



## Marijuana's potency & what churches can do

By Barrett Duke

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Southern Baptist ethicist Barrett Duke offers guidance for churches after President Obama influenced the national drug debate by saying marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol. Baptist Press covered [Obama's comments](#) and surveyed the [push toward marijuana legalization](#) for medical and recreational use.*



WASHINGTON (BP) -- President Obama's recent comments about marijuana are very troubling. Having smoked marijuana myself for many years as a teenager and young adult, I can say that the president's claim that marijuana is less dangerous than alcohol is an inadequate comparison.

Both alcohol and marijuana are dangerous. To say one thing is less dangerous than another doesn't mean very much if both things are extremely dangerous.

Claiming alcohol is more dangerous than marijuana is essentially a distinction without a difference. Marijuana is associated with a long list of physical and psychological problems.

Further, the Justice Department's own statistics indicate marijuana is associated more often with other criminal behavior than any other illicit drug. In a 2002 Department of Justice survey of convicted inmates in jail, 14 percent reported using marijuana at the time of their offense -- more than cocaine/crack at 11 percent. In addition, marijuana is acknowledged by millions of users and multiple studies as the gateway to even more destructive drugs.

Contrary to alcohol, marijuana almost cannot be taken in moderate doses. It is nearly immediately debilitating upon the first intake. Alcohol impairs the user at practically any level of use as well, but its strongest effects require higher levels of usage.

Marijuana is more powerful in smaller doses. This is even truer today than it was back when the president and I were smoking it. The higher potency levels of today's marijuana compared to that of the '60s and '70s is well documented. But even when the president and I were smoking marijuana, it didn't take much to thoroughly incapacitate a person.

The president is correct to maintain the current administrative policy toward marijuana as a Schedule I drug. It is a dangerous substance that will be made more destructive if the federal government relaxes its position. The president's latest comments about the dangerous nature of marijuana are damaging enough. He would be better served to look more closely at the current facts about marijuana than to depend on his own experience.

Millions of lives are at stake in the debate over marijuana. I agree that we need to make sure we aren't locking up young adults with hardened criminals for recreational marijuana use. Instead, we need more effective deterrent and rehabilitative programs. I agree that we need to address any racial disparity that exists in current drug enforcement policies. But making marijuana more available or reducing the penalty or stigma associated with its use is not going to help those using it now. Instead it is going to result in more use and more associated problems.

### **What churches can do**

As our country continues to engage in the debate about marijuana, we must remember that the young people in our churches are listening and watching. We must make sure we help them understand the importance of personal purity and the dangers of marijuana and other drugs. Here are seven things a church can do to help keep their youth away from marijuana and other dangerous substances:

1. Teach what the Bible says about proper treatment of our bodies. Our bodies are God's creation, and for those in Christ, they are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As such, everyone, including young people, should do their best to keep themselves healthy and sober.
2. Teach young people their worth in God's eyes. They should be made aware that their lives matter. They should be taught that God has a plan for their lives and that they should seek His plan.
3. Encourage adults in the church to practice abstinence toward alcoholic beverages. Young people have trouble distinguishing the difference between alcohol and marijuana use. To simply say one is legal and the other isn't is not persuasive to youth curious about marijuana. This certainly won't be much of a deterrent now that some states are legalizing it.
4. Hold Christ-centered substance abuse awareness seminars. Parents should be made aware of the signs of substance abuse and be equipped to minister to a child who has fallen under its power. These seminars can also help young people and church members understand the dangers of substance abuse.
5. Develop wholesome, enjoyable activities and ministries that offer young people in the church good alternatives to non-Christian venues. Make sure there is a strong emphasis on discipleship in these as well.
6. Promote ministry opportunities for young people in the church that can help them focus on service to God and others rather than self. Teens are looking for ways to make their lives count. These activities can help them develop direction and purpose in their lives.
7. Remind youth of the Lordship of Christ. Christian teens must be made aware of the reality that their lives are not their own. Having trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, they must put Him first, above all else.

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Barrett Duke is vice president for public policy and research for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Get Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter ([@BaptistPress](#)), Facebook ([Facebook.com/BaptistPress](#)) and in your email ([baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp](#)).

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