



'I loved to be included' (Proverbs 1:8–19): The Church and Tiv Christian Youth Development



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This article examined the warning against evil companions in Proverbs 1:8–19 and the role of the church in addressing the involvement of Tiv youths in crime in Benue State and its implications for actions. Wicked people were zealous in seducing others into the paths of destruction. Would young people shun temporal and eternal ruin? This was the reason for Solomon's instruction in Proverbs 1:8–19. He admonished his son with the caption 'hear,' which presented the son with a choice. However, Solomon implored the child to refuse to take any step in destructive paths of evildoers. The persuasive nature of the pericope was important in addressing the growing crime rate amongst Tiv youths in Benue State. Most youths in Tiv communities were being enticed into joining criminal gangs, secret cults and rituals in order to make quick wealth. Unfortunately, the number of youths in these immoral acts such as YahooYahoo amongst Tiv youths kept on increasing in the midst of the growing number of churches in most Tiv societies. Rhetoric analysis was used as the methodology. As part of recommendations, parents should instruct, discipline and stop their children from engaging in acts that lead to death. The youths should also avoid evil companions to avoid falling into trouble.

Contribution: Youths are the leaders of tomorrow, which makes admonition to youths a necessity for the growth of the Tiv Society. Proverbs 1:8–19 provides roadmaps that Tiv leaders and the church could adopt in preserving morality among Tiv youths.

Keywords: Proverbs 1; instruction; Christian youth; crime; amoral lifestyle; YahooYahoo.

Introduction

Raising children involves more than simply providing the material and emotional needs of children. It also involves nurturing and instructing children in the good and right ways (Hammermeister 2017:1). This is wisdom, because it involves sound judgement based on experience and knowledge. The wisdom sentence is the basic element of the form of the text (McKane 1970:2). From the writer of Northern Seminary's (2005) perspective, '[b]ack in ancient times, the temptation for young men to join the gang of troublemakers was virtually the same as today, and those gangs were dangerous'. The writer of Proverbs 1:8–19 is clear with his advice on refusing to be included in bad companionship. It has so many wisdom sentences, which is the basic element of the pericope. There is an exercise of affection *vis-a-vis* paternal authority so that the son could give proper attention to the instruction. In early Judaism and also in the Israeli *Kibbutz*, the one who gives counsel is known to be a father and the son is the scholar or student.

The pericope is a call for young people to refuse to be included in evildoing and be present amongst evildoers. Solomon tells his son not to be enticed with the possession of his or her peers. He counsels his son on the repercussion of seeking fast wealth, that is, making much money in a short time. Solomon was not merely concerned that his son would obey his instructions when it came to matters revolving around clothing, chores or other daily issues; the command to follow the instruction of the father and mother assumes that the father and mother were teaching the child how to live life in accordance with God's standard (Hammermeister 2017:1). The pericope was used to study the present moral decadence amongst the youths in Tiv land. It is a truism that the chief characteristic of youth is vulnerability; the young are ignorant of the ways of the world and lack the power of self-control. They need first to be protected from falling into disaster before they have hardly begun (Hammermeister 2017:1). In contemporary times amongst the Tiv youths of Benue State, there is an obscene and blatant quest by young to partake in social ills in the bid to generate fast wealth. Some of these youths engage in robbery and kidnapping, which makes them

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flamboyant in their lifestyle. Unfortunately, the innocent ones are being tempted to join them and generate fast wealth.

The scope of this article will be to exegete the pericope of Proverbs 1:8–19, where parents have roles to play in the lives of their children, especially as it relates to Tiv youths. Using the rhetorical analysis, this article examines the persuasive nature of the social and theological issues in Proverbs 1:8–19. Specifically, in the pericope, the analysis looks at the way that Solomon was able to engage persuasive languages in addressing his son not to join the evil company of his peers. It is strongly anticipated that the pericope will speak anew to the problem of increasing teenage pressure amongst Tiv youths.

Understanding Proverbs 1:8–19

Gates (1930:768) explained that the time when, all things considered, the compilation is best explained is between 350 and 150 BC. Proverbs 1:8–19 are designed to instruct people how to live wisely and avoid folly and apply to all classes of people and all periods of history (Hale 2007:928). They are a discourse between a father and a son. Although alleged to have been written by Solomon (Dell 2006), it projects a father's experience, which has been passed to a son. Clifford (1999:39) observed that in summary, the inexperienced person, as yet untaught by wisdom, is instructed about the two paths in life, one characterised by seductive words and glittering prizes (although, in reality, strewn with traps), whilst the other path is honourable and safe.

Proverbs 1:8–19 are most distraught about scoffers: the people who think that they know everything and there is nothing to learn (Goldingay 2016:327). It is a clarion call to people who are blind in their evil ways, which leads to destruction. People are deceived to think that anything they do is right, notwithstanding the process. This is why people do anything to generate wealth, and the father calls on his son not to join them or allow himself to be included amongst scoffers.

Youthful exploits can easily have disastrous consequences, which end in death. Most youths are imprisoned today. Furthermore, it is easy to be led on step by step into activities that are very bad (Northern Seminary 2015). The youths are easily enticed by what they see, feel and hear. This is the fate that Solomon tries to counsel his son not to fall prey to.

Proverbs rub our noses in truths that we wish we did not have to face. They provide insight into the capacity to be discerning and to decide rightfully (Goldingay 2016:326). The teacher (parent) calls on his student to follow God's leading instead of personal instinct. The teacher (parent) encourages the student to make intelligent judgements in moral, psychological, religious or aesthetic matters. In making the judgement, the son is called upon to adhere to the instruction of the father. The book of Proverbs, as we have it, is the result of a long process of growth with a continuous and cumulative process (Rylaarsdam 1976).

Proverbs 1:1–7 also indicate who its target audiences are. They speak first of the simple or young, the unlearned, who need to let their lives be shaped by it. But they go on to people who are already wise and discerning, who can still learn from it. Many people insist on being fools, which does not mean being intellectually feeble but rather ignoring the way that actions have consequences, the way that life works and the way that ethics and God's involvement are integral to the way life works (Goldingay 2016:327).

In Proverbs 1:8–19, the speaker or teacher is a parent, and the hearer is a child. This highlights the truth that parents have the primary responsibility for teaching godly wisdom to their children (Hale 2007:928). Parents are not to leave the work of disciplining a child to teachers or guardians. They are not to leave the child to toe the line of destruction. Parents are called upon to be disciplined on themselves by not overlooking the wrongdoings on their children to be disciplined.

The pericope further assumes and insists that humans can know the way to 'life' or 'the fear of the Lord' and can follow it (Rylaarsdam 1976:444). It further insists that the way of life is to fear God and do his will. His will according to the sage is to run from evil and avoid the enticement of joining people to do evil. The subject matter of Proverbs referenced two types of character: the emotions and the desires of the heart and the joys and sorrows, the losses and gains, the duties and the relationships of human life (Gates 1930:767). The sage advises the son to seek joy and avoid sorrow by avoiding the desires of one's heart on a daily basis. The duty of a father is to correct the son and tell him how to be careful in his relationships with peers to avoid them luring him into evil.

'I love to be included'—Proverbs 1:8–19

The pericope is an injunction about avoiding bad influence. As in Egypt, the sage addresses the pupil as my son (8, 10). He builds on the father's discipline (Hebrew *Musar*) and the mother's guidance (Hebrew *Torath*). The appeal of the boastful washbuckling bandits to the spirit of an adventurous youth serves the sage to illustrate the universal temptation of the way of sinners (Rylaarsdam 1976:445). The young person is encouraged to pay attention to parental instruction. Solomon uses his childhood experience to teach his children.

Proverbs 1:8–9

Children are encouraged to pay heed to the instruction of their father and mother. Verse 8 reminds us that parents have the responsibility for giving their children moral instruction (Hale 2007:931). Children may be thinking that their parents never had the pressure, the temptation or the experience they are going through. But the parent tries to call the attention of his son to the fact that he has been through that youthful process. The structure shows that the parents have been young and had those experiences that their children are going through. Their experiences give them the wisdom the young need to hear. Hence, the use of שָׁמַע [hear] shows that

the father was speaking from experience and needed the son to listen to avoid mistake. This shows that leadership is achieved by setting a good example (Achebe 1984). Solomon charges the son to receive and to retain the good lessons and laws that their parents give them (Henry 2006a:956). The son is called upon to hear the מוֹכֵר [instruction]. In Hebrew מוֹכֵר verse 8 is related to the verb יָסַר, that means 'to chasten, correct, instruct' (Koehler et al. 1985:387). Hebrew מוֹכֵר is used in verse 8 indicating the call made to the child by the father. In this context, the call is a way of the father chastening or correcting the child. The child is called upon to open this call. The father says 'שמע בני מוסר אביך תרות אמך ואל-תשש' ['Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching'], which is an indication that the pieces of advice of the father and the mother are important for the healthy living of the son. Both of them are needed for the growth and edification of the church. In this verse, the father pleads with his son to hear and accept parental instruction, which indicates *choice*. If the child neglects to hear, he becomes a fool and experiences many of the consequences of being a fool (Hammermeister 2017).

Proverbs 1:10

In this verse, there is the warning to resist bad people who want you to join their evil ways. Hebrew בָּנִי is repeated twice (cf. v.8) (Waltke 2004:189). This repetition is for emphasis. In verse 10, protasis could be seen, whilst in verse 10b, apodosis is observable. Protasis is the introductory part (if sinful men entice you [אִם-יִפְתְּוּךָ הַחַיָּאִים]), whilst apodosis is the concluding statement (do not consent [אַל-תִּבְנֶה]). The father warns the son not to be enticed by the lifestyle and temptation of evildoers. In Hebrew חַיָּאִים means sinners, offenders, lawbreaker, criminals and wrongdoers, which was used in verse 10b, denounces reprobates and people who acquire dishonest gains at others expense. He calls them 'sinful men', but the Hebrew word used also means 'criminals', not just people of poor moral judgement. In this world, there are very bad people who would lure away the innocent, and especially the naïve, to behaviour that they will regret (Northern Seminary 2015).

A close look at the protasis and apodosis in verse 10 emphasises two things: Firstly, there is a warning against joining hands with evildoers in their evil actions. Secondly, it points out to the refutation of evildoers and their evildoing. The same sins that evildoers commit will come back to them; those who commit murder will probably end up being murdered and God repays evildoers for the evil they have made—either in this life or the next (Hale 2007:931). The father warns against those who make wrongdoing look attractive. He calls them 'sinners' and advises his son not to 'consent' to them.

Proverbs 1:11–14

The father instructs his son against the sales pitch used by a gang of robbers. In verse 11, the father describes their activities. Robbers get more people into their gangs by evangelising their evil actions to their peers. Their evil actions include shedding blood and taking advantage of

the innocents who have given them no wrong. Evildoers engage in armed robbery, kidnapping, pickpocketing and assassination of character and theft. The sinners and lawbreaker said 'come with us' (לִקְהָ אִתְּנוּ), which indicates that the sinners are numerous, strong and sociable. The sinners further assured their peers that they are in the process of enticing that nobody will arrest them. Sinners enticed their peers saying, נִצְפְּנָה – let us lurk secretly' for the innocent, which shows that evildoers assure their would-be converts that they shall neither be prevented before, nor discovered and punished afterwards (Poole 2020) for their evil actions. They further assured that it is those who cannot protect themselves who will attack – the innocent [harmless people] (in 11b). It is also an encouragement that the innocent has not made any wrong to deserve what is being planned for them. It is the blood of the innocent that is being sought for. חַי in verse 11 is a strong language and vivid to admit of a figurative interpretation. In verse 12, Hebrew בֹּר [pit] was anticipated to be the last position of their victims when they are being molested by the evil people.

In verse 13, the robbers are focused on stealing costly things from their victims and using these things as their own. Gill (2016:2) reported that evildoers are:

[N]ot considering that hereby they were in danger of losing the more precious substance, their immortal souls; and the most precious substance of all, the enjoyment of God, and happiness with him to all eternity, which is the 'more enduring substance': the things of this world, properly speaking, are not substance, though wicked men so judge them; they are things that are not; nor are they 'precious', in comparison of spiritual and heavenly things; but they are what carnal men set a high price and value upon, and risk the loss of their name, lives, and souls for. (p. 1)

The use of הָיוּ יָקָר וְנִמְצָא [we shall find all precious substance] carries the proposal of the sinners one step further and puts forward a third enticement, viz. that of the profit of crime or the prospect of immediate riches, before youth to join in crime (Spence-Jones 1890).

In verse 14, in the process of enticing, they admonish their peers to join them in their evil ways, as to be rich as them. According to Keil and Delitzsch (1878:1), 'To their invitation, bearing in itself its own condemnation, they add as a lure the splendid self-enriching treasures, which in equal and just fellowship with them, they may have the prospect of sharing'. Although Solomon specifies only the temptation to rob on the highway, he intends hereby to warn us against all their evils, which sinners entice one to (Henry 2006a:956).

Proverbs 1:15–16

Solomon warns the son about the destruction where the wrong path leads. Hebrew בָּנִי [my son] was repeated for the third time (v.15). The son is warned neither to follow the ways of evildoers nor join them in anything they do (v.15). In Hebrew מִנְתֵּיבָתָם [From their path] means that publicly and privately the son should not have dealings with sinners. The son is advised to avoid their companionship and dialogue. Without considering

what they are doing and shutting their eyes to the consequences, they decide in haste, not only to do evil to others but also to bring evil upon themselves (Benson 2018). They bring evil upon themselves because of the blood they shed (v.16). The son is also advised to make no trial of it, whether it will be pleasant or profitable walking in it; the experiment will be dangerous (Gill 2016). Shedding innocent blood is an inhuman practice, and a practice always followed by dreadful punishment, if not from man, certainly from God (Benson 2018).

Proverbs 1:17–19

Solomon emphasised that ultimately the destroyers will be destroyed. It is a foolish thing to spread net in the presence of the bird, so it is the situation of the violent people who lay in way for their victims—sooner or later, they will reap the fruit of their actions (v.17). No bird is caught in a net set in its presence; sinners themselves set the trap that devours them (Rylaarsdam 1976:445). The fowler, who spreads his net in the presence of the bird loses his labour, but these sinners are more foolish than the silly birds, for, although they are not ignorant of the mischief that these evil courses will bring upon them, they will not heed the warning (Benson 2018).

People who seek dishonest gain do that at their own peril (v.18). Their wickedness and violence are against their very self. Evildoers see that the judgement of God is imminent on evil people, yet they still rush into evil things for their own destruction. Young men are urged to avoid danger in the same way as the birds avoid net, but it seems that those greedy of gain eventually fail to avoid this danger. The greediness of men for gain pushes them into practices which will not suffer them or others to live out half their days (Henry 2006b). Evildoers know and find that by these practices, they expose themselves to the justice of the magistrate and to the vengeance of God, the consequences whereof they daily see in the destruction of their brethren in iniquity, yet they will boldly and madly run themselves into the same miseries (Poole 2020).

Proverbs 1:8–19 are precisely an encouragement to pay attention to parental guidance, warning about resisting bad company, a description of the evil ways of wicked, the consequences of evildoers and the destruction of evildoers.

At this juncture, the situation of peer pressure would be examined. Firstly, a sketch would be made about Tiv youths and crime and the implications of increment in Tiv youths engaging in crime will be examined. Secondly, a hermeneutical approach is adopted in the context of Tiv youths.

Tiv youths in the 21st century

The Tiv youths belong to the Tiv tribe in Benue State. It is the largest tribe in the state with a population of 4 513 000 people (Joshua 2021). The youths comprise the active population of Tiv people. Fortunately, the Tiv youths were known for hard work, tolerance, honesty and transparency. However, in contemporary times, things have fallen apart and the centre can no longer hold.

Tiv youths live on both sides of the Benue River in Nigeria (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). In the past, Tiv youths were known to engage in agriculture. The Tiv youths are mostly subsistence and commercial farmers whose main crops are yams, millet and sorghum, all of which are eaten as porridge or are made more palatable by their combination in sauces and stews. Although goats and chickens are plentiful, few cattle are kept because of the tsetse fly (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). However, in contemporary times, youths of Tiv descent detest farming but prefer quick money through any way deemed possible.

In the present Tiv society, the youths have engaged in so many activities that are inimical to the growth and development of Tiv people. According to Uja, the areas affected by the actions of criminal elements include Welfare Quarters, Yarkiyo, Wadata, Ankpa Quarters, NUJ and North-Bank all in Makurdi, Benue state capital (Uja 2020). These places have witnessed an increasing number of youth restiveness, cult-related killings, rituals using human parts and armed robbery.

This increase in criminal activities such as theft, armed robbery and cult-related activities is caused by the increasing number of youths joining evildoers. Firstly, there is a high rate of stealing and armed robbery. Most youths do not want to work hard; they want to make fast money. Unfortunately, those who engaged in theft and robbery live big and luxurious lives. They use this flamboyant lifestyle of theirs to entice their friends, peers and other youths. Consequently, in the city of Makurdi, young people who engage in evil practices are seen driving big cars, living in hotels and moving around with sex workers. Their peers are enticed into joining these evildoers in their actions.

The problem of crime, criminal behaviour or unlawful behaviour has always not only posed a big threat to the society and people but also raised great concerns (Kyegh 2017). In an empirical study carried out by Kyegh (2017), armed robbery and theft have the highest number of participating youths than other crimes.

The reasons why Tiv youths engage in the inimical activities cannot be underestimated. One is the quest for high self-esteem. Tiv youths of contemporary times do not want to be looked upon as failures. They want to make themselves, their family and friends proud of them (All Answers 2018). They dislike the so-called 'peasant state' of their parents. They do not want to engage in farming work (Tyodoo 2016:42) just as their parents. They see fast money as a way of becoming rich, without going through the turmoil of suffering of their parents (Iorkegh 2013:25). Another reason for youth engaging in evil doing is the quest to get more girls to have sex with, which led to increased prostitution amongst the Tiv people (Ahua 2019:71). Most Tiv youths go into robbery, stealing and theft in order to buy cars, rent hotels and move around with ladies, all because of bad company (Shaapera 2017). Tiv ladies, on the other hand, love young men with flashy cars who can buy

TABLE 1: The increasing cases of crime in Benue State.

Type of crime	2007	2008	2012	2013	2014	Total
Armed robbery	3	5	13	32	17	70
Robbery	5	16	4	32	16	73
Rape	3	5	5	16	1	30
Theft	14	26	12	55	48	155
Fraud/cheating	0	1	1	7	2	11
Kidnapping	3	0	6	3	3	13
Caught in possession of Indian Hemp	1	0	0	1	0	2
Breach of trust	1	0	1	0	0	2

Source: Benue State Police Command Headquarters, Makurdi (2015)

expensive clothes and food and can give them the money to take care of their family (Shaapera 2017:27). In order to meet this criteria, Tiv youths engage in many illegal activities to grow their fortune and generate quick wealth and satisfy their immoral pleasures, especially sexual pleasure. In addition, Tiv youths engaged in evil practices to meet up with societal expectations. Many Tiv youths are from poor families and the elites are not willing to help them (Shaapera 2013). In order to elevate the condition of their respective families, they become involved with crime to make money and help their family alleviate poverty. Furthermore, they become involved with crime to avoid intimidation and harassment from outsiders to their respective families. This is in a bid to meet up with the society's expectation.

The impact of the crime committed by Tiv youths in Benue State cannot be overemphasised. Firstly, it has increased cultism and cult-related deaths. Many cult groups now exist in Benue State because more youths seem to be joining (Duru 2020). Some are coerced to join in order to obtain the protection and wealth that their peers who belong to the cult groups are enjoying. In the long run, cult clashes are now the norm amongst Tiv youths. In Makurdi, for instance, Tiv youths who now engage in cult clashes smash the head of members of opposing cult groups with stones, hammers and rods (The Eagle 2020; The Nation 2018). Furthermore, there is exchange of fire by gun shots (Charles 2018), from which most of the time, innocent members of society are seriously affected. Secondly, there is the closure of businesses and educational centres, which would have provided employment for the teeming youth population (Benue Blog 2015). Businessmen have been forced to shut down their shops to avoid armed robbery. Most of the times, the robbery by youths is carried out in broad daylight (Duru 2021). This has forced companies to shut down and relocate to other states of the federation.

The hermeneutical function of the 'warning against evil companions'

The warning against joining bad gangs is biblical, which is important to be emulated by youths in contemporary times. The first discourse opens with the real parents exhorting their son: 'Listen ... to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching' (1:8). The word 'instruction' is the same one that was translated as 'discipline' in the purpose statement (1:2). It is associated with the father, which

shows that parents are to discipline their children to follow the right way. Most fathers of Tiv descent do not have time to advise or to discipline their children. They spend most of their time in their working place and bear parlour. This is the reason that Tiv youths are easily influenced by their peers. Furthermore, in verse 8b, the word 'teaching', which is a translation of the Hebrew word for 'law' is associated with the mother. The mention of both parents here (and again in 6:20) is a tribute to the significant role played by mothers in the Hebrew family, a role that was unusual in the cultures of the ancient Near East (Habtu 2006:775). Tiv mothers have been alleged to have encouraged their children to go and generate money in whatever way. This is the reason that most Tiv girls join their peers to engage in prostitution to generate fast wealth and to make their family proud of them. Also, Tiv youths of the masculine gender bring in much money and ride exotic cars without their parents questioning their source of wealth.

Parents are supposed to teach their children not to join bad gangs and unions. Good parents teach their children not to engage in immoral actions. Tiv youths get involved with crime because of their inability to be morally upright and develop the strength to resist the evildoers who try to entice them. Youths have peers who are indulging in stealing, armed robbery, fraud (financial and Yahoo boys), kidnapping for ransom and assassination.

Most of the evildoers usually entice their peers with flamboyant lifestyles and possessions. Evildoers apply peer pressure (vv.11–14). This type of peer pressure justifies the comment that 'folly is not just an individual matter but a social one as well' (Habtu 2006:776). Several criminal gangs and commercial sex worker gangs exist in Tiv land. The members of these gangs are mostly youths. These youths (males) usually recruit their peers, promising them a better future for themselves and their families. The youths (females) obtain more girls, entice them with lofty gifts and force them to engage in sex work for money. These women are otherwise known as *Ashawo* amongst the Tiv people.

In the pericope (v.19), the consequence for following or joining bad company is death. The father and mother tell the child the final destiny of evildoers. Although evildoers lie in wait for others blood (v.11), indirectly, they lie in wait for their own blood (v.18). Evildoers will pay for their crimes. The pit they dig, they themselves will fall into. This is the end of all ill-gotten gain and the lives of evildoers.

Christian youth development

The youth comprise the active population of any community. The behaviours and contributions go a long way to determine the level of peace and development that affects a particular place. Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence (United Nations 2021). Youth development is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth

to develop social, ethical, emotional, physical and cognitive competencies (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition 2010).

Christian youth development refers to the provision of support, encouragement and empowerment of Christian youths through youth programmes. It is through church youth development that youths are made to know and convinced of what to do and why to do it and the need for youths to make choices based on biblical principles rather than on someone else's code of conduct for them (Church Growth 2021).

On the other hand, the youths are expected to show commitment and have positive and responsible models of emulation by the younger ones (Konopka Institute 2000:3–4). They should seek spiritual growth, live out a life of service in the church, community and the world and live a moral Christian life. Mahoney (2019) added that God-centred heart, the servant heart and a sense of responsibility and authority are features that must be included in homilies on Christian youth development.

The church is supposed to provide positive and conducive circumstances that provide overwhelming support for development. Churches, in the bid to receive the needed youth development strategies, resort to the involvement of youths in policies. Young people are capable of doing great things, but sometimes, they are not given the opportunity to grow and develop. This will enable these youths to emerge as better leaders tomorrow (Schoenherr 2014). This is a very useful way in Christian youth mentoring and development.

The church as the reform stage for Tiv youths

Churches have looked for ways to attract their youth (Ji & Tameifuna 2011:306). It seems that less attention is being given to the care, correction and discipline of youths. Terdoo (2021:oral interview) revealed that the failure of the parenting and church on the given aspects in Tiv land has led to an unprecedented increase in crimes. Most youths engage in crimes because of peer pressure. Churches in Tiv land usually organise church programmes for the youths where homilies on youth and nation building are taught. Unfortunately, homilies that centre on need for youth to avoid youthful pressure is lacking (Akase 2021:oral interview).

The church has also been criticised for her admiration for well-to-do youths. Youths see how the church praises their peers who give donations for church-building projects (Ada 2021:oral interview). Some of these youths are poised to do whatever it takes to generate fast money so as to contribute during church donations and receive the needed praise. This has made the number of evildoers amongst the youths to soar high (Egbe 2021:oral interview).

Proverbs 1:8–19 provide a structural and systemic method for dealing with peer pressure and the role of the church in this regard.

More programmes and seminars need to be organised for youths. In these programmes, youths should be told the consequences of engaging in wrongdoing and following evildoers. Also, teaching young people in the church that to grow in their relationship with the Lord prepares them to serve Christ (Abraham 2016). This should be the epicentre of the theology of the church for Tiv youths in Benue State.

It is important that the church pay closer attention to youths. This will equip them not to get easily enticed by evildoers. The contemporary Tiv youths are easily lured by evildoers, which increases the need of the church to play an instrumental role in sensitising the youths on the need to shun vices and actions inimical to their growth and that of the society. Churches in Tiv land need to engage the youths more in physical and spiritual activities (Terhumba 2021:oral interview). This will help them to monitor the activities of most of the youths and correct them wherever necessary. Nel (2003) argued that the isolation of young people from the larger church is one of the greatest problems being faced by churches today. Much emphasis needs to be given to the youth ministry of the church (Goreham 2004). Older church members should be coming as guest speakers in youth programmes. They will be teaching the youths of their experiences and how they overcame them.

It is paramount to state that the church has its prime responsibility to educate parents on the need to carry out their God's given role in line with themes in Proverbs 1:8–19. Low parental engagement (Chifeche & Dreyer 2019) affects the growth of morality and increases the level of peer influence. Parents should be encouraged on the need to increase parental engagement with their children (sons and daughters).

Proverbs 1:8–19: Implications for actions

Parents and youths in Tiv land have roles to play in their quest to curb the increase in crime and crime level in Benue State. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

1. Parents should know that there are moments to guide youths. If it is missed, then the society and the child are in trouble. Parents should instruct, discipline shout and stop their children from engaging in acts that lead to death. If the child listens, he will live, but if not, then the child will bear the consequences of his actions.
2. Tiv youths should never allow themselves to be used by evildoers. They should not join hands with criminals in executing their plans. They should avoid robbery gangs and diabolic activities for the purpose of making fast money.

3. Tiv youths should also return to the traditional society value of hardwork. They should see dignity in hardwork rather than the quest for quick wealth without much stress. Tiv youths should avoid chasing sinful gain, which is a whirlpool to be avoided.
4. Youths who engaged in immoral ways of money making have met their untimely deaths. Tiv youths should not allow themselves to die just like their contemporaries who followed the immoral way. Tiv youths should know that the end of evil is destruction. They should not allow themselves to be enticed by the fast wealth of criminals who are their peers. They should know that the evil that people perpetrate on others will destroy their own lives.

Conclusion

The important task of parents is to teach their children how to behave under parental authority. This affects the child's behaviour positively when he grows up. On the part of the youths, it is in their own interest to be considerate and obey their parents' instruction by not allowing themselves to be included in evil. In the short- and long-run, this will help them to achieve spiritual and physical successes and growth. The periscope calls on Tiv youths to apply God's truth to their lives, which is wisdom. This is the only sure recipe for good success for youths in Tiv communities.

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Both F.C.U. and S.E. contributed equally to this work.

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