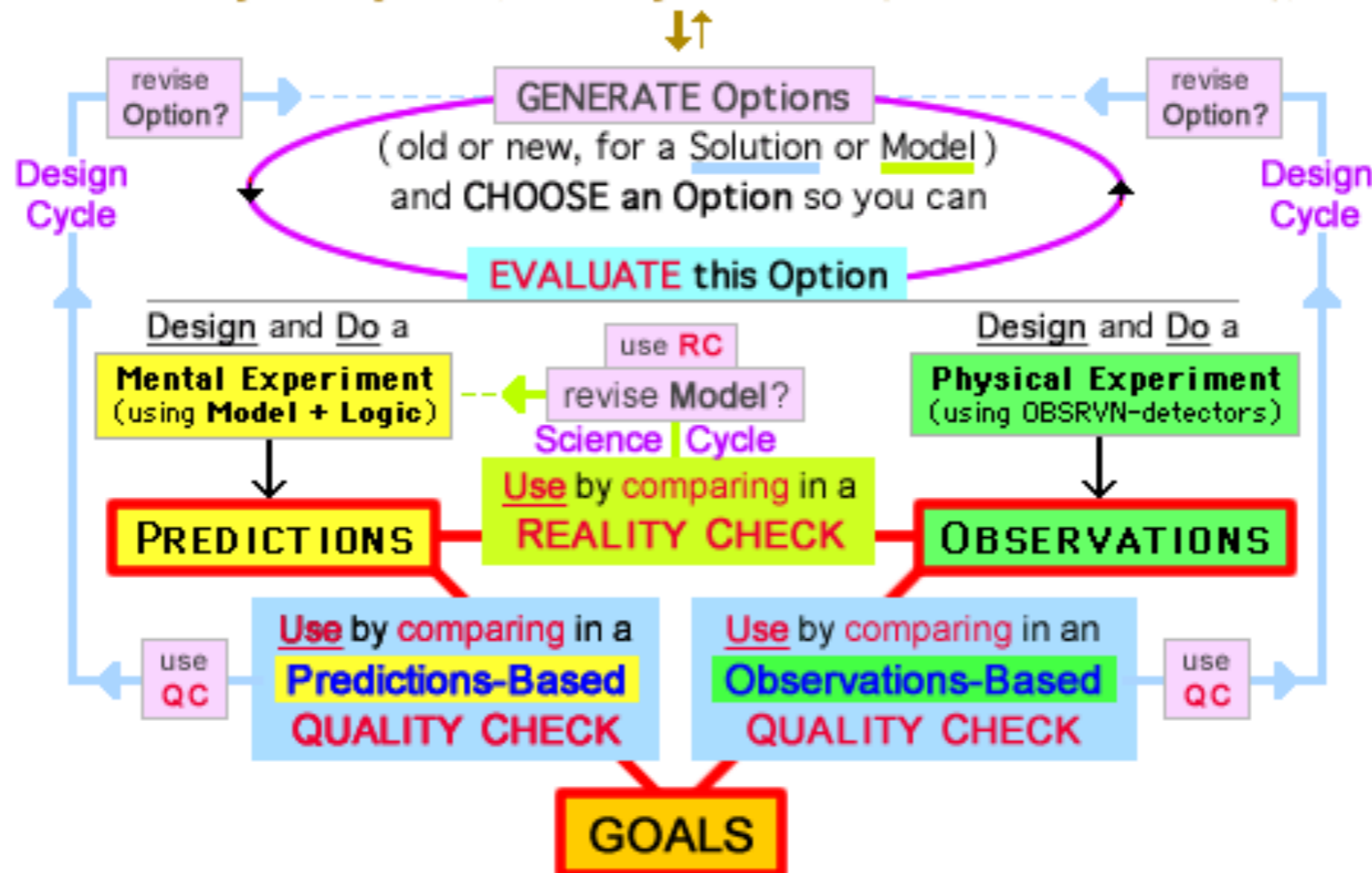
- different kinds of **evidence**,
- about different kinds of **WHAT-improvements**
(e.g. stronger biblical claims for some [character, love] than for others)
(e.g. stronger scientific evidence for some [physical] than others [cognitive]),
- using different kinds of **prayer and/or meditation**,
- by people with different **worldviews**,
- for **different ages** of people (e.g., students vs seniors),
- in different **educational contexts** (private vs public,...);
- a Person (God) decides His person-specific responses to prayer.

for Evaluation we use 3 Elements (PGO) in 3 Comparisons:



critical Evaluation stimulates-and-guides creative Generation:

Learn more, for accurate-and-thorough understanding with empathy,
 Define your Objective, Define your GOALS (for a Solution or Model),



Using Experiments in 4 Ways:

1. for **Experiment** → **Information**, you **USE an Experiment** to produce **Information** (Predictions or Observations) by doing a Mental Experiment or Physical Experiment.

2. for **Information** → **Evaluation**, you **USE this Experimental Information** to do Experiment-Based **Evaluation** by comparing 3 Elements (Predictions, Observations, Goals) in 3 Ways.

3. for **Evaluation** → **Generation**, you **USE this Experiment-Based critical Evaluation** (of an old Option) to stimulate-and-guide your creative **Generation** (of a new Option).

4. for **Evaluation** → **Generation**, you **USE this Experiment-Based critical Evaluation** to stimulate-and-guide your creative **Generation** (of new Information) by asking “what new Information (Predictions and/or Observations) would be useful for Evaluation?” and “what Experiments will help me get this Information?” so you can creatively design new Experiments to USE in these 4 ways.

Christian Education for Life – Using Prayer for Problem Solving

some ideas to think about while you wait for the talk to begin:

- **Should we encourage** (or even allow) **students to pray**
- **in Christian schools?** (and if yes – how, when, where, ...?)
- **in public schools?** (or with “non-religious” mindful meditation?)

study the diagram — For two kinds of **Design Thinking** (while we're doing **SCIENCE-Design** and **GENERAL Design**), we **EVALUATE** by using 3 Elements (PGO) in 3 Comparisons:

