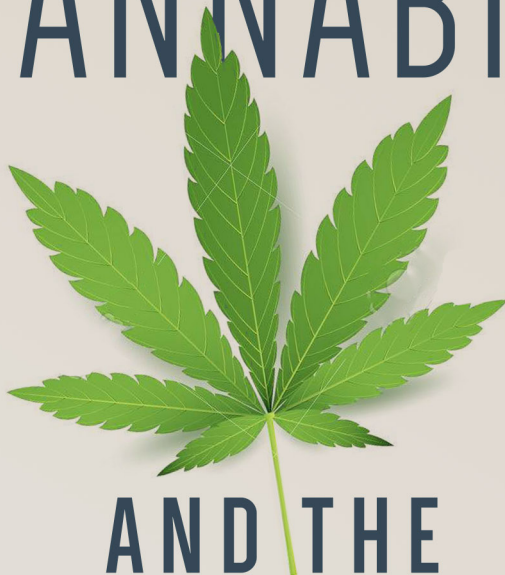


# CANNABIS



# AND THE CHRISTIAN

What the Bible Says about Marijuana

## TODD MILES

*Cannabis and the Christian* is an outstanding book. It's thoughtful, biblical, and enjoyable to read. Whether you agree or disagree with the conclusions, this book deserves a wide reading. We need to think through how to navigate one of the biggest ethical issues of our day, and Todd Miles has given us a helpful tool.

**Sean McDowell, PhD**, Biola University  
professor, speaker, and author

The question of what to do about legalized marijuana has reached the church's doorstep. Todd Miles provides a skilled and timely answer. He is fiercely biblical in his treatment, clear in his warnings, and tender with those looking for relief in the midst of suffering. But he does so much more than address cannabis use. Miles models how to think Christianly about ethics when the Bible doesn't offer a proof text, how to lean into God and his Word when we experience chronic pain, and how to react when the demands of the government don't align with the demands of God. Pick up this book as soon as you can! If the problems Miles addresses aren't knocking on the door of your church and family right now, they will be very soon.

**Aaron Menikoff, PhD**, senior pastor, Mount Vernon  
Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, and author of *Character  
Matters: Shepherding in the Fruit of the Spirit*

More than ever before, it is critically important to be a thinking Christian. It's so easy for our responses to questions to be based on opinions or emotions, or to not think about it too much and go with whatever the strongest voices are—even if they're not biblically thoughtful or well researched. What I love about Todd's book is that it is extremely thoughtful. Foremost, it is biblically based, but it really looks at the reality of marijuana usage today, not in a shallow or reactionary way, but in the context of scientific and cultural insight. I'm thankful to finally have a book I can now recommend and use in day-to-day life and ministry on this topic.

**Dan Kimball**, author of *How (Not) to Study  
the Bible* and Western Seminary faculty

We are called to take every thought and action captive to Christ. Therefore, as states continue to legalize marijuana, the question becomes, *How are we to think biblically about Mary Jane?* Though the Bible doesn't address it directly, Miles argues the Bible is sufficient to address the issue. The research on marijuana is a moving target, but Miles provides a wise and winsome Christian analysis of both recreational and medical marijuana. Discipleship must include dealing with tough current issues, and Miles is a shepherd along the path. Pick up a few copies of this book and pass it around to parents, teens, and pastors.

**Patrick Schreiner, PhD**, associate professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of *The Visual Word: Illustrated Outlines of the New Testament Books*

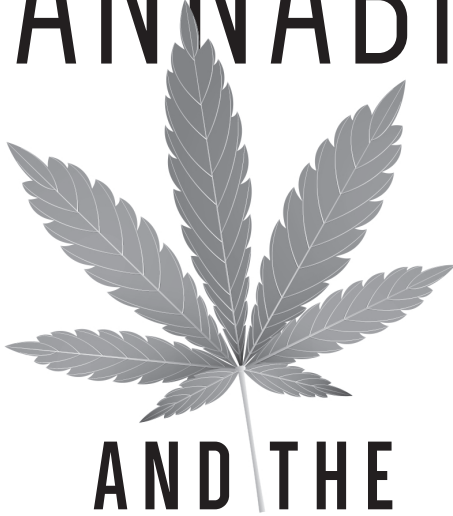
With the de-stigmatization and often recreational legalization of marijuana sweeping across the American landscape, it is easy to treat significant issues as old hat and simply as part of the "new consensus." Todd Miles's book is a welcome rebuttal to what will likely be an issue that will have tremendous impact on the local church and throughout American culture. He does a fine job of exploring the overt and implicit dangers linked with marijuana use and does so by appealing to scriptural authority.

**Andrew T. Walker, PhD**, associate professor of Christian Ethics, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Todd Miles has done the Christian and the local pastor an enormous service with this book. With clarity, precision, and pastoral sensitivity, he addresses the legal, medical, moral, and ethical questions facing Christians in a culture hurtling toward widespread legalization of marijuana. This book distills and presents the careful, nuanced wisdom of Scripture to help followers of Jesus answer the questions posed by legalization. But more than that, Todd calls us to a faithful discipleship which understands the relief of suffering is not our highest goal, but rather joy in the Lord. I highly recommend this book.

**Michael Lawrence**, lead pastor of Hinson Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

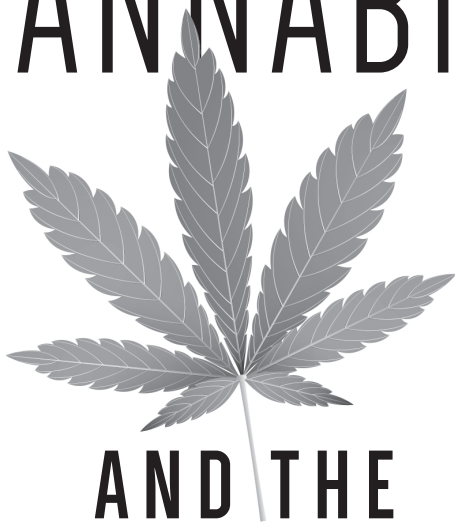
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## TODD MILES

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I had a great team of people who read all of my chapter drafts and commented on them. That team included Tracy Fabel, Taylor Turkington, Kelli Templeton, Josh and Dizzie Hus, Lee Watkins, Anthony and Natalie Locke, Trent Hughes, Christian Lawrence, and Ron Marrs. *Cannabis and the Christian* is clearer and more pastoral because of them.

My oldest sons were especially helpful. Ethan was my “science and medicine” editor who made sure my



explanations were both understandable and accurate. Levi read all my initial chapter drafts and cleaned them up for me.

Finally, a special thank you must go to my wife, Camille. She encouraged me to write and then created the space for me to do so, all while in the middle of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. She even gave me permission to reference her struggles in the chapter on suffering. Camille has always been my toughest and, therefore, best first reader. This book is no exception. I am exceedingly grateful to her and for her.

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# Introduction

In December 2012, recreational marijuana was legalized in the state of Washington, a short drive across the mighty Columbia River from my neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. That week a member of the church where I was serving as an elder contacted the leaders to ask if it would be permissible, now that marijuana was legal, for him to drive across the bridge to smoke some pot.

If this question had been asked just a month or so earlier, the answer would have been obvious: “No, it’s against the law.” But now violation of the law could no longer be given as the reason for abstaining.<sup>1</sup> So, what were we to say? Churches could no longer bind the consciences of Christians to abstain from marijuana by appealing to

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<sup>1</sup> Marijuana is currently listed as a Schedule 1 drug by the federal government, making the possession and/or selling of marijuana a violation of federal law. But the federal government is on record as refusing to enforce the federal marijuana ban against individuals who comply with state laws.

governmental prohibitions. A more thoughtful response would be required.

A few months later I was asked to do a breakout session at a pastor's conference, where I had spoken annually on theological and ethical hot topics—contemporary issues pastoral leaders had to confront. I decided to address the issue of the church and marijuana.

In the opening program the breakout leaders were asked to give a little advertisement for their sessions. When I announced that I was going to be speaking on the topic of “Marijuana and the Minister,” the assembly erupted in laughter. Throughout the next day, before my breakout session, I was given title recommendations: “The Deacon and the Doobie,” “The Trinity and Tree,” “The Pastor and Pot,” “Weed and the Way,” “The Bible and the Blunt,” “The Gospel and Grass.” I could go on and on. Many of the recommendations were funny, but I did wonder if anybody was going to take the topic seriously and show up.

They did.

My breakout session was packed, every chair taken, with people overflowing into the hallway.

Since then, in addition to speaking about the topic on podcasts and radio shows, I have delivered the “Cannabis and the Christian” talk to churches, men's groups, youth groups, and conferences in Washington, Oregon,

Montana, and California. Initially, I just addressed recreational marijuana. Later, I added a separate talk on medical marijuana. Without exception, every time I speak on the topic, the Q&A at the end runs later than the time allotted. This issue is clearly on the minds of followers of Jesus around the country.

## The Church Has Some Catching Up to Do

Churches have ignored the issue of marijuana for far too long. The reason, I believe, is threefold.

First, to many in the church, it was just self-evident that marijuana use was sinful, and the question was not even worth considering. If people did have questions, they were ashamed or embarrassed to ask. Dismissal might have been possible in the past, but our current context demands that the question now be considered.

Second, because marijuana possession and distribution were illegal at both the federal and state level for so long, churches did not have to think theologically about marijuana; they could simply appeal to those laws that prohibited marijuana use when counseling or discipling church members. As those state prohibitions have begun to disappear, so has the default argument of many churches.

Third, the Bible does not specifically address marijuana, either positively or negatively. Because Scripture

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neither explicitly promotes nor forbids the use of marijuana, it requires heavier lifting to present theological arguments. When you can't quote chapter and verse, it's more challenging to glean biblical wisdom on a topic.

## But If Marijuana Is Not in the Bible . . .

All of this raises a good question: If the Bible does not explicitly mention marijuana or any other name for the cannabis or hemp plant, how can one write a book subtitled *What the Bible Says about Marijuana* and have something other than a book full of blank pages?

The answer: very carefully.

Let me explain.

I understand that the Bible is the Word of the living God. It is inspired by God and is therefore without errors. Further, I believe the Bible is sufficient. By that I mean that God has given to us all the divine words we need to live faithfully before him, even today. Notice that I did not

say that we have all the divine words we might want. There are plenty of areas where I would love a few more divine words. For example, the creation of the cosmos is basically covered on one page of my Bible. I would love to have more revelation of what happened and how. But God, in his infinite wisdom, has deemed what Genesis 1 communicates to be sufficient for us to live faithfully before him.

Initially, we might think it would be nice to have a word from God that exactly matches the specific needs of the moment. But think about it: Do you want cookbook instructions for every possible circumstance? Imagine how long such Bibles would have to be! On reflection, we ought to agree that God's wisdom ought not to be called into question, as he has instead laid a foundation of divine revelation from which growth in godliness and wisdom can be achieved. Due to the historical and cultural context in which the Scriptures were written, marijuana is not specifically mentioned, but the Bible has much to say about things like discipleship, wisdom, mind-altering substances, human needs, human frailty, stewardship, creation, and addiction. What the Bible says on these topics will provide wisdom on the question of marijuana.

God has given us all the divine words we need to faithfully navigate the issues surrounding marijuana and the church. In the following pages, I want to use correct



biblical interpretation to specifically answer the questions surrounding both recreational and medical marijuana. In

**God has given us all the divine  
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marijuana and the church.**

so doing, I also hope to model a more general skill: how to think biblically about something that is not specifically in the Bible.

## This Book Is (Primarily) for Christians

A quick word is in order regarding whom this book is for. It is primarily for Christians. Many of my arguments and considerations will be applicable to all people, regardless of whether they understand themselves to be Christians. After all, the medical risks for unbelievers are the same as those for believers. But most of my arguments are aimed at Christians.

A Christian is a follower of Jesus.

You are probably thinking that the previous sentence is obvious, but this assertion is vital to grasp before we move forward. Acts 11:26 teaches that the name “Christian” was first used of the disciples of Jesus in Antioch during the first century. By the time we get to Acts 11, the epicenter of Christian missions had moved from Jerusalem up to Antioch, and this church was responsible for sending

out the apostle Paul on his first missionary journey. That church was committed to following Christ, and those disciples (or “learners”) of Christ were called Christians. So a Christian is a disciple, a learner, a follower of Jesus.

The one the Christian follows, Jesus, is none other than the second member of the Trinity, God in the flesh. He is described as the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16), so the Christian view of Jesus is pretty high. One becomes a Christian by confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9).

Jesus is not just a wise man walking around dropping wisdom that can be considered and either accepted or rejected. He has authority, and he demands that his followers listen and obey. Jesus is Lord.

But Jesus is also good. The Bible teaches that Jesus is compassionate (Mark 6:34), gentle (Matt. 21:5), and loving (John 11:1–5). Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). And of course, that is exactly what he did. Jesus died for our sins and rose again to save us. It was an act of self-sacrificing, humiliating, and gloriously wonderful love. Here is no omnipotent yet brutal, authoritarian taskmaster, ruthlessly commanding those weaker than him to do his selfish bidding. Jesus is all-powerful, but he is simultaneously meek and mild.

Here is how his disciple and friend Matthew described him, using the prediction of the prophet Isaiah. “He will not argue or shout, and no one will hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick, until he has led justice to victory. The nations will put their hope in his name” (Matt. 12:19–21).

Further, Jesus Christ is wise. How wise? Paul described Jesus this way: “In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Bottom line: Jesus is worth your trust.

Jesus demonstrated his love for his people by dying for them, and he continually demonstrates that love through

**The Christian should be deeply concerned about what Jesus thinks about marijuana. The difficulty lies in discerning what those thoughts might be.**

his care, provision, and guidance. In response, Christians best demonstrate their love for Jesus, according to Jesus himself, by obeying him (John 14:21). All that to say, obedience to the words of Christ, either from his

own lips or by his prophets and apostles, is crucial to the Christian life.

So the Christian should be deeply concerned about what Jesus thinks about marijuana. The difficulty lies in

discerning what those thoughts might be. That is the task of this book.

## This Book and You

Before we begin, I want to offer a word of caution. Be aware that as you read I may say things either stronger than or not as strong as you might like. Some will be disappointed in my conclusions, believing them to allow too much. Others will be shocked at how restrictive I am. Please recognize that you do not come to this issue as a blank slate, waiting for information so you can form a position for the first time. You already have thoughts and opinions on marijuana, and those form a position that you all hold with varying degrees of certainty. You hold your current position on marijuana because of what you have heard, what you have seen, and what you have experienced. This book is one more contribution, and I pray that it will be helpful to you.

Some of you will read this, already convinced that marijuana is evil, looking for more ammunition to share with your friends or children. Some of you believe marijuana is of great benefit. Perhaps you or someone you know was helped by medical marijuana. Maybe you believe you function best when smoking pot. Some of you might

believe that using marijuana has deepened your spiritual life. Whatever your ideas coming into the reading of this book, recognize they will shape how you receive what you are about to read.

I remember doing a seminar at a normal gospel-preaching church one evening and staying behind to answer more questions than could be addressed in the allotted Q&A time. Two lines quickly formed, both equally angry for opposite reasons. One line contained people frustrated that I was so negative about marijuana. The other line was full of those equally frustrated that I was so accommodating of marijuana. Both sets of people heard the same presentation but heard it in two different ways. As the people presented their cases, their pastor would often interject, "But Todd did not say that!" They were confident they heard what I did not say.

There is a lot of misinformation and confusion about marijuana. Many who read this will be surprised to hear of the risks associated with marijuana consumption. I have been careful to cite credible medical and legal sources for the claims I have made. You can find them in the footnotes.

Our experiences shape our convictions, and they color the way we see and hear things. So I invite you to read this book with your Bible open in front of you. Evaluate how I

am interpreting the Scriptures to see if my conclusions and recommendations are faithful.

I am convinced the people of God need more Bible teaching, not less. We need to teach with a loud voice all the things the Scriptures clearly teach. But we also need to teach with a softer voice where the Bible is less clear. Pastors and teachers have been given the right and responsibility to bind the consciences of the people of God to obey him where he has spoken. But we must be careful not to abuse that responsibility in areas where he has not spoken. To bind the consciences of God's people to obey something God has not said can be equivalent to false prophecy. We cannot say that God has said what he did not say. I want no part of that, so I am going to be careful to interpret the Scriptures as accurately as I can and to give counsel that flows from the biblical teaching. I have no wish to bind your conscience, one way or the other, when the Scriptures do not clearly teach something.

## The Path Forward

In chapter 1, I explain how marijuana works. We must understand what is actually going on when someone uses marijuana before we can move from clear biblical teaching to application regarding marijuana use. In this chapter

I will describe the cannabis plant and the complex ways it affects the user, both positive and negative. I will also explain why issues regarding a standardization of potency are difficult. Such understanding is necessary to make ethical judgments concerning cannabis use.

In chapter 2, I describe the risks involved with marijuana smoke and ingestion, including its effects on the development of the brain, immune system, and lung function, among others. When we are not given a specific biblical command, wisdom dictates that we do some sort of cost-benefit analysis to come to wise conclusions. I hope to equip you to perform that cost-benefit analysis in this chapter.

In chapter 3, I look at the relationship between the Christian and civil law. What are the issues regarding the legalization of cannabis, and is civil law a reliable guide to Christian morality? I will emphasize that the Christian is obligated to obey the law, but what the government commands, forbids, or permits is not always righteous. The Christian ultimately serves a higher authority.

Once we have established the science of how marijuana works, the risks associated with using the drug, and the legal context, we will turn to the Bible and apply what the Scriptures say about the issue of marijuana. Specifically, in chapter 4, we will look at what the Bible has to say

about alcohol addiction and intoxication to determine if there are principles that apply to the use of marijuana. I will argue that though the marijuana high is different from alcohol drunkenness, the effects of drunkenness—namely, impairment of physical ability, cognitive ability, and judgment—also occur with the marijuana high, so the biblical prohibition on drunkenness applies to marijuana intoxication.

In chapter 5, I raise a series of questions related to marijuana use and Christian discipleship. Faithful followers of Jesus Christ should give due consideration to these questions. Some of them are specific to issues related to marijuana use (including marijuana use for the pleasures of getting high and marijuana use as self-medication to escape). Many of the questions could be applied to any morally indifferent issue, so the framework I am laying out can be used on a number of ethical and moral issues that the Christian will face. I hope you will go on to apply these tools in your quest to live faithfully before God.

I take up the question of medical marijuana in chapters 6 and 7. Recognizing that some doctors are now suggesting the use of marijuana for certain medical conditions and side effects, I will survey the current established science on cannabinoid use in medicine in chapter 6. We will find that while anecdotal evidence abounds, actual research is



still in its early stages. Though in its infancy, this research seems to show significant medical benefits to components of the cannabis plant. Both THC and CBD have some proven medical uses.

In chapter 7, I survey the biblical teaching on what it is to be human and the biblical teaching on suffering, where it comes from, how the Lord uses it in the life of the believer, and the biblical priority on its alleviation. I then ask a series of questions designed to provide wisdom on the use of cannabis (and other mind-altering drugs) for acute suffering and for chronic suffering.

Finally, in the appendix, I bring the fruit of the content covered thus far to answer questions commonly asked by pastors and parents. This appendix will demonstrate how to apply biblical wisdom to concrete situations and will hopefully be a resource you can return to in the future after you've finished reading the book.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MARIJUANA?

In the past, Christians could easily answer the question of whether or not it was permissible to use cannabis by deferring to state prohibitions. We could simply say, “it’s against the law.” Today, that answer is no longer possible. Christians are now forced to do what they should have been doing all along: think like disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and bring to bear the wisdom of the sufficient Word of God.

Since cannabis is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, we must understand what it is and how it affects the user. We also must understand what the Bible says about discipleship, healing, suffering, and what it is to be human. Only then can we answer the critical questions regarding the recreational use and the medical use of cannabis.

**In *Cannabis and the Christian*, Todd Miles gives readers:**

- biblical wisdom applied to the question of recreational cannabis
- biblical wisdom related to the medical use of cannabis
- a grid to think through other ethical questions that aren’t directly addressed in the Bible
- confidence to respond to challenging issues standing on the sufficient Word of God

*“We need to think through how to navigate one of the biggest ethical issues of our day, and Todd Miles has given us a helpful tool.”* —**Sean McDowell**

*“Todd Miles’s book is a welcome rebuttal to an issue that will likely have tremendous impact on the local church and throughout American culture.”* —**Andrew Walker**

*“Discipleship must include dealing with tough current issues, and Miles is a shepherd along the path.”* —**Patrick Schreiner**

**TODD MILES** is professor of Theology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, where he teaches theology, church history, hermeneutics, and ethics. Prior to becoming a seminary professor, he was a nuclear engineer at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. Married, with six children, Todd is a fan of all-things Oregon State, and enjoys running and reading (though rarely at the same time).

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