Chapter 29 *Legalizing Marijuana*

*7 Reasons to Reject Legalization* Social justice themes call us to look out for the whole of society - especially those most vulnerable. There is underfoot in America a pernicious development to legalize and glamorize smoking “pot” under the ruse of “medical marijuana.” “Hey, people suffering and sick need medical relief and weed fits the bill!”

Is this ligit? Are impressionable youth exempt from negative consequences? Is legalization of marijuana harmless?

Because we’re called to be “salt” (preserving from decay) and “light” (illuminating the darkness), let’s examine 7 Reasons for Rejecting Legalization of Marijuana.

"They just found my daughter dead!" This unexpected and startling revelation jolted my morning. At the mall where I exercise, a middle-aged mother darted from the Starbucks and stammered the above words. "Larry, remember when I asked you to pray for my 27-year-old daughter a couple months ago? A guy came into her life ...This was her first real boyfriend... He made her feel special... He also introduced her to 'gettin high.' She'd never done drugs! It wasn't hard stuff –just recreational. Now she's dead! This wasn't supposed to happen!"

I took her hand and we prayed together. Comforting her as best as I could, I then slipped away saddened by the tragic news of this mother's only daughter now gone.

I have a daughter too. For seven years she worked long hours in a youth venue where over a thousand young people came weekly. She regularly shared with us how many were trying pot, leading them down a path to inevitable consequences that broke her heart and brought devastation to them and their families.

Most of us are well aware by now that marijuana has been officially declared legal for recreational use in twenty-four states plus Washington, DC and Guam. Initiatives to legalize and legitimize toking up for innocent fun have been pushed nationwide for the past decade.

*A Pendulum is Swinging* In 1969, Americans opposed the legalization of marijuana by an overwhelming 7 to 1 majority. Now more than half of Americans support it - 2/3 of those are 18-34!

Is this a good thing?

An ancient proverb gives us a heads up, *"A prudent man sees danger and hides himself. The fool goes on and suffers for it" (Prov. 22:3).* My childhood best friend of over 20 years ignored this advice and was dead before the age of thirty. Like a Cheech and Chong character, he naively thought casual drug use was harmless following the anthem, “All I wanna' do is have some fun.”

How about you? Consider the following before you are misled by blind leaders of whom Jesus forewarned, *"If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14).*

A line from the classic Eagles song, "Hotel California" serves as ample warning as we proceed, "You can check out any time you please, but you can never leave."

*Seven Reasons to Reject the Legalization of Marijuana*

1. Don’t be duped.
Our Founding Father, George Washington, told us *"An uninformed populace is easily enslaved."* Addressing arguments for legalizing marijuana demands discernment and the ability to recognize a pig with lipstick on.

 The "Yes We Cannabis!" movement is out in full force. Advocates and lobbyists are aggressive and persuasive, but misguided and dishonest to the core. Like same-sex marriage proponents, they tell us it's time to be "enlightened... progressive... cool ... shake off the old-school mentality and reject everything discriminatory and restrictive in our culture. After all, Amsterdam has joints available alongside coffee in shops throughout their country! We need to get with the program!"

* "It'll balance the budget... save the economy...create scores of jobs!”
In reality this represents no more than a drop in the bucket while conveniently ignoring other economic realities.
* "It eliminates the need for law enforcement plus provides needed tax revenue." A whole new set of rules and regulations have to be established and enforced - most people don't voluntarily pay taxes out of sheer civic duty.
* “This won’t affect youth… it’s only for 21 and up… private use only… since you can grow it at home it won’t go out…it’s not sold on the streets.” Who are we kidding? Look at all the scrambling going on in Colorado as people get around all the so-called rules and authorities turn a blind eye to what’s really going on. Clever operators use limos with “free” pot. Drug dealers buy the weed and sell it to support habits. Are signs really effective in airports saying don’t take any home? Within 24 hours of legalizing, a two-year-old girl ended up in the hospital after eating a marijuana cookie.

 • "It's for cancer patients." So-called "medical marijuana" for the most part goes out for trumped up "stress" and "pain relief" excuses; scores simply want it legalized so they can get stoned, avoid jail, party and make some fast cash. L.A. has already closed 200 "marijuana clinics" because of this travesty while Holland, Portugal and Zürich, Switzerland are changing drug policies because of exploding social problems.

 • "Marijuana is not addictive... it's like a beer...harmless... it's not as bad as cocaine or heroin." We'll address these but here's the deal best conveyed by an expert. Dr. Ed Gogek, a Democrat and Addiction Psychiatrist, wrote in the *New York Times*: *"I've spent 25 years as a doctor treating drug abusers and they are con artists... Marijuana activists are phony scientists. For years they said marijuana is good for glaucoma when it actually worsens it. They said it is not addictive and this is false! They said it doesn't increase usage among teenagers and all evidence says the opposite...It is not harmless! Youth do worse in school and have two times the dropout rate while marijuana permanently lowers their IQ."*

1. Your health matters.
Our Declaration of Independence refers to God as our Creator. He designed us in His image, directing us to care for our bodies and avoid destructive influences. Why? So we glorify Him in what He calls our *"temple"* which we have *"received from God. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).*

 Just as you would not put gunky, contaminated oil into an expensive Lexus, so too are we to steer clear of polluting our body with toxic elements that bring about a premature demise.

If they were able to have a second chance, do you think celebrities like Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson and multitudes of others who met their tragic end from drugs would encourage you to get started by lighting up a joint? We only pray that in their final moments they repented and got their lives right with a merciful and just God.

In Revelation 22:15 God tells us that "drug users and spellcasters" (CEB) or "sorcerers" (KJV)--are under the wrath of God and associated with "dogs "– an idiom for despicable persons. Their severe punishment is separation from God for all eternity. Greek word used here is "*pharmakeus*" from which we get our word pharmaceuticals. Thayer’s dictionary defines this as "one who prepares or uses magical remedies."

In Jesus's weakest moment on the cross, He deliberately refused any mind-altering intoxicant that was offered to Him (Matt. 27:34). He serves as our example, not singers, movie stars and even politicians who persuade multitudes into drug usage.

THC, the active component in marijuana plants (the cause of people getting "high"), is 10 times as potent as the "weed” of decades ago (*60 Minutes* special report 2015). Just like inhaling toxic cigarette smoke, it adversely affects the lungs. In fact, three joints are the equivalent of twenty cigarettes plus consider how long people hold it inside. This is why scientific studies have disclosed that three joints a day does as much damage to the lungs as 200 cigarettes!

Smoking cigarettes kills 400,000 Americans every year. Fifty thousand die from secondhand smoke. Eight-point-six million citizens have illnesses caused directly by smoking. Cigarette smoking cuts lives short by an average of 13 years. Daily misleading and deceptive ads lure multitudes down this path. Guess what unseen entity is trying to do something similar by promoting marijuana?

There are over 30 scientific studies that show higher risk of schizophrenia and paranoia amongst marijuana users. It increases one's heart rate producing a five-fold increase in heart attacks and panic attacks.

Some people scoff at statements like these and say they're merely "scare tactics." Do you want to risk your future by relying on "potheads", pop stars and politicians? These pied pipers will one day be accountable to God for their reckless and irresponsible ways.

1. Avoid deception.
TV and movies abound with stories about demons, the paranormal, vampires, zombies and "comes as a thief to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10). The Bible clearly warns us not to be "ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11).

As America drifts from our Judeo-Christian roots and standards, people’s perceptions of marijuana have changed drastically - especially among impressionable youth.

Scores of teenagers have been deceived to view the drug as harmless. Therefore, more are indulging. In 2013, one in fifteen high school seniors reported using marijuana daily. Ten years ago, it was one in 50! (check these dates) This most recent national survey also revealed that only 40% of high school seniors now believe smoking marijuana is risky compared to 75% 20 years ago.

The delusion is not only in their perception of the drug but in their penchant to partake of it as a means of escape. Why not? "It's legal--or soon will be... it's increasingly available... pop stars I admire use it, sing and joke about it and even promote it... gimme' a joint!"

Young people struggling through the teen years instead of turning to God or their

parents or godly counselors find it easier to escape problems and depression by medicating with drugs like marijuana since it's becoming such an easy solution. The snare is when the "buzz" wears off and a habit pattern develops of grabbing another joint or experimenting with harder drugs. Soon one is addicted and then it's either more drugs or maybe yield to those persistent suicidal thoughts to simply end it all.

Like in the classic film *Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy pulled back the curtain and exposed the deceiving mastermind behind the facade, will multitudes take heed to the facts being presented and rise up to resist the pull into destruction? More importantly, will you?

1. Maintain maximum mental capacity.
National surveys continue to indicate that the overwhelming majority of Americans believe that our nation is headed in the wrong direction while others believe we are coming to the close of the age. Apocalyptic warnings seem to be swirling all around us amidst accelerating moral decline.

The scriptural admonition for the days in which we're living is clear: *"The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so you can pray (1 Pet. 4:7, NIV).* Pot smoking fosters just the opposite.

Joseph Califano, head of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, declares without qualification that “pot smoking adversely affects motor skills and does serious damage to the brain over the long-term." Objective studies repeatedly show that regular users find their IQ dropping and all cognitive functions hindered.

A recent study from Northwestern University established clearly that teen "potheads" had brain abnormalities related to poor short-term memory performance. Healthy individuals who did not use marijuana scored 37 times better on average then users - NOT JUST ADDICTS - who had smoked pot in the past.

*Morning Joe* cohost Joe Scarborough, said on national TV that he never smoked pot. "Why do I want to make my odds for success even longer? It just makes you dumb!"

The Executive Director of Drug Free America Foundation in St. Petersburg, Florida, Calvina Fay, states the case even stronger, "It's a big lie to say marijuana is not harmful. We are fooling ourselves if we think legalizing drugs is not going to be extremely detrimental to our children." She knows it's only common sense that people of any age who are toking up are going to adversely affect their minds and alter their consciousness.

Matthew Leahy was in the newspapers where it stated he started smoking marijuana at 14, experienced a drop in grades and then eventually ended up in a mental hospital where he hung himself. A more uplifting testimony is the one I heard personally of a ninth grader who regularly smoked pot which "really messed up my mind" but he was grateful to God that he had been set free from the addiction that was ruining his life.

This all may seem so self-evident but let's face it; many parents are reluctant to speak out against this because they feel hypocritical having experimented when they were younger. Moms and dads, your children's lives are at stake! Sit down and share transparently that you were acting stupidly many decades ago, but now from real experience you know the dangers and care enough to waive the red flag: "Bridge out! Stop. Don't go there!"

1. Protect public safety.
Many marijuana advocates will tell you that we already allow alcohol so why shouldn't we allow pot? Granted, beer and wine and adult beverages have been around for thousands of years and unfortunately some people abuse them. Scripture speaks of "moderation" here and "obeying the governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1-8) regarding laws. Adult beverages are a cultural reality and it was foolishness when people tried to "prohibit" their usage because, in fact, the Bible doesn't prohibit their responsible use.

Just because some people overindulge and do harm due to alcohol, is not a valid reason to exacerbate the situation by adding dope to the mix! I'm sure you've heard the adage, "Don't point to bad behavior to justify more bad behavior. "

**Here's the deal:**

* In 2015 the “National Institute on Alcohol Abuse” released a study saying “30% of Americans admitted they struggled with alcohol in their lives.”
* 33,000 Americans are killed yearly in traffic accidents – one third because of drunk drivers. How many others are left impaired or paralyzed for life?
* 1.2 million drivers are arrested annually for drunken-driving. The highest number is among 21-25 year olds.
* One in three people will be involved in a drunk driving crash in their lifetime.
* Car crashes are the leading cause of deaths for teens. Teenage alcoholic use kills over 48,000 every year.
* Drunk driving costs you and me $132 billion a year.

Be honest with yourself: In light of the above, do you want to compound these sobering statistics by making marijuana freely available?

A deterrent to drinking and driving is the alcohol aroma on one's breath. That basically goes out the window when people think they can smoke a few joints outside, drive "high" down the highway and never dream of one day standing before a judge with a weeping father who lost the love of his life and three children via an intoxicated driver. Think about it along with the prison term and lifetime of guilt that follows.

By the way, the pop stars, comedians, politicians and marijuana pushers won't be standing with you in that court room. They might be perusing their latest issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine discovering new ways to promote pot in between occasional, unfortunate stories on celebrities that have "bit the dust" from pursuing the hedonistic lifestyle they applaud.

1. Don’t relinquish control of your life.
Our culture attempts to airbrush away sin and its consequences as it emphasizes a message: Indulge yourself (instead of control yourself). Yet there are three maxims of life from which we cannot escape:
2. Life is a series of choices.
3. Choices bring consequences (eventually, not always immediately).
4. Choices determine destiny.

As people increasingly get "stoned" and yield the control of their lives to ingested substances that bring temporary "highs," the results are weaker individuals and a weaker nation. Über--liberal and *Newsweek* editor, Tina Brown, released a statement recently where she said, "Legal weed contributes to us being a fatter, dumber, sleepier nation even less able to compete with the Chinese."

Scripture tells us our lives are to be surrendered to God and we are to draw upon His grace to resist temptations that can bring us into destructive enslavement to sin. Jesus cautioned us when He said, *"I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead end life and is, in fact, a slave" (Jn. 8:34 MSG).*

The fact is, marijuana easily becomes habit-forming in the lives of people, especially impressionable youth. It oftentimes becomes a "gateway" to other drugs.

The most successful ministry that has helped bring deliverance to thousands of drug-addicted young people is Teen Challenge, with a track record of over 50 years. Jack Smith, president of the Teen Challenge USA chapter in Missouri says, "Our experience is that marijuana is a gateway drug leading to harder and more damaging drugs. Well over half our students indicate the first drug they really were involved with was marijuana."

Government agencies such as the FDA and the Drug Enforcement Administration have all published reports showing over the years the addictive nature of marijuana. Try it once, try it again, when things get tough - a "buzz" beats reality any day!

*USA Today* reported the following in an article on addiction and marijuana. "A group of addiction counselors and physicians said they're seeing more marijuana addiction problems, especially in youths, and that wider pot availability will exacerbate the problem." "This is just throwing gas on the fire,” said Ben Cort of the Colorado Center for Dependency, Addiction and Rehabilitation at the University of Colorado hospital.

Pop-culture paints a glamorous and enticing picture of a life with pot and uninhibited "freedom." Miley Cyrus lights up a joint on stage and the crowd hoots and hollers approval. Strip off clothes and get on the wrecking ball to swing naked across the room in her video viewed by over 3 million.

The book of Proverbs paints a different picture and it's not too flattering. Repetitious sinful activity is likened to a "dog returning to its vomit" (Prov. 26:11). This is an aphorism referring to foolish people who lack moral behavior and repeat indulgence in activities that bring about their inevitable ruin.

The pro-marijuana magazine, *High Times*, won’t tell you this. Remember that cryptic line in the Eagles song, "You can check out anytime you please, but you can never leave?"

1. Be responsible and care for our children.
Jesus Christ, the most influential person who ever lived in human history demonstrated genuine care and concern for children. Not only did He heal them but he strongly rebuked His disciples when they tried to keep them away. He warned us, *"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt 18:6).*

Now let's get real. When we talk about legalizing marijuana, what message are we sending to this next generation? "It's legal. It's okay. Like cigarettes, it's the adult thing to do. Don't worry about getting caught. Today they just wink at you anyway – give you a ticket, with no arrest and no record!"

Clever politicians rationalize and assure voters they’ll have stringent regulations to keep pot out of young people's hands.

Fearful and selfish parents are caving because they don't want to alienate their child and, after all, “juveniles have to experiment and find out about life for themselves.”

One TV commentator went so far as to say "Let’s give it a go – these are laboratories of democracy" - referring to municipalities legalizing pot. In other words, why don't we just give it a try and evaluate down the road. After all we've had other social experiments like the welfare state... no-fault divorce... abortion on demand... they've been disasters and have brought devastating consequences to millions of lives (and over 60 million unborn) but, hey, what the heck, let's see what happens.

 *"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools..." (Rom. 1:22).*

On this point, we cannot and must not be silent. We cannot offer up our precious little ones and future generations on the altar of selfishness and hedonistic pleasure. To deceive ourselves by saying we will just keep it out of their hands is sheer lunacy. Think of how many parents liquor cabinets, refrigerators and medicine closets have been raided easily by youth tempted to experiment!

How about the 16-year-old boy who recently got a hold of some drugs and alcohol and then drove a car killing four people and paralyzing another?

* 1 in 6 youth who try marijuana before age 18 will either abuse it or will become addicted. - National Institutes of Health
* Teenagers using pot before age 18 are 2–4 times more likely to develop psychoses as young adults compared to those who don't.
* "We are fooling ourselves if we think legalizing drugs is not going to be extremely detrimental to our children." Executive Director of Drug Free America Foundation - St. Petersburg, Florida

*A Little Long but Long Overdue* **Here's the deal:** This commentary had to be comprehensive and not merely a few bullet points for easy reading. We must face up to the coming tsunami! This is a perfect storm gaining daily momentum and it must be stopped in its tracks before it is too late.

I would encourage you to watch a documentary called, *Narco Culture*. It does what I'm endeavoring to do with this commentary – raise awareness of what can happen if we do not awaken to what's happening concerning the push to legalize pot and other drugs.

The focus is on Juarez, Mexico and what has happened there in a brief time as drugs became increasingly accepted and promoted. It's very personal for me since I planted churches in both Juarez and its sister city across the border El Paso, Texas.

What was once a beautiful and peaceful Mexican city is now a drug-infested war zone. El Paso was labeled "The most peaceful city in the USA" with only five homicides a year. Juarez records over 3500 homicides in a year! Most small businesses are closed. Fear and assassinations abound with bombs, AK-47s and decapitations. Narco culture music is very popular with the youth who are now living amidst the legalized and illegal drug culture.

The most poignant part of the film comes at the end where a massive rally is being held in Durango. An Hispanic woman speaks passionately as she calls the people to "awaken in our city to gain awareness of what happened in Juarez and realize it can be here next! Mexico is being destroyed unless we change!"

I appeal to you, the reader, to heed this woman's warning as the United States of America hangs in the balance.