

OUTCOME OF PRAYER: A STUDY OF CHILDREN IN SELECTED DENOMINATIONS IN IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Prayer has been assumed to cause different effects on the life of the praying individual. On one side, prayer could imply on the emotional status, individual growth and the on the personal needs of the individual among others. On the other side, it may cause depression and unhappiness especially when the desired response did not happen. This study was set out to investigate whether the above argument applies to the lives of younger and older children of ages 7-8 and 11-12 respectively in four selected churches in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted phenomenological qualitative design with Semi-structured interviews and conversations, uncompleted sentences, picture projection and letter writing to God as methods for collecting data. The raw data was gathered, transcribed, coded, classified and re-classified until meaningful patterns and themes emerged after which they were analysed with the help of NVivo. 11 Pro. This study discovered that the effects of the children's prayer are directly related to their reasons for praying; that as they pray, children experience a deep relationship with God, dialogue with Him verbally and non-verbally, and act upon instructions they believe come from God. It was revealed that children's emotions and feelings are affected negatively or positively based on the stage of development as discussed in Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development that formed the foundation for this study.*

KEYWORDS: Prayer, Older Children, Younger Children, Effect, Nigeria, God, Relationship, Theme, Denomination, CCN, MFM, NBC, CAC

INTRODUCTION

Children's relationship with God has been demonstrated by the kind of questions researchers ask that seek to reveal the effect that prayer has in their lives. Such a relationship have been stated by Coles (1990) in his book on children's spiritual life in different countries of the world where he asserts that Anne, an eleven year old respondent of his study indicated that talking to God and hearing Him speak back to her had a calming effect on her and brought peace and joy. Anne said, "When I start praying and when Jesus does answer . . . the day seems sunny again (Coles, 1990). Susanna, a seven-year-old girl, would go and pray when she was angry at her brothers instead of flaring-up at them and prayer always calmed her down (Stonehouse and May, 2010 p.46).

Prayer was seen to help children cope when things were hard or when faced with life stressors and prayer gave them comfort in times of sorrow (Moore, Talwar and Bosacki, 2005 p. 228). In his study Coles talks of Margarita, an angry older girl, whose mother had just died and she was struggling to cope with her emotions. At times she had fits of anger which she directed at the priest and not at God. However, she explained that listening to God in prayer lifted up her spirit when nothing else could (Coles, 1990 p. 95). This finding was similar to that of Mountain (2005 p. 229); it could be one of the reasons why she was of the opinion that prayer is an important subject that should make up part of the religious curriculum of children.

These testimonies imply, therefore, that prayer had some kind of positive effect on the moods and emotions of the children; that as children who were unhappy prayed, they felt better and happier. The question to ask is would prayer have such an effect on African children. Basing on the foregoing background, this paper sought to investigate the effect that prayer had in the lives of Children of ages 7-8 and 11-12 in Ibadan, Oyo state Nigeria. The research question guiding the research question was: *What are the effects that prayer has in the lives of older and younger children from the four denominations under study?* To answer this question, Theory of Cognitive development was adopted.

Theory of Cognitive Development by Jean Piaget explains how a child's thinking changes from early childhood to later childhood (Radcliff, 2007 p. 225). Jean Piaget explained the process of knowing and the four stages a person moves through to gradually acquire this ability (Blake and Pope 2008 p. 59). The steps are: Sensorimotor Stage (birth through two years), Preoperational Stage (ages two to seven), Concrete operational stage (ages seven to eleven) and Formal Operational Stage (ages eleven and above). Children start at the very beginning of each stage and graduate to the next stage (normally advanced than the previous) as they grow in age and experience.

The four stages, are universal thus are applicable in the same order to every person no matter the culture. Also, each stage is sequential as they follow a particular pattern and they build upon one another. It is hard to jump a stage (Invariant) and each stage is more advanced than the previous one, learners move from one degree of hardship to another (Cloyd, 1997 p. 35; Yount, 1996 p. 84).

METHODOLOGY

This paper investigated into the prayer life of younger children ages 7 - 8 and older children ages 11-12. It sought out to answer the research question using phenomenological qualitative design chosen as it helped look into meanings and perspectives that the respondents had on prayer. Children from four denominations: Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), Catholic Church in Nigeria (CCN), The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) and Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), ages 7 - 8 years (younger) and 11-12 years (older) were used for this research as summarised in table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents from the Denominations

Denomination	Younger children (7-8)		Older children (11-12)	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
CAC	2	3	3	2
NBC	2	3	3	2
MFM	3	2	2	3
CCN	3	2	2	3

The researcher sought a similar number of each category of respondents in the overall sample, spread out across the four denominations. Therefore, ten children were chosen from each denomination thus giving a sample size of forty (40) children from the four denominations. The children were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. It started with three initials of the church, the age group of the children Y for younger children and O for older children, 'b' for a boy and 'g' for a girl and finally a number 1-5. An example

is CACYb1 which is decoded as the first boy aged 7 to 8 years from the Christ Apostolic Church. Here is the tabular representation of the pen names for each respondent. All pseudonyms can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Pseudonyms for the Respondents

Denomination	Pseudonyms Younger children 7-8 years	Pseudonyms Older children 11-12 years	Denomination	Pseudonyms Younger children 7-8 years	Pseudonyms Older children 11-12 years
CAC	CACYg1	CACOb1	NBC	NBCYg1	NBCOb1
	CACYg2	CACOb2		NBCYg2	NBCOb2
	CACYb3	CACOG3		NBCYb3	NBCOG3
	CACYb4	CACOG4		NBCYb4	NBCOG4
	CACYb5	CACOG5		NBCYb5	NBCOG5
MFM	MFMYb1	MFMOg1	CCN	CCNYb1	CCNOg1
	MFMYb2	MFMOg2		CCNYb2	CCNOg2
	MFMYg3	MFMOb3		CCNYg3	CCNOb3
	MFMYg4	MFMOb4		CCNYg4	CCNOb4
	MFMYg5	MFMOb5		CCNYg5	CCNOb5

Data was collected with the use of different qualitative child-friendly data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and conversations, uncompleted sentences, picture projection and writing a letter to God were used. The picture reading tool used images so as to stimulate discussions, while the uncompleted sentences allowed children to answer honestly without feeling the pressure of talking to an adult. With the aid data projective test (Picture reading and uncompleted sentences) (Finaluu, 2013), the respondents were able to “reveal predetermined attitudes, feelings and emotions” (Soley, 2009). The raw data was gathered, transcribed, coded, classified and re-classified until patterns and themes that could be translated meaningfully emerged. These themes were then compared and analysed. The researcher made sure that the data collection and analysis methods passed credibility/internal validity, transferability, dependability and conformability/checks. The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package that was used in this research is NVivo. 11 Pro for Windows.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Outcome of Prayer in the Lives of Older and Younger Children

The research question guiding the study was: *What are the effects that prayer has in the lives of older and younger children from the four denominations under study?*

It set out to reveal the actual or perceived outcome of prayer of older and younger children. Seven categories (1) feelings and emotions, (2) success in school, (3) deliverance and safety,

(4) personal growth and development, (5) answered prayers, (6) provision: needs are met, and (7) being healed were discovered as discussed in the following sections.

Feelings and Emotions

The respondents described their feelings before and after they prayed and what prayer did to their emotional state. It was found that prayer had both negative and positive effects as children under study stated that they got happy and strong feeling, sang, got satisfied, and felt an urge to pray more, and change of mood from a unhappy to happy, especially when their prayers were answered.

Positive Response to Prayer

Prayer made children happy. The thought of prayer brought about happy feelings for both older and younger children. Older children mentioned feeling “attracted to pray,” feeling like “singing songs of praise and worship” and “happy” before prayer. While after they had prayed they also reported positive feelings like “feeling strong throughout the week” “singing again” and “having happy feelings”. This was because they could sense God’s presence and it made them happy.

Younger children also told of positive feelings before and after prayer. They used words like “happy,” “okay,” “very happy,” “good feelings” and feelings of “faith and hope” to describe how they felt before praying. They concluded that after prayer they felt: “happy,” “strong,” “very happy,” “better,” “good feelings,” and “wonderful”.

Most of the time, these positive emotions were as a result of getting positive answers to such prayers. NBCyb4 noted his prayer had “good effects” on him because the outcome of prayer was positive. He was hungry, he prayed, and God provided food for him. CCNOg1 explained she felt happy after praying because “God will deliver it to me”. Then with a smile on her face said, “God is wonderful”. For CACOb2 explained, that “God loves me,” and this knowledge made him happy after prayer.

A Change in Mood after Prayer

From the analysis, it was noted that more older children than younger children experienced a change in their emotions and feelings after prayer. Older children used the following words to describe their feelings before praying. “Not always active,” “feeling sober,” “feeling bad especially if something evil happens,” “sad I have lost hope,” “dizzy and tired,” and “unhappy”. Younger children explained that before they prayed they were “not feeling like praying,” “tired” or “very tired,” and “unhappy or sad”.

However, after they prayed, older children reported feeling “happier,” “free,” “relieved,” and “better,” “safer,” “eased and accepted,” “certain” and “happy and delivered”. While younger children reported they felt “happy” or “so happy”. CCNOg1 mentioned that the change in negative feelings was because she forgot her problems as she talked to God. Or as NBCOb2 put it “God is with me”. CACOb1 said that he felt “relieved” after praying “because the devil would have departed and would not come back”. However, CACOG5, CCNYg5 noted that prayer had no effect according to them.

These findings were in line with the researches on prayer by Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967 pp. 101-9), Mountain (2005 p. 297), and of Moore, Talwar and Bosacki (2005 p. 225) as they

noted that prayer was a positive action for children and children felt happy and reported happy feelings when they prayed. This was because they were assured that God listened to them as they prayed.

Emotions and Feelings towards Unanswered Prayers

Older and younger children reported that some of their prayers were not answered or answered as they expected and brought about different feelings and reactions. Some feeling and reactions were negative while some were hopeful and some joyful. Older children reported that they did not act negatively, wait patiently and continue praying when their prayers were not answered while a few cited depression, unhappiness, sad and angry. On the other hand, younger children felt unhappy and bad, sad, angry at mummy when their prayer were not answered in the way and manner they wanted unlike a few who had mixed reactions (sad but wait patiently).

Positive Reactions to Unanswered Prayers

Children noted that God does not always answer their prayers and they respond to that realization in a positive manner. 'Why' God did not answer their prayers had a great influence on their feelings and emotions. In most cases older children reasoned that they did not get answers to their prayers because "it was not yet time" or "God knows it is not good for us" or "God will not answer such prayer". Their reaction was to "wait patiently" or "pray some more" or to stop praying for such. NBCOG4 mentioned two prayer concerns she asked God for. "I prayed to be first but did not come first. I prayed for my aunt to get a job but she didn't get it. When I pray and do not get what I want that means it is not the right time". CACOb1 had a similar view but he puts it in another way, "When we pray for something and God says that it is not yet time and we continue to pray for that thing and we don't stop praying for it God knows it not good for us, so He would not give it to us". NBCOb1 acknowledged that he was praying amiss and so his response to unanswered prayers was not negative.

Negative Response to Unanswered Prayers

This was a major theme for younger children and a minor one for older children. Older children and younger children mentioned times of perceived unanswered prayers and their negative response to such times as an outcome of prayer. When younger children in particular perceived that their prayers were not answered as they wanted or not answered at all, they responded in a negative manner. Younger children noted being "angry," "feeling bad" "sad and unhappy". CCNYb2 explained how he complained when his prayers were not answered, "I always look up and say God why did you not answer me and people always worship you and you answer them but when it's my turn you don't answer me" (CCNYb2). CCNYg3 cited times she prayed not to be flogged by her mother or aunty, and protested because, "Sometimes they beat me even after I pray that they should not beat me. I felt like God did not answer my prayer on such days". CACYg1 told of a prayer request that she made and God did not answer and shared her response. "When I pray not to fall sick and I fell sick I felt sad and unhappy." NBCOb2 recounted a recent incident of an unanswered prayer and his negative reaction, "I felt angry with God and told him that he does not love me". However, the object of anger and negative feeling for CCNYg5 was not God but her mother, her reason being that:

I prayed to have time to read for my Civic, Mathematics and English exam. But I did not read... My mummy was just sending me to do a lot of work...I felt bad

and angry that I must work and that God did not answer my prayer. I was angry with my mummy not God (CCNYg5).

Mixed Reactions to Unanswered Prayers

Both older and younger children exhibited mixed reactions when they perceived that their prayers were not answered. They reported “feeling sad” and “unhappy” but would “continue to pray” until they got the answer they wanted. NBCYb4 shared his reactions: “I prayed that my mummy would give me money, one hundred naira for a practical lesson in school... I was not happy with God and I asked him why did he not answer my prayers but I prayed again” (NBCYb4).

NBCYg1 was also not happy when God provided N700 instead of N1000 she had requested: “I was not happy but will be patient until God provides the remaining N300. I also sometimes feel sad but I wait for God’s time” (NBCYg1).

In concordance with this finding, Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967 p. 107) posited that unanswered prayers a “distressed younger children more than older children and seemed to be associated with a wide variety of immature rage and frustration responses . . . while older children were more resigned and philosophical in their responses”. The children’s concepts of prayer are developing in line with Piaget’s Stage Theory of Cognitive Development as Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967 p. 107) noted that “emotional responses to answered prayer become more modulated and mature” as the children grow older.

The study findings showed there were some children that noted that prayer had no effect on them but these children were just a few older ones. Also some younger children noted mixed reactions to unanswered prayers noting that they would be sad but they would wait patiently until the answer they wanted came to pass. Considering the study of Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) one may conclude that these few younger children who showed mixed reaction are at a transitional stage of cognitive development and are growing. Although these ones are only few, they are maturing in their faith. However, Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967) explained the age was 6 or 9, yet these few younger children are 7 to 8 years.

Success in School

Education can be seen as very important in the lives of children; therefore, it was a major reason why they prayed. The quest for knowledge, wanting to pass their examinations and do well in their school work made them to pray. In response to this, both younger and older children acknowledged the effect of prayer on their examinations, knowledge, wisdom and understanding and that God gives them success in other school-related matters.

Passed Examinations

Prayer helped them pass harder and vital examinations like “common entrance” and “JSS 1 final examination into JSS2” as recounted by CCNOg1 that “When I was in nursery school, I repeated my class. I prayed and God answered my prayers because by the next year He promoted me to the next class”. This implies that God was the one who promoted her to the next class and not the school because she prayed.

CCNOg2 recalled an event where she prayed so as to pass examinations and sure enough, she declared, “I pray for God to allow me to pass, and I passed”. MFMOg3 boasted “When I

prayed to God . . . I pass every time". MFMOg1 was in agreement with this. CACOG3 noted that when she prayed she "achieves success" in all her endeavours and her example of success was "come first position in her class". Prayer helped older children when education becomes competitive. CCNOB5 stated, "In school there is someone that pass me in scores. But in this session, I am better than the person". He believed that he was better because he prayed.

For younger children prayer seemed to have a double-barrel effect. Children mentioned passing examinations, being promoted and something else positive happening to them as a result. CCNYb2 supports: "Prayer helped my exam. I prayed so that I pass and move to the next class. My father promised me he will fix my Play Station 2 if I passed. When I passed my father fixed my Play Station 2" (CCNYb2). The play station had been a major reason why he prayed as he stated earlier in the interview.

CCNYg3 explained how she passed when she prayed: "When I came first in Nursery 2. I prayed. Also, when I came eighth in my primary two exam because we are seventeen in my class. The result I see is that God has answered my prayers and he has allowed me to pass. When I pass my exam, my mum doesn't beat me."

By her words, it can also be noted that younger children, just like the older children, state that it is God who allows them to pass.

Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding

Children chorused the need to gain knowledge, wisdom and understanding. MFMOB3 explained this as he said, "When I pray to God He gives me Knowledge, wisdom and understanding. CACOG5 explained, "I didn't remember what I read, as I prayed I remembered".

Younger children elaborated on the result of prayer. It was prayer that made Mathematics, English, Agricultural and Social Sciences easier for them to understand. NBCYg2 explained that one day she forgot something she had read and prayed and she remembered it again. CACYg2 noted that, "When I pray I have retentive memory," when asked to explain further she noted it was due to prayer "that God gives me a brain

One younger boy prayed for success for his mother who was having struggles during her doctorate programme. According to him, when they prayed his mum was able to do her PhD and it was not "cancelled" as the school authority had warned.

Again, it was found that God lets children, or helps them, get away with things that are wrong as NBCOB2 recounted how he got away without doing assignment, "Halleluyah! My teacher did not beat me because of the excuse I told her". However, he was not so lucky the second time as he was caught by the teacher copying assignment from a friend and caned. He was happy the first time when he was not caught but the second time he was caught he was angry.

It was revealed that children understood God as omniscient, and so they tapped into His knowledge by asking Him for success in school related issues and they reported that God gave them great success. They noted passing all their examinations, being promoted to higher classes and gaining the desired knowledge, wisdom and understanding because they prayed. Children brought Christian Religious Studies, English Language and Agricultural and Social Sciences to the Lord in prayer, subjects that they did not understand and were not expecting to pass. However, they did understand the hard subjects and they passed and in their reasoning, it was

as a result of their prayer. God gave them brains and made their academics easy because they prayed. Both younger and older children noted that prayer helped them have a retentive memory. They were able to understand what the teacher taught them due to prayer. As children prayed during examinations, one effect of prayer was that they could answer the questions, even the ones that they were not taught or did not study for. Prayer helped older children pass better than their class mates.

Younger children explained that prayer for success in school had a double barrel effect; with the first being success in their examination, and the second being gifts from their parents. Success in their academics was attributed to God and because they prayed, not because they read or studied. It was God who helped them pass and who promoted them to the next class and not their school or because of their grades. However, such a belief held by both older and younger children and can be very dangerous. What happens when they fail or when they do not do as well as expected or when they will not remember what they have read? Will they blame God and say He does not like them or He failed them?

One minor theme worth mentioning was that older children prayed that they wanted to get away with doing what is wrong. They did something that did not conform to the rules and regulations and they prayed that they would get away with it. Even though the older respondents in this category were small in number it was a departure from the cognitive and moral development of children. These few older children were behaving like younger children, especially when caught they became angry with God. This effect of prayer showed that some children prayed for the wrong reasons. They tried to use prayer as a getaway or a way out of trouble. They know what they did was bad but they prayed to get away with it. They did bad things and prayed not to be punished. And if they are punished, they behaved like younger children getting angry and upset either with God or their parents.

Deliverance and Safety

The need for protection, defence and safety were cited reasons for prayer by children. God protected them and gave them power to fight evil, deliverance over the devil and evil happenings and safety from physical dangers. God also kept them alive and did not allow them to die.

Victory and Deliverance

Both younger and older children argued that prayer gave them strength and courage to face and defeat the devil; they were no longer afraid. CACOG3 showed her boldness noting that “I acknowledge the fact that I can fight against principalities”. When the devil attempted to attack her in her sleep, she prayed and was victorious. Older children explained the effects of prayer as keeping them “safe from evil and other works of the enemy” or bringing them “freedom from bondage”. Prayer brought about deliverance. CACOb2 mentioned that when he prayed “he becomes strong on earth and then does not fear evil people”. This could be because as CACYb3 put it “prayer gives you power over evil and wickedness”. NBCYb3 concluded that “prayer destroys wickedness”. CCNYg5 shared this story when telling of the effect of prayer.

An evil man (Satan) used to enter my body and I would then lie and steal. Anytime I pray he used to leave my body. The evil man has two horns and wears a black cloth. I told my mummy and daddy and they pray for me. This happens on Monday and

Tuesday nights. When they pray for me I will be shaking and the evil man will leave me. After I pray or my parents pray the evil man will leave me (CCNYg5).

CACOG5 also said to have defeated the devil, that "...I woke up and couldn't move my body then I prayed and I was freed" (CACOG5).

Other minor themes revealed included: safety and protection against kidnappers in the bus as argued by CACYg2 also stated that through prayer, God enabled her "go out and come back and they did not kidnap me" and CCNOB4, who said, "she did not die"; being alive and not dying, as supported by arguments of CACOB1, CACOG5 and CCNOg2. Further, CACYb4 is in support in her argument that "God has answered our prayers and that we should not die".

Under this theme, children demonstrated the understanding of the mighty power of God to keep them safe from harm and all kinds of evil as a result of their prayer. Children believed that as they prayed, God fought their enemy, the devil and gave them victory, safety and protection and deliverance over the devil/Satan, evil powers and physical dangers such as kidnappers or accidents. Through prayers, they became bold and with courage confronted the devil or evil powers and could fight Satan. Both older and younger children noted becoming bolder and more secure. They no longer were afraid to travel or to use the public transportation system or to go out and mix with strangers that they interacted with on a day to day basis. Older children noted that due to prayer the Holy Spirit would warn them if there was danger. Younger children said that God either stopped accidents or did not allow accidents to take place because of their prayer.

Personal Growth and Development

The data revealed that the younger and older children considered personal growth and development as an outcome of prayer. Spiritual growth, becoming better people and improving lives are discussed under this theme.

Spiritual Growth

Older children talked about how prayer made them feel "near to God" or "walking closely with God". NBCOB2 explained thus: "Anytime I pray I feel like He is praying with me and I am sitting next to Him talking to Him". He went on to explain, "Through prayer I understand that God exists; that he is always ready to give me advice when I seek from Him".

Become Better People

Children reported that prayer had a positive impact on the way they thought and behaved. They gave examples of how prayer helped them "learn good things". Two younger children (CACYb3 and MFMYg3) associated the outcome of prayer with the condition of their minds. It made them become better people. "Prayer helps me to do good and have a good mind" one said, while the other said, "Prayer brings great results like good minds and the fear of God to do great things in life". Older children also mentioned becoming a better person as a result of prayer, "Prayer helps me not to do bad things" mentioned CACOB1, while CCNOg2 showed the positive effect of prayer as, "prayer helps me do things that please God. Not to lie, not to abuse and not to think about things that are not right". CCNOg2 also noted that prayer helped her sins to be forgiven especially when she was not 'able to go to confession and tell the Reverend Father her sins.

Improved Life

Children noted that prayer improved the quality of their lives. For younger children, prayer brought “good things” into their lives. MFMYg3 buttressed this point in the interview when she said, “Prayer helps me to do and fulfil great things”. CACYg1 admitted that prayer helped “me succeed in everything I do”. NBCyg2 reported that she “began to move forward” when she prayed. For older children, prayer brought about “blessings from God to me”, helped them in their “future purposes” and brought about “success in my endeavours” despite some who were not certain “maybe when I pray God will show me the way?” (MFMOg1).

It was evident from the data analyses under this section that children attributed their personal and spiritual development to their prayer. There was significant difference in the effect of prayer among older and younger children concerning spiritual and personal development as an outcome of prayer. The study reveals that older children mentioned spiritual development as a major effect of prayer and personal development as a minor effect. For younger children, it was the other way round as they mentioned personal development as a major effect and spiritual development as a minor one.

Answered Prayers

Physical Evidence

CACOb1 asserted that “I know my prayers have been answered when what I ask from God has come to a success in my life”. CCNOg2 explained that what she asked for would “appear the way I have asked God to make it”. Then to stress the truthfulness of what she was saying she said, “In reality!” “I have seen it”. Further, CCNOb4 said “The day my friend lost his Bible and my friend prayed and one of his friend in another class brought the Bible without him asking”.

Younger children also noted that an outcome of their prayers was that they would see things they pray for manifest physically. They explained this with words such as, “It will happen as I have prayed,” and “What I pray for begins to happen”. CCNYg3 gave examples of some physical manifestation of answers to her prayer. She states:

When I see the thing has happened like when God has given the Reverend Father money to build the church and my mummy money, and he allow my father to buy car. I see that it has happened, I know God has answered all the things I have prayed for. He gave my mummy money, he did not allow my parents to have accident. (CCNYg3)

CCNYb2 collaborated this when he said, “I see it in my report card. My teacher didn’t believe I would pass because I usually play”.

Conviction

Children showed an unwavering faith that each prayer had an automatic answer: their prayers were answered because they had “faith” or they “believed” or because they had the “Holy Spirit”. For some older children, this faith came about due to what they had been taught. CCNOb5, confirmed that “in my school we were told to trust and believe that our prayers have been answered”. While MFMOg2 explained that his convictions came from listening to people “preach,” the message that “when you have faith in your prayer it has been answered”. NBCOg3 echoed almost the same answer as others. “I have faith in God that my prayers have

been answered". When asked what she understood by the word "faith," she defined it as "having the assurance that God will do something in my life". A few older children also attributed knowing that their prayers were answered to feelings. Their conviction came as a result of "feeling okay" after they had prayed or having a certain feeling. MFMOB4 explained this, "God answer my prayers, I feel it".

Younger children showed complete trust that God answered their prayers but did not attribute it to what they had been taught or heard. Their conviction came naturally, and it seemed inbuilt. They explained their faith through statements showing that they knew it was "God who provides answers to prayers," noting "God always answers". NBCYg1 went a little further as she boldly said, "I have the Spirit of God in me and I believe and have no doubt in God" and that was why her prayers are answered. Feelings also helped younger children know that God answered prayers. These feelings were described as "good feelings" or just knowing that prayers were answered which CCNYg5 explained, "Because I have it in my heart that my praywas answered".

Insight from Dreams and Visions

CACYb5 narrated that "God would have told me that my prayers have been answered in my dreams". CACYg2 mentioned "When God talks to me in spirit I see him in my dreams" and it is at that time CACYg2 would have the conviction that her prayers are answered. CACYg2 talked about dreams and visions and her encounter with God as she said "He speaks to me in a dream because God will send his angel. I only see part of his body wearing white and not his face. Also by hearing what He is saying in my spirit, in my mind. He says 'my daughter, do not steal'".

In addition to these testimonies, CCNYg4 felt the answer to her prayers. She said, "Sometimes when I am sleeping I feel it in my dreams". MFMYb1 further stated, "God will show me through my dreams that my prayer was answered. God will show me a vision. God will reveal it to me in form of a person like an angel". CACYg1 also corroborated this by saying, "Sometimes I see an angel after prayer".

Hearing God Speak

Some children noted hearing God speak to them in different manners, assuring them their prayers had been answered and that brought about the conviction they had. CCNOB4 said his spirit talks "like a voice" saying "that my prayers have been answered". Some older children depicted some kind of confusion in their explanations as seen from MFMOB4 who said, "Something will tell me my prayers are answered". MFMOg1 was not also sure how God spoke to her: "Maybe when I pray God will show me the way". NBCOB5 mentioned that God spoke to him through a third party; he got his assurance of answered prayers not by hearing a divine voice but by hearing through his friend's voice. "One day when I went to pray with somebody, God answered my prayers and the person told me that the prayer had been answered", he said.

For younger children, God spoke to them in their "minds," "hearts" and "soul". NBCYb3 knew his prayers had been answered when as he said, "I closed my eyes and listened to God who told me not to worry, that my mummy will get money". CACYg1 noted, "I always hear God speaking to me".

Under the theme on answered prayers, the data analysed revealed that children had a strong conviction that God answered them when they prayed and they knew it. The way they knew

that God answered their prayer through conviction, physical evidence, insight from dreams and hearing God speak. Out of the four themes, there was significant difference only in physical evidence as an effect of answered prayers as it was a major effect for older children and a minor effect for younger children.

Younger children also had strong belief or faith that God answered their prayers once they ask Him for something, but not because they had listened to teachings; their reason being that they just knew or had good feelings, or had the Spirit of God. Their reason was inbuilt and not because of what they had heard. It can be observed that this finding also shows the active element of the mind in the faith of younger children's strong conviction belief that God answers prayers. Younger children noted that prayer affects their minds and helps them think of good things. They were also the ones who noted talking to God in their minds more and they were also the ones who heard God speaking to them in their minds more than older children. There is a renewal of mind as they pray. This is a digression from Long, Elkind and Spilka (1967). Younger children in this study are displaying a spirituality that is in a higher stage of cognitive development and faith than what their age should dictate according to the developmental theorist.

Provision: Needs are Met

Children had many great stories on the outcome of their prayers regarding provision. Their stories and the discussion come under the following themes (1) God provides money, and (2) Personal needs are met.

God Provides Money

One reason why younger children prayed was to request for money and they testified that God provided money for their parents as CACYg2 boasted, "When I tell God to provide money for my parents he does it". CCNYg2, NBCYb4 and CCNYg3 were more specific as they mentioned that their prayers help their mummies to have money. NBCYb4 reported that one time, "I prayed for money and God provided one thousand naira for me". However, not every child believed that the request for money always brings an instant answer as CACYb3 noted, "Prayer provides money, although not all the time". God providing money as an outcome of prayer was a minor theme for older children. God answered the request for money through the provision of work. NBCOg3 recalled, "In my family we prayed for money and God brought a person who wanted to sew clothes. So we got the money we prayed for".

Personal Needs are Met

Younger respondents particularly from Catholic Church strongly believed that God meets personal needs as an outcome of prayer. CCNYb2 testified anytime his parents went to the market and came back with food he knew it was an answer to his prayer. CCNYg2 recalled an incidence in which she got instant answers to her prayer in her mother's shop. "My mother needed help as in carrying something back to her shop from the market. This was because what she took was hard and heavy. We prayed and she got help to carry it". NBCYb4 told of a time they were all hungry in their home and how they prayed and God provided food for them.

For older children it was more of personal needs such as shoes, bags and personal things and in many cases unnamed needs that were met. It was common for them not to mention the things God provided. They only stated that "needs were met" and "I get what I need," and "I do all the things I need to do after I pray". CCNOg1 stated that the effect of her prayer was that "it

chased suffering away from me and my family”. She later described an interaction she had with God; she said His words to her were “You are suffering”. She continued by saying “And I told him to help me because my mummy and daddy are poor”. Prayer brings about success to do the impossible as CCNOB5 explained, “That when I know I can’t do something and my parents are not capable of doing them I pray. I then accomplish my needs”.

Here, it can be seen that the children believed in God the great provider and so when they took needs to Him in prayer, one outcome was that He met their needs. There was significant difference in the kind of needs God met as an effect of prayer as older children argued that God met their personal needs as a major theme and provides money as a minor theme. However, the major theme for younger children was God provided money and a minor theme was He met their personal needs. The children had many stories of how God met their needs because they prayed. For older children, they testified that God provided for their personal needs such as, bags, shoes and other things that they did not name. God gave to them things their parents could not provide. Older children believed that God provided money for their parents. They showed an understanding that while they prayed for money, God provided work for their parents.

Other Minor Themes

Older and younger children stated that when they prayed for healing, either for themselves or a family member God answered them by healing the person. For MFMOB3 it was her sister: “When my sister could not to go to school. I prayed for her and she got healed. I said, “Every stranger in her body should come out”. In the case of CACOB2 it was his father who needed healing and he prayed “till it came to pass”. CCNYb1 was so afraid that healing would not happen in his case. “I felt like crying because I felt my father was going to die. I prayed that the Lord will heal him and God healed him”. NBCYg1 attested that the result of her prayer was “divine healing” for herself and her brother.

This study revealed other minor themes such as healing and certain physical conditions as effect of prayer. They saw God healing power no matter how long it took.

The timing of prayer or when prayer took place led to physical conditions of tiredness or sleepiness was also an outcome of prayer. This was a minor theme for older children, and no younger child identified with this category. For some children prayer brought about complaints. They reported feeling happy before and during their prayer because as one put it, “I am talking to my God”. However, by the end of the prayer they felt “sleepy” and “tired”. CCNOB3 complained “I always stand up when I am praying and my leg will be painning me” while CCNOB4 noted “I always feel sleepy because it is in the night that we pray.

“This is observed as one negative outcome of prayer that older children mentioned was being tired or sleepy when prayer was too long or if they had been standing during the prayer for a long time. This was a minor theme for only older children. Prayer practices and positions are very important when children are praying. It would seem that for these older children the positions of prayer could work against prayer. Also, the length of actual prayer time can also be an advantage or disadvantage to prayer. The findings revealed that older children complained when prayer is too long and younger children did not want to be forced to pray

when they did not want to pray. Parents should remember that children have a short attention span.

CONCLUSION

This paper was based on the premise that prayer had some kind of effect on the lives of children from selected churches and denominations. Thus the study was set to ascertain the foregoing argument. Consequently, it was revealed that prayers of children out rightly show their emotional and mental state of mind. Prayer was found to have a calming effect on the emotional fears that children have. It makes them calmer and happier. It was therefore concluded that as children pray, they dialogue with God and act upon any instruction they believe comes from Him. Through prayer they experience God, in minds and in dreams. It is a positive experience for them and helps children cope with the stress of daily life within Nigeria.

In addition, it can be inferred that the effect of prayer is not only positive, but it can also be negative for younger children if they perceive their prayers were not answered in the way and manner they want or expect. This can bring tensions between younger children and God or the person they assumed was the reason their prayers were not answered. Through prayer God is a major part of their daily lives as both older and younger testify of how God answers their prayers. Through their prayer it was discovered that they experience a deep relationship with God. They encounter God and are ready to act on what God says to them.

RECOMMENDATION

The study has revealed both positive and negative effect that prayer had on the lives of children under study.

1. Christian parents and other people who care for children in the family setting should encourage children to pray. Children should take every issue to the Lord in prayer. Parents should organize regular prayers with both younger and older children.
2. Night time prayers are especially good because they will help to wind up the day's activities. If children feel sad or unhappy because of something that went on during the day, praying at night will help them seek God's help, which can change such feelings and they will sleep and wake feeling happy or happier. However, prayer time at night should not be long and not take place when the children are too sleepy. The findings also suggest that if children pray at night it will also help them have assurance of God's presence with them at night and victory in case they have bad dreams.
3. The findings also revealed that when children did not get the kind of answers they wanted they reacted negatively. Stories about Elijah (1 Kings 19:3-4, and 2 Kings 11) and the request of the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Mathew 20:20-24) can be used to teach children to look and see the better plan God has.
4. Also, it was discovered that children had some misconceptions in how God answers prayers. Curriculum writers should develop stories and teachings to teach this and other things such as correct motives/reasons for praying (Proverbs 16:2), praying according

to the will of God (1 John 5: 14-15), how to communicate with God verbally and in your mind and so on.

5. The negative effect that may come with prayer as depicted by the perception of children about passing examinations without reading but only by prayer is dangerous. Thus, there is need for Children to be taught that not everything is rosy for a Christian and in many cases God blesses the efforts of people. This is like the issue of faith without actions. If not, in the near future, children will not prepare for examinations beforehand. They will only pray and expect to pass and do well in school, which may not be the case.

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