WHY IT’S STILL A BAD IDEA TO LEGALIZE MARIJUANA

A couple of western states have recently legalized marijuana, and some have predicted that the tax revenue from sales, accompanied by increased public support, will lead more states to follow suit. Given these developments, the Rescuer sat down with a pair of former marijuana addicts to get their opinions on legalization. One is our assistant house manager, Mike Edrington, a formerly homeless man who graduated from the New Life program four years ago. Mike shared his story of overcoming addiction in the January 2011 Rescuer. Daniel Swiney, who shares his story of marijuana addiction in this edition of the Rescuer, gave his take on legalizing marijuana as well.

Mike noted that when “spice,” or synthetic marijuana, was briefly sold legally in Utah a few years ago, many homeless people smoked it more regularly. It was a simple matter of easy access. So banning a drug does reduce the amount it is used, he said. And while many argue that marijuana has fewer negative health and social ramifications than alcohol, it doesn’t mean it is harmless.

“There would just be a lot more people driving when they shouldn’t be and causing accidents and problems,” Mike said. “It wouldn’t be good for people and driving.”

“Like you’re stuck on stupid.” Daniel said. “It definitely dumbed me down, took away my ambition, my drive, my natural human curiosity. I was a much worse worker. After I smoked pot, I would go from a productive, hardworking person to a lazy person not wanting to work anymore.”

Based off the experience of the streets, if marijuana is legalized, more people will use it, simply because it is legal. And those people will be less productive and potentially more dangerous to others. Mike and Daniel’s experience leads them to believe that the negative impacts of marijuana use greatly outweigh whatever positives might come from legalization.

For Mike, Daniel and countless other men and women who have come through the Rescue Mission, a life of addiction and homelessness began with smoking marijuana. The Rescue Mission firmly believes that because of issues like these, God knows best when He says us not to controlled by alcohol or other drugs, but to be filled (controlled) by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

DANIEL SWINEY:
A Former Criminal Is Finally Released

In May of 2013, I spent three days riding my bike back and forth in front of the Rescue Mission of Salt Lake. I was homeless, addicted to marijuana and was tired of dealing drugs to make money. Still, something was holding me back from walking into the one place that I knew could help me.

I grew up with my grandmother in St. Petersburg, Florida. My mother was a marijuana addict and had given me to my father’s mom when I was two. My father is a career criminal and has been locked up for most of my life. I have only seen him a handful of times.

My grandmother was part of a religion called Armistrong, which is otherwise known as the Worldwide Church of God. While the church includes some Christian teachings, I also learned many misconceptions about who God is and what He is like. In school, people made fun of me because I was part of a “weird” religion.

Beginning a Life of Crime

Since I didn’t have many friends, I started connecting with kids who smoked cigarettes and skipped school in junior high. Soon I was cutting class regularly and began breaking into homes with my friends to steal loose change or cash. We really didn’t need the money; we just did it for sport. We became a band of juvenile delinquents.

Eventually, I was arrested and sent to a juvenile correctional program. When I got out, my friends were in their late teens and were off the streets. It seemed like I was going to be the one thing left in my life.

Since then, I have been in and out of jail for most of my life. I have only seen him a handful of times.

Daniel Swiney enjoys the trees and shade in the backyard of the Terri Timmerman Freedom House. Daniel has been sober for 14 months, has a good job and a new relationship with God. Please see “Daniel” on Page 3.
I recently read a National Public Radio (NPR) report about extreme poverty that really hit home. The report detailed how people in Ohio were employing a unique approach to decrease extreme poverty. The workers at the Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron and Richland Counties in Ohio had noticed that most of their clients were living in broken homes. Often, there was a single mother with dad drifting in and out.

And when dad did come by, it would often lead to a shoving match between the parents. The one constant, it seemed, was that the people they were trying to help were dysfunctional parents, mostly because they had grown up in dysfunctional homes and knew nothing else.

The NPR report noted that “research shows that chronic conflict between parents — even if they live apart — can harm children’s mental health.” So the workers at Community Action began to study if constant parental conflicts were damaging children to the point that they were destined to remain in poverty as adults.

Instead of using traditional methods of fighting poverty, like job training, subsidized housing and education, Community Action workers began teaching parenting skills and how to live as a family. They explained to mothers and fathers how their fighting impacts their kids. The simple step of not fighting in front of their kids could be a significant factor in overcoming poverty for the next generation, the workers said.

Community Action suggested that fathers be involved in their children’s lives, even if they didn’t live with them. A real once a week or even a 30-minute visit could go a long way. And when dad did make even a token visit, there would be no guilt trip from mom.

Here’s some more from the article, including quotes from Community Action’s program manager, Jennifer Jennette:

“...I feel strongly that family — or at least a sense of family — is the most important thing for prevention. People who come here that are attached to me and feel that I’m on their team are more likely to succeed in getting their lives together and getting their kids together with their family members as well as the community.”

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**The initial offer the prosecutors gave me was 40 years in prison. That meant I wouldn’t get out until I was 60. My lawyer worked out a deal, and I was eventually sentenced to four years in prison.**

A 20-year-old, white, skinny, wannabe gangster was not a good look for the Florida prison system. There were real gangsters in there and people who wanted to hurt others. Just for fun, they’d be constantly watching my back and living in fear. I tried to keep my head down and my mouth shut the entire time.

**Never Going Back**

When I got out, I was 24 and I vowed I would never, ever go back to that life. The first thing I did was go to the drug dealer and have the gold plates removed from my teeth. My mother had remarried and she and my stepdad lived in Rock Springs, Wyoming. When I called my mother I said I could come live with them. She said there was a lot of work on the oil fields, and a hard-working man could make a good living. I went to Wyoming and got a job as a rough around on one of the largest oil rigs in the U.S. I made good money, but there wasn’t much to do in Rock Springs. So I ended up going to the liquor stores. I would drink and smoke marijuana with friends from town. It seemed like that’s what everyone did — I had a party hard all night.

But, eventually, the marijuana and drinking drove the will to work right out of me. Instead, I just wanted to get high. I quit my job and lived in my parents’ basement with no real direction. All I was missing was something in my life. I just couldn’t figure out what it was. I felt like a washed-up former criminal that wasn’t really good for anything.

In 2009, my parents had finally had enough of my on and off routine, my constant moaning and my near-constant lying. They kicked me out for good. I tried a treatment program, but I knew something was missing in my life. I just couldn’t figure out what it was. I felt like a washed-up former criminal that wasn’t really good for anything.

In the summer of 2013, I was done. I knew I needed to change and I knew about the Rescue Mission’s New Life Program. I realized that the only thing holding me back was my marijuana addiction. I had smoked marijuana most of my life and I really didn’t know if I could stop. When I finally decided to get off my bike and join the program on June 1, 2013, I smoked my last bit of marijuana and then walked into the Mission.

**Getting On Board with God**

It took about two months before I was completely on board. I had always believed in God, but I never had a relationship with Him before. I had always thought I wasn’t worthy of God’s time, that God didn’t care about me and I was the complete opposite. But at the Rescue Mission, I learned more about who God really is and how even someone like me could have a relationship with Him.

Understanding that God loves me and is willing to forgive me changed my entire outlook. I realized what I had been missing all those years: I had been searching for something to fill a void in my heart that only God could fill. When I received God’s forgiveness, it freed me up to forgive others. For the first time, I was able to quash the resentment I felt toward my mom for giving me up when I was two.

I realized that my addiction boiled down to this: I used drugs, partied and stole all because I simply didn’t like the way I felt, and those things were a way to distract myself from how I was feeling or covering up the pain.

Now, in experiencing a daily relationship with God, I enjoy the way I feel. I have good friends at my home church, K2 - The Church, where my younger pastor, John, has shown me that sharing faith is not about getting someone to see the Sinner’s Prayer and then walking away. If it were, it would be easy. Instead, sharing faith is about building a relationship with a person and being involved in their life for the long haul.

Today, I have been sober for 14 months and feel that I am on solid ground. I have moved into the Rescue Mission’s transition apartments in the Timmerman Freedom House and am enjoying some expanded freedoms and responsibilities. I am overseeing a small landscaping business this summer and even get a car of my own.

As a single man with no kids, I feel like I have a lot to offer in service to God, not to earn His favor, but out of love for what He has done for me. I would like you to know that such generosity is not about getting someone to see the Sinner’s Prayer and then walking away. If it were, it would be easy. Instead, sharing faith is about building a relationship with a person and being involved in their life for the long haul.

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