Like many of you, it is this time of year when I think about all the things I’ve done right (and wrong) and where, moving forward, I can be most helpful to our community.

This year I find myself thinking deeply about the number of stories that I read about our youths, specifically those who are involved in negative activities — drugs, crime, and assorted other mischievous deeds. By no means am I suggesting that all of our young people exhibit poor behavior, because that is not the case. But I do recognize that for many of our community’s youths, their value system is undeniably compromised and must be put back into perspective for them.

I can recall when I was a kid, I was taught by my mother, grandparents and community members (village) the meaning of prayer, the Golden Rule (treating people the way you want to be treated), loving who I am and understanding that I was placed on this Earth for a reason. In addition, I was taught respectful behavior, not only for adults but also for myself and my peers.

Today, it seems that — for reasons I don’t completely understand — we as parents and some community members have abdicated our responsibility in guiding and directing our youths. Although there are many organizations within our community, such as The Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Scouts, and various other mentoring programs that do a great job, nothing takes the place of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and community members who are actively engaging in raising and training our youths.

It is not my impression that all of us are remiss in doing our job, because that would not be the truth. My hat is off to those who are providing the right direction for our youths. However, that does not negate that many of our parents, guardians, protectors, etc., do not accept the responsibility to ensure that our youths receive the proper guidance and training. Unfortunately, we have far too many parents who have neglected and ignored their responsibility as leaders in their homes and the community. Although training is critically important, I must add that a strong spiritual home is just as important in raising our youths.

Like many of our youths today, I grew up in a single-parent home. However, strong spiritual values were exemplified, and I was blessed to be surrounded by grandparents and a community that helped train me to become the man I am today. It is a foundation that I rely on every day and in every aspect of my life.

Frankly, as adults, parents, guardians and communities, we have a responsibility to engage with our young people through various ways, while modeling positive behavior. In doing so, we might just learn, understand and change negative behavior.

I am a firm believer that if we (and I am including myself) put aside our cellphones, iPad, computers, etc., and take the time to talk about education, violence, drugs, peer pressure, crime and other bad influences, we can also establish and agree upon rules, boundaries and consequences with our youths. That way, we create a better chance of surviving and thriving in this chaotic world.

I am an example of how a strong, godly, spiritual home can also make a difference in how youths respond to negativity. It is our obligation to ensure that it happens.

Earlier, I listed a number of organizations that could use your help and support. Please contact them or any other organization that makes a positive difference in the lives of our youths this year.

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