

Research

Christian Heritage at Risk: A Theological Investigation of Youth Morality In Jos-South Local Government of Plateau State

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Abstract: This study investigates the growing problem of moral decline among young people in Jos-South Local Government Area, evidenced by rising involvement in substance abuse, internet fraud, gambling, and sexual immorality, alongside declining church participation and weakening commitment to Christian values. The research identifies a widening gap between the region's Christian heritage and contemporary youth practices, influenced by peer pressure, digital culture, and socio-economic challenges. The study aims to examine youth moral formation within a Christian theological framework and to propose contextually relevant strategies for restoring moral integrity. Guided by Richard Osmer's practical theological model, the research applies his four tasks, descriptive–empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic, as an analytical framework. Methodologically, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was employed to collect data from selected participants in Jos-South. The data were analysed thematically to identify patterns, underlying causes, and institutional influences on youth behaviour. Findings reveal that moral decline is driven by weak parental supervision, inadequate moral instruction, economic hardship, and the pervasive influence of globalisation and digital media. Normatively, the study highlights the doctrines of God and Soteriology as central to shaping ethical behaviour, with the family and church as primary agents of moral transmission. Pragmatically, the study recommends structured, Scripture-based discipleship programs, capacity-building for church leaders, family-centred moral formation, restorative disciplinary approaches, youth engagement initiatives, and the strategic use of digital media for moral guidance. The study concludes that a holistic, integrated approach is essential for restoring moral integrity and sustaining Christian discipleship among young people in Jos-South.

Keywords: Christian discipleship, Jos-South, practical theology, Soteriology, Youth moral formation.

Introduction

There appears to be a theological crisis in some contemporary African Christian communities. Some communities that responded to the gospel early, such as Gyel, Vwang, Du, Zawan, and Kuru, embraced Christianity for its transformative power, rejected Islam and African traditional religion, but are now experiencing an alarming moral shift among the younger generation. These geographical locations are well known for missionary enterprise, the spread of churches, and numerous missionary schools that have shaped the social life of the people by inculcating Christian values; yet, they seem to portray a disconnect from the Christian heritage. A few years ago (2000-2013), the researcher was part of the COCIN youth fellowship, which demonstrated a passion for knowing God and for fellowshiping with other fellowships within the same and different denominations. Music concerts, vigils, Bible study, sword drill, and outreach and evangelism attracted many young people to God, and these were major annual programmes that provided an avenue for sharing our faith with the unreached. However, these life-transforming programmes appear indifferent.

Though Africa may be experiencing numerical growth in Christianity, there is a crucial and pressing pastoral and theological challenge of character formation and the transmission of moral values from one generation to another. Greg Ogden observes that the current gap between the existing reality and the desired destination is key. John Stott describes the massive Church growth today as “growth without depth.” It implies that the Church may have thrown its weight into reaching the unreached with the gospel; however, the converted souls have not been nurtured adequately to have their lives transformed into becoming like Christ. Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul corroborates that “being religious is synonymous with being a Nigerian,” religious zeal is highly exemplified, and churches are continually increasing; ironically, the spirituality of Christians is low or shallow. In his lamentation for this situation, Bjork declares that the command to “Go and make,” churches have made it “come and watch.” Michael Pam has declared emphatically that “the Church is saddled with the responsibility for transforming the world.” Reacting to Pam, it implies a misplacement of priority of the Great Commission mandate in the churches. Hull re-echoed that some contemporary churches are “departing from the gospel that calls on all believers to be disciples and follow Christ in obedience...and when we lose discipleship, we also lose vibrant Christianity.” Ronald Walborn and Frank Chan reiterated the problem by observing that:

There is a crisis in Christianity today. Many churches and denominations are struggling to reach their financial goals and fund their visions. However, the crisis we face is not primarily a struggle of stewardship. It is a crisis of discipleship; the central issue is the totality of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the twenty-first century. The church has tragically and unknowingly reduced following Jesus to a series of creeds to believe and a group of prayers to be prayed. Our call to become citizens of the Kingdom of God has made few demands on previous worldly allegiances. We have produced disciples who do not mind taking up their cross, so long as it is not too heavy, fits into their schedule, and does not conflict with their lifestyle.

The two scholars highlighted a salient issue, discipleship, which has caused a crisis in Christianity because it is misunderstood, neglected, not emphasised, or not prioritised. As such, the disciples are not of high quality, since they are not willing to have their wills clash with one another. The Jos-South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, denotes a convincing case of this concern. Historically, Gyel, among other districts, is maintained as one of the early districts that were receptive to the gospel and resisted Islamic expansion. Gyel, Kuru, Vom, Du, and Zawan evolved into a robust Christian identity over the years. Churches turned into an agency for the development of morals, the impact of knowledge, and community leadership. Hitherto, modern remarks expose an emerging youth culture branded by internet fraud (popularly known as “Yahoo activities”), fights, pornography, keeping late nights, sexual immorality, drunkenness, abortion, and violent conflicts among young men. In many cases, disputes among the young people have escalated into fatal stabbings, raising serious concerns among parents, church leaders, and community elders. For instance, a young, vibrant, and promising former soldier was stabbed with a knife and killed because he made peace between two fighters. Likewise, another son of a pastor was also attacked with a knife and died.

These value changes prompt a theological question: Jos is known as a Christian state; some Christian groups have their headquarters in Jos, such as COCIN, ECWA, and some Pentecostal churches and ministries. How, then, is this Christian community birthing a generation of young people seemingly detached from Christianity? This is in line with a biblical account that a generation may arise that “does not know the Lord or the work he has done.”

This research, therefore, assesses the moral weakening of young people in Jos-South Local Government Area using a theological and qualitative lens. By employing

field interviews, theological analysis, and African Christian scholarship, the research finds the fundamental causes of the crisis and offers constructive pastoral answers.

Theoretical Framework

This research is rooted in Practical Theology and Youth Discipleship Theory. The rationale for practical theology is to investigate how Christian faith is understood, interpreted, practised, and lived in the Jos-South social context. Richard Osmer re-echoes that practical theology comprises four key tasks: first, a descriptive-empirical task, which asks, what is happening? Second is an interpretive task, which asks why it is happening. Third is the normative task, which asks, what should be happening? And fourth is a pragmatic task, that is, how should we respond? The study is designed around this framework, particularly these four aspects, to critically analyse the culture of young people in the Jos-South Local Government Area.

It also uses theories of Christian discipleship and spiritual formation. Dallas Willard, among other African scholars, highlights the role of purposeful formation within families and churches. Kwame Bediako and John Mbiti aver that Christian faith, rooted in the life of a community, influences moral identity. This thought prioritises Christian teachings as central and indispensable in everyday life for profound transformation. This implies that the discipleship of young people must extend beyond weekly Sunday worship attendance to an intentional and sustained reorientation and formation of values, practices, and acceptable socio-religious habits that align with Christian precepts.

Qualitative Research Design

The research design is a qualitative method rooted in practical theology. This befits this kind of study because of its flexibility to examine complex social realities of youth modern culture through individual and group accounts, experiences, and contextual observations. The research was conducted in Gyel, Kuru, Vwang, Du, and Zawan, districts of Jos-South Local Government Council Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. These communities were once known for a robust Christian presence and vibrant young people following Christ. However, present-day social changes are ushering in new cultural influences that are impacting the moral life of youth.

The sampling technique is purposive; it selects participants who are familiar with the culture of the youth in the communities. The participants comprise nine youth, aged fifteen to thirty, six church leaders, and six parents. The participants were chosen on the grounds of their availability and willingness to share their knowledge and experiences of

youth behaviours and community changes. The data collection instrument is an in-depth interview and a semi-structured interview, which permits respondents to give an account of their knowledge and experiences in their own words while still addressing the central problem of the study.

To align the semi-structured interview questions with Richard Osmer's Practical Theology framework, the questions should correspond to the four tasks of Practical Theology: Descriptive-Empirical Task, which asks what is going on; the interpretive task, which asks why it is going on; the normative task, which asks what ought to be going on; and the pragmatic task, which asks how we should respond. Below is a set of twelve (12) interviews. Semi-Structured Interview Questions Aligned with Osmer's Practical Theology Framework.

1. Descriptive-Empirical Task (What is happening?)

1.1 How would you describe the current behaviour and moral lifestyle of young people in your community today?

1.2 What kinds of social activities do youths commonly engage in during their free time?

1.3 How has youth participation in church activities changed over the past decade in this community?

2. Interpretive Task (Why is it happening?)

2.1 What social, cultural, or economic factors do you think are contributing to the moral challenges among youths in Jos South?

2.2 How do peer groups and friendships influence the attitudes and behaviour of young people in this community?

2.3 In what ways have modern influences such as social media, internet culture, or global trends shaped the values and lifestyles of youths here?

3. Normative Task (What ought to be happening?)

3.1 According to Christian teachings, what kind of moral character should young people demonstrate in their daily lives?

3.2 What responsibilities should families have in transmitting Christian values and moral discipline to their children?

3.3 What role should the church play in nurturing spiritual maturity and discipleship among young people?

4. Pragmatic Task (How should we respond?)

4.1 What practical steps can churches take to strengthen discipleship and moral formation among youths?

4.2 How can parents and community leaders work together to guide young people toward responsible and godly living?

4.3 What programmes, initiatives, or strategies do you think would help restore strong Christian values among the youth in this community?

Interviews: Qualitative Data Presentation and Analysis

1. DESCRIPTIVE-EMPIRICAL TASK: What is Happening?

In this section, qualitative data describe the current moral realities among youths in Jos-South LGA. Respondents consistently described a noticeable moral shift characterised by declining traditional values, new social practices, and changing youth lifestyles.

1.1 Perceived Behaviour and Moral Lifestyle of Youths

Participants described contemporary youth behaviour as representing a significant departure from both African traditional moral values and Christian ethical standards. One respondent noted that respect for elders, once a defining feature of African communal life, appears to be gradually disappearing. Greetings, which traditionally symbolised humility and respect, are increasingly treated as a mere social obligation, often performed without the customary expressions of honour. Several interviewees also observed a growing sense of autonomy among youths, sometimes expressed through resistance to parental authority. According to respondents, some young people frequently leave home without permission, keep late nights, and return at their convenience despite living under their parents' roofs.

Another frequently mentioned concern was sexual immorality. Interviewees suggested that many young people, including those active in church communities, struggle with sexual purity. Church weddings, in some cases, were described as merely formalising relationships that had already become sexually active before marriage. Some respondents linked this trend to the emerging "hook-up culture," which they believe has spread through social media influences from southern Nigeria. One participant recounted an encounter illustrating the normalisation of transactional sexual relationships: "A young woman once stopped me on the road requesting a lift, but shortly afterwards asked to be taken to a hotel for sexual relations in exchange for two thousand naira."

Drug use was also widely reported as a growing problem among youths. Participants described creative methods used to conceal drug consumption, including

mixing multiple substances into soft drinks such as Coca-Cola to avoid detection. Others reportedly relocate to isolated areas or jungles to consume drugs away from public scrutiny. Respondents also expressed concern about drug-induced violence, including cases of assault, rape, and even homicide. In addition, sports betting has become a widespread pastime among youths. Some youths reportedly describe betting as a form of youth empowerment, despite the financial risks associated with gambling.

Finally, interviewees highlighted the rise of internet fraud (“Yahoo Yahoo”), a clandestine activity involving online deception and financial scams. Respondents noted that some teenagers involved in these activities have begun acquiring substantial wealth and property, creating the perception that fraudulent activities can lead to rapid economic success.

Coding Table (Q1.1)

Code	Theme	Description	Example Evidence
D1	Decline of traditional respect	Weakening of cultural norms, such as greeting elders	“Respect is disappearing among young people.”
D2	Youth autonomy and rebellion	Resistance to parental authority and discipline	“They leave home at will and return late at night.”
D3	Sexual immorality	Premarital sex, transactional sex, and hook-up culture	“Church marriages now sanctify relationships already sexually active.”
D4	Drug abuse	Consumption of narcotics and substance mixtures	“Mixing drugs in Coca-Cola to avoid detection.”
D5	Drug-related violence	Criminal behaviour under drug influence	“Some have raped grandmothers or killed under drug influence.”
D6	Gambling culture	Increasing participation in sports betting	“Betting is seen as youth empowerment.”
D7	Internet fraud	Youth involvement in online scams	“Teenagers acquiring wealth through Yahoo-Yahoo.”

1.2 Social Activities During Youths' Free Time

Interview participants indicated that evenings, particularly Sundays, represent the primary leisure period for many youths. During these times, young people frequently gather at football viewing centres to watch matches. Respondents further observed that Sunday evenings have increasingly become associated with romantic and sexual encounters. Young people often arrange meetings with partners during these periods, while individuals involved in prostitution reportedly position themselves in social spots to attract clients. Other commonly mentioned gathering locations included boyfriends' residences, entertainment joints, secluded areas (referred to as “jungles”), and football fields. Streets

have also become informal social meeting points, particularly after dark. Participants noted that street lighting has unintentionally facilitated late-night social interactions, including romantic encounters.

Coding Table (Q1.2)

Code	Theme	Description	Evidence
A1	Football viewing culture	Youth gatherings at match viewing centres	“Watching football matches at viewing centres.”
A2	Romantic/sexual meetings	Organised evening meetings between partners	“Sunday evenings reserved for flirting.”
A3	Prostitution networks	Sex workers seeking clients in public spaces	“Those making money from prostitution wait at joints.”
A4	Youth gathering spaces	Informal meeting locations	“Joints, jungles, football fields.”
A5	Night street culture	Streets are used as social hubs at night	“Street lights support late-night interactions.”

1.3 Changes in Youth Participation in Church Activities

Respondents indicated a noticeable decline in youth participation in church activities over the past decade. Many interviewees attributed this change to competing lifestyles that reduce interest in spiritual commitments. Historically, youths were described as energetic participants in church programmes, including youth concerts, drama festivals, and rural evangelistic missions. These activities once served as key avenues for spiritual formation and community engagement. However, respondents suggested that such enthusiasm has diminished significantly. Even youths who remain within the church community often demonstrate limited involvement in spiritual programmes, choosing instead to prioritise community associations or social engagements outside the church.

Participants specifically noted declining attendance at Bible study sessions, mid-week services, and youth fellowship meetings. Some interviewees emphasised that the central issue is not merely church attendance but the deeper question of spiritual union with Christ and commitment to sanctified living. According to respondents, many youths have experienced spiritual disengagement or fallout.

Coding Table (Q1.3)

Code	Theme	Description
C1	Declining church attendance	Reduced youth presence in church activities
C2	Loss of spiritual passion	Decline in commitment to Christian spirituality
C3	Decline of youth ministries	Reduced participation in concerts, drama, and missions
C4	Passive church membership	Youth attending but not actively participating
C5	Spiritual disengagement	Weak relationship with Christ and discipleship

2. INTERPRETIVE TASK: Why Is It Happening?

This section interprets social, cultural, and economic factors shaping youth morality.

2.1 Social, Cultural, and Economic Factors

Participants identified several structural factors contributing to youth moral challenges. One frequently mentioned factor was the desire for social recognition and belonging. Many youths reportedly seek validation through behaviours that elevate their perceived social status. Respondents also emphasised the powerful influence of social media, which exposes young people to global lifestyles characterised by luxury consumption, sexual freedom, and rapid wealth acquisition. The "quick money syndrome" was cited as another significant factor motivating involvement in fraud, gambling, and transactional relationships. Family dynamics also emerged as a key concern. Several respondents noted that economic hardship forces many parents to spend long hours working, leaving limited time for supervision and moral guidance. Culturally, participants argued that these emerging behaviours conflict with traditional African values, which historically emphasised respect, discipline, and sexual restraint. Some respondents attributed the erosion of these values to the increasing influence of Western cultural patterns.

Another factor identified was the proliferation of betting companies, such as Bet9ja and Sporty Bet, which have normalised gambling among youths. Finally, youth unemployment was highlighted as a contributing factor. Educated but jobless young people often experience frustration, which may push them towards alternative means of economic survival.

Coding Table (Q2.1)

Code	Theme	Description
I1	Desire for social relevance	Youth seeking recognition and status
I2	Social media influence	Exposure to global lifestyles
I3	Quick money culture	Desire for rapid financial success
I4	Weak family supervision	Reduced parental guidance
I5	Cultural erosion	Decline of African traditional values
I6	Gambling infrastructure	Influence of betting companies
I7	Youth unemployment	Economic frustration and survival strategies

2.2 Influence of Peer Groups

Respondents emphasised the powerful role of peer networks in shaping youth behaviour within Jos-South. Many young people reportedly adopt behaviours observed

among their friends in order to maintain social acceptance and group identity. As a result, activities such as drug use, internet fraud, and prostitution are sometimes learned through peer interaction. Interviewees also indicated that disrespect toward elders can spread through peer influence, as group members normalise behaviours previously considered unacceptable. Despite these influences, participants acknowledged that individual agency remains important, as each young person ultimately decides whether or not to adopt behaviours promoted within peer networks.

Coding Table (Q2.2)

Code	Theme	Description
P1	Peer socialization	Learning behaviours from friends
P2	Group conformity	Pressure to fit into peer expectations
P3	Normalisation of deviance	Immoral behaviours seen as acceptable
P4	Collective influence	Peer groups shaping youth culture
P5	Individual moral agency	Personal responsibility within peer influence

2.3 Influence of Social Media and Global Culture

Respondents acknowledged that social media provides important developmental benefits, including access to information, communication platforms, and educational resources. However, interviewees also expressed concerns regarding exposure to harmful online content, particularly pornography, which some believe stimulates unhealthy sexual desires among youths. Participants further reported that some online platforms disseminate content that challenges Christian beliefs, thereby influencing young people to question or abandon their faith. Additionally, social media has facilitated new forms of risk, including online scams and recruitment into questionable social networks. Respondents also discussed the broader impact of globalisation, which introduces cultural values that sometimes conflict with traditional African norms of communal living, respect for elders, and sexual discipline. While globalisation has brought technological and social benefits, interviewees suggested that uncritical adoption of Western cultural values may weaken both African traditional ethics and Christian moral teachings.

Coding Table (Q2.3)

Code	Theme	Description
G1	Positive digital resources	Information and communication benefits
G2	Pornographic exposure	Online sexual content influencing behaviour
G3	Religious skepticism online	Content challenging Christian beliefs
G4	Online risk networks	Scams and harmful digital communities
G5	Global cultural influence	Western lifestyle influencing youth values
G6	Cultural value conflict	Tension between globalisation and African ethics

3. Normative Task (What Ought to Be Happening?)

This section articulates the theological and ethical ideals that should guide youth moral formation, drawing on core Christian doctrines and institutional responsibilities as reflected in the interview data.

3.1 Expected Moral Character of Young People

The findings indicate that Christian moral formation among young people is normatively grounded in the doctrinal frameworks of the Doctrine of God and Soteriology. The Doctrine of God establishes God as the supreme moral referent, whose attributes-holiness, righteousness, and justice-constitute the ultimate standard for human conduct. The ontological purity of God, being entirely devoid of evil, positions the divine character as the normative template for moral imitation (Interview). Moreover, the theological affirmation of the imago Dei underscores that human beings are inherently constituted to reflect divine attributes. Consequently, young people are called to embody virtues such as holiness, integrity, justice, and truthfulness in both disposition and action. This theological anthropology fosters reverence for God, humility in interpersonal relations, and a heightened sense of moral accountability, including ethical responsibility in areas such as sexuality and personal conduct in anticipation of divine judgment (Interview).

Soteriologically, salvation is construed not merely as forensic justification but as transformative renewal. It initiates regeneration and the reconstitution of moral identity, mediated through the agency of the Holy Spirit. This transformation engenders an internal moral consciousness that orients the believer towards righteous living. Such moral renewal is sustained through continual engagement with Scripture, which functions as both a moral guide and a corrective lens against sinful behaviours (Interview). The doctrine of sanctification further reinforces this process by framing moral development as progressive and dynamic. Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, believers cultivate virtues such as love, self-control, patience, and perseverance. The integration of these doctrinal strands provides a comprehensive normative framework for youth moral formation, orienting them towards lives characterised by holiness, responsibility, and faithful obedience.

Coding Table (Q3.1)

Code	Theme	Description
TG1: Doctrine of God	Theological Foundation	God as the ultimate moral standard
TG2: Imago Dei	Theological Foundation	Humans reflect God's character
MC1: Holiness Righteousness	& Moral Attributes	Expected virtues in youth

Code	Theme	Description
MC2: Moral Accountability	Moral Attributes	Awareness of divine judgment
ST1: Regeneration	Salvation Transformation	& New moral identity
ST2: Holy Spirit Agency	Salvation Transformation	& Moral empowerment
SF1: Ongoing Moral Growth	Sanctification	Continuous transformation
SF2: Virtue Formation	Sanctification	Development of the fruits of the Spirit
EO1: Sexual Purity	Ethical Outcomes	Moral discipline in sexuality
EO2: Obedient Living	Ethical Outcomes	Alignment with God's will

3.2 Role of the Family in Moral Formation

The data underscore the family, particularly parents, as the primary locus of moral formation. Parents function as custodians of Christian values and are expected to embody and transmit these values through both instruction and lived example. Observational learning emerges as a critical mechanism, with children internalising moral norms through parental behaviour (Interview). Intentionality in moral instruction is identified as indispensable. Early childhood is viewed as a formative stage for character development, aligning with the psychological construct of *tabula rasa*, which posits that children possess a high degree of receptivity to moral and spiritual imprinting during early developmental phases (Interview).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of moral transmission is contingent upon parental competence and commitment. Parents who possess a robust understanding of Christian values and intentionally inculcate them foster intergenerational continuity of moral and spiritual formation. This highlights the family as both a pedagogical and formative institution within the broader moral ecosystem.

Coding Table (Q3.2)

Code	Theme	Description
FR1: Parental Custodianship	Family Responsibility	Parents as moral guides
FR2: Role Modelling	Family Responsibility	Learning through observation
EF1: Early Childhood Training	Early Formation	Moral teaching from a young age
EF2: Tabula Rasa Concept	Early Formation	Child's receptivity to formation
IN1: Deliberate Teaching	Intentionality	Conscious value transmission
GI1: Value Continuity	Generational Impact	Passing values across generations

3.3 Role of the Church in Youth Moral Formation

The church is conceptualised as a central ecclesial institution responsible for fostering spiritual maturity and moral discipleship among young people. As the body of Christ, it is tasked with guiding believers toward a deeper knowledge of Christ and conformity to His ethical teachings (Interview). A critical dimension of this role is effective doctrinal instruction. The church must communicate theological truths in a manner that is both contextually relevant and cognitively accessible to young people. Core doctrines, including God, salvation, sanctification, and eschatology, should be systematically taught to cultivate theological literacy and moral discernment (Interview).

The primacy of Scripture is emphasised as the medium through which divine transformative power is mediated. Consequently, the church must prioritise sound biblical teaching. Equally important is the role of leadership; church leaders are expected to embody the doctrines they teach, thereby bridging the gap between theological abstraction and lived reality (Interview). Additionally, structured discipleship programmes are essential for equipping young people with the spiritual disciplines and moral competencies necessary for ethical living. Eschatological teaching, particularly concerning eternal consequences, serves as a motivational framework, reinforcing moral commitment and spiritual vigilance.

Coding Table (Q3.3)

Code	Theme	Description
ER1: Spiritual Guidance	Ecclesial Role	Leading youth in Christ
ER2: Doctrinal Instruction	Ecclesial Role	Teaching core doctrines
TA1: Contextual Communication	Teaching Approach	Use of accessible language
TA2: Biblical Centrality	Teaching Approach	Emphasis on Scripture
LD1: Exemplary Leadership	Leadership	Leaders model values
DS1: Structured Programs	Discipleship	Organised training systems
DS2: Spiritual Empowerment	Discipleship	Equipping for moral living
ES1: Eternal Consequences	Eschatology	Awareness of judgment

The normative framework that emerges is a tripartite model of moral formation: theological, family, and ecclesial. The first is rooted in the Doctrine of God and Soteriology, which leads to moral ontology and identity. While the family institution ensures early-stage moral socialisation and value transmission, the ecclesial community sustains doctrinal formation and lifelong discipleship. Together, these dimensions constitute an integrated theological ecology for shaping morally responsible and spiritually grounded young Christians.

4. Pragmatic Task (How Should We Respond?)

This section advances contextually grounded pastoral strategies for addressing youth moral decline, translating theological ideals into actionable interventions.

4.1 Strengthening Church-Based Discipleship

The data advocate for a paradigm shift toward intentional and structured discipleship systems within the church. Central to this is the implementation of continuous training and retraining initiatives designed to enhance the spiritual capacity of young people. These programmes must be systematic, context-sensitive, and firmly rooted in biblical teaching (Interview). Institutional revitalisation is also imperative. Existing structures, such as Sunday School and Youth Fellowship, require reconfiguration to deliver programmes that are both engaging and transformative. This includes prioritising the recruitment of qualified, spiritually mature instructors capable of facilitating interactive and impactful learning experiences (Interview). Furthermore, the strategic placement of morally credible and well-trained pastoral leaders within youth ministries is essential. Such leadership provides not only doctrinal guidance but also moral accountability and mentorship, thereby fostering holistic development among young people.

Coding Table (Q4.1)

Code	Theme	Description
DS3: Training & Retraining	Discipleship Structure	Continuous spiritual development
DS4: Structured Discipleship	Discipleship Structure	Systematic formation processes
CR1: Program Reorganisation	Church Revitalization	Reform of youth structures
CR2: Engaging Content	Church Revitalization	Transformative program design
TQ1: Qualified Teachers	Teaching Quality	Competent instructors
TQ2: Interactive Learning	Teaching Quality	Participatory pedagogy
MT1: One-on-One Mentoring	Mentorship	Personalised guidance
LD2: Pastoral Oversight	Leadership	Assigned youth leadership
LD3: Integrity-Based Leadership	Leadership	Moral credibility

4.2 Family-Community Collaboration

The findings emphasise the necessity of collaborative moral governance involving parents and community leaders. Leadership selection should be predicated on demonstrable moral integrity and commitment to Christian values, ensuring credibility in moral enforcement (Interview). Disciplinary frameworks should adopt a restorative orientation, prioritising rehabilitation and moral recovery over punitive measures. Parental support is critical in legitimising and reinforcing such disciplinary systems (Interview). Moreover, the establishment of structured forums for engagement enables stakeholders to collectively

address pressing social challenges, including drug abuse and internet fraud. Such collaborative mechanisms foster shared responsibility and coordinated intervention.

Coding Table (Q3.2)

Code	Theme	Description
LS1: Character-Based Leadership	Leadership Selection	Integrity-driven leadership
DP1: Restorative Discipline	Discipline	Focus on rehabilitation
DP2: Parental Support	Discipline	Reinforcement by parents
CL1: Parent–Leader Partnership	Collaboration	Joint responsibility
CL2: Community Forums	Collaboration	Engagement platforms
SI1: Drug Abuse Prevention	Social Intervention	Addressing substance abuse
SI2: Anti-Social Vices	Social Intervention	Combating immoral practices

4.3 Programmatic and Strategic Interventions

The data further propose the implementation of holistic discipleship ecosystems that integrate biblical principles into all dimensions of life. Sustained engagement with Scripture is identified as foundational to moral formation (Interview). Mentorship and accountability structures are indispensable, requiring the intentional pairing of spiritually mature believers with younger Christians. Additionally, small group systems provide relational contexts for teaching, follow-up, and peer accountability (Interview). The reintroduction of participatory and diverse church programmes, such as evangelistic initiatives, drama ministries, and Bible competitions, serves to engage youth constructively while reinforcing Christian values and identity.

Coding Table (Q3.3)

Code	Theme	Description
DS5: Holistic Discipleship	Discipleship Programs	Integrative formation
DS6: Word-Centred Living	Discipleship Programs	Scripture as foundation
MA1: Spiritual Mentorship	Mentorship & Accountability	Guidance by mature believers
MA2: Accountability Structures	Mentorship & Accountability	Monitoring moral growth
SG1: Cell Groups	Small Groups	Interactive learning spaces
SG2: Peer Accountability	Small Groups	Mutual support
YE1: Worship Programs	Youth Engagement	Spiritual gatherings
YE2: Evangelism Activities	Youth Engagement	Outreach involvement
YE3: Creative Ministries	Youth Engagement	Arts-based engagement
YE4: Bible Competitions	Youth Engagement	Scripture-based activities

The pragmatic framework reflects a multi-tiered intervention model that includes Ecclesial Reform, that is, structured discipleship and leadership development;

family-community synergy, that is, collaborative moral regulation; and youth engagement systems, that is, mentorship, small groups, and participatory programmes. Collectively, these strategies constitute a contextually responsive pastoral paradigm aimed at restoring moral integrity and sustaining Christian identity among young people.

From Moral Drift to Transformative Discipleship:

An Osmerian Analysis of Youth Moral Formation in Jos-South

The descriptive-empirical task reveals a concerning shift in the moral landscape of young people in Jos-South. Interview data indicate increasing involvement in behaviours such as substance abuse, internet fraud, gambling, and sexual immorality. These patterns are accompanied by declining participation in church activities and weakening commitment to Christian values. Youth social life appears increasingly shaped by peer influence, digital culture, and economic pressures, creating an environment where moral boundaries are blurred. This empirical reality points to a widening gap between inherited Christian heritage and contemporary youth practices, confirming prior research on the vulnerability of African youth to global cultural influences.

The interpretive task probes the underlying causes of this moral decline and identifies a complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, and theological factors. Weak parental supervision, inadequate moral instruction, and the erosion of traditional communal values contribute significantly to the problem. Additionally, poverty and unemployment push many young people toward survival-driven behaviours such as internet fraud and gambling. The church, while still present, is often perceived as less engaging or insufficiently responsive to the existential struggles of youth. Furthermore, globalisation and digital media have introduced alternative value systems that compete with and often undermine Christian ethical norms.

In response to these realities, the normative task draws on Christian theology to articulate what ought to be happening in the moral formation of young people. Central to this vision are the doctrines of God and soteriology, which together provide a foundation for ethical living. The Doctrine of God presents divine holiness, righteousness, and justice as the ultimate moral standard (Exod. 15:11; Ps. 89:14). The concept of humanity created in God's image calls young people to reflect these attributes in their daily lives (Gen. 1:26-27). Soteriology emphasises transformation through salvation, regeneration, and the ongoing process of sanctification, enabled by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 12:2).

These theological principles establish a moral framework that prioritises holiness, accountability, and obedience to God.

The normative framework also underscores the critical roles of family and church in moral formation. Parents are identified as the primary agents of value transmission, responsible for modelling Christian virtues and intentionally instructing their children from an early age (Deut. 6:6-7; Prov. 22:6). The church, as the body of Christ, is tasked with nurturing spiritual maturity through sound doctrinal teaching, discipleship, and exemplary leadership (Eph. 4:11-12). Together, these institutions form a complementary system in which moral values are taught, embodied, and reinforced. The failure of either institution creates a vacuum often filled by negative societal influences.

Building on this theological and institutional foundation, the pragmatic task proposes actionable strategies for addressing youth moral decline. Churches are encouraged to develop structured discipleship programmes, revitalise youth ministries, and prioritise high-quality, Scripture-based teaching (Col. 3:16). Mentorship systems, small group structures, and interactive learning environments are essential for fostering personal and spiritual growth. Additionally, assigning trained and morally credible leaders to guide youth ministries ensures accountability and consistency in moral instruction (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

Finally, the pragmatic response highlights the importance of collaborative engagement between families, churches, and community leaders. Establishing forums for dialogue and joint action can help address pressing social issues such as drug abuse and internet fraud. Restorative approaches to discipline, rather than punitive measures, are recommended to facilitate moral recovery among erring youths (Matt. 18:15-17). Furthermore, the reintroduction of engaging church-based activities, such as evangelism, worship programmes, and creative arts, provides constructive outlets for youth expression (Acts 2:42-47). Taken together, these interventions offer a holistic and contextually grounded strategy for restoring Christian moral values and sustaining the spiritual vitality of young people in Jos-South.

Major Findings

Using Richard Osmer's practical theological framework, this study examined youth moral formation in Jos-South Local Government Area.

Descriptive-Empirical: Young people show increasing involvement in substance abuse, internet fraud, gambling, and sexual immorality, alongside declining church participation and weakening commitment to Christian values. Peer influence, digital

culture, and economic pressures are significant drivers, widening the gap between inherited Christian heritage and contemporary youth practices.

Interpretive: Moral decline is shaped by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and theological factors. Weak parental supervision, inadequate moral instruction, erosion of communal values, poverty, and unemployment push youths towards survival-driven behaviours. The church is sometimes perceived as disengaged, while globalisation and digital media introduce competing moral frameworks that challenge Christian ethical norms.

Normative: Effective moral formation requires grounding in the doctrines of God and Soteriology, emphasising holiness, righteousness, justice, and transformation through salvation and sanctification. Families and churches are essential for transmitting, modelling, and sustaining Christian values through intentional teaching, discipleship, and exemplary leadership.

Pragmatic: Addressing moral decline requires holistic strategies, including structured discipleship, revitalised youth ministries, mentorship, and participatory learning. Collaboration among families, churches, and community leaders, alongside engaging youth-centred programmes, reinforces Christian identity and moral discipline.

Conclusion

The study concludes that addressing youth moral decline in Jos-South requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines theological grounding, institutional responsibility, and practical intervention. By aligning empirical realities with theological reflection and strategic action, this research offers a sustainable framework for restoring moral integrity and nurturing a generation of spiritually grounded and ethically responsible young Christians.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen church-based discipleship and youth programmes. Churches should address moral decline by institutionalising structured, Scripture-based discipleship programmes, incorporating interactive teaching, mentorship, and participatory learning. Such programmes should aim to develop both spiritual and moral maturity in youth. Scripture emphasises the importance of teaching and guiding believers: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16).

2. Equip parents and families for intentional moral formation. Parents should be empowered to intentionally model and transmit Christian values within the home, especially in response to socio-economic and cultural pressures. Early moral instruction aligns with biblical guidance: “These commandments that I give you today shall be on your hearts. Impress them on your children” (Deut. 6:6-7).

3. Reinforce the role of family and church in moral formation. Both institutions should sustain youth moral development through sound theological teaching, exemplary leadership, and structured discipleship, grounded in the doctrines of God and Soteriology. The church and family function together as spiritual mentors, as Scripture instructs: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6), and “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:11-12).

4. Foster collaborative engagement and restorative approaches. Families, churches, and community leaders should collaborate to address youth moral challenges. Restorative disciplinary systems should prioritise rehabilitation and moral recovery, while youth-focused activities and digital platforms should be leveraged for teaching and empowerment. Scripture supports both corrective and nurturing guidance: “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault...if he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (Matt. 18:15-16), and “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them” (Matt. 19:14).

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