

bread for the journey

Kids at risk

Cain lives ... but so does Abel.

Folks who write about kids at risk use “evidence-based” data to inform us about what’s cooking in the world of adolescence. They will most assuredly tell us what’s happening “on the ground.” I tire of the worn out cliché—“on the ground?” Where else do things happen but “on the ground?” If they happen in the air—eventually, it’s going to happen on the ground—according to Newton. What goes up must come down.

This is the one certainty whenever we evaluate the adolescent experience of drugs and/or alcohol. What they experience as an “upper” eventually becomes a downer. And when they land, they land hard. Sometimes upside-down—but always on the ground. Every drug experience eventually comes to earth or below the earth. This stuff kills kids. The kids know this. But it seems to make “no never mind” to them whenever they land with a thud.

My family loves to ski—I don’t. We didn’t ski much on the streets of the old neighborhood in Chicago. Instead, we latched onto the rear bumper of a car and went for the sliding, skidding ride of our life—they didn’t salt the streets much in the 40s. Those few moments of hanging on for dear life seemed worth it until Bobby Exby took a whack on the head as he flew around a corner. Bobby’s been a little goofy ever since.

His goofiness did not stop us from tagging the bumper of a car on a snowy day. Expensive lift tickets, scary rides on a chair lift, and screaming, careening down a mountain do not stop the average skier from taking a plunge down a mountain. Non-skiers don’t get it—what’s so great about flying down a hill when the ecstasy lasts for only a moment? “Big deal,” I say. “To each his own,” they say.

Non-users don’t get it. What’s the buzz about getting a buzz from a drug-induced high? Average card-carrying addicts all

say: “Don’t knock it until you have tried it.” Responsible adults and other preachers “knock it.” Trouble is, such advice does not work. Doesn’t put a dent in the drug-running gig because kids continue to use. The demand to get high is so high and the benefits from running the stuff are so rich that the threat of consequences makes very little difference. Getting “high” will always be worth it to those who use.

We “straights” and other “goody-two-shoes” just don’t get it. We *get* skiing. We *get* our habit of working like crazy to prove our worth. We *get* exercise until we become buffed out freaks. We all have an addiction of one kind or another. The difference is some addictions land us in jail and a world of hurt and shame while others, like smoking, are merely *subtly* dangerous. Another name for *obsession* is *addiction*.

Regret for using drugs does not kick in until a gateway drug—such as pot or booze is replaced by major league stuff—crack, oxycodone or heroin. Higher highs are possible. Regret comes later. Shame follows. Finally, despair shows up to smear the hopelessness around. They all come—regret, shame, and despair.

I am not a believer in the “slippery slope,” but I would vote *against* legalizing pot because it opens a door to harder drugs—drugs that are harder to kick. Killer drugs that captivate, capture, and exterminate people in odd and awful ways. It’s the old “what goes up comes down” law of addiction. Not much has changed since Cain and Abel. We claim to have learned commonplace decency and civility. Seriously?

Our kids are at risk now more than ever. Getting high is easily achievable because drugs are more available than ever before. We need to accept this. We can pray about it, preach about it and claim to have taken preventive steps by offering “natural high” opportunities for our kids such as retreats, mission trips and regular youth gatherings. But it won’t change the “at risk” factor for kids. They are sitting ducks. Cain is very much alive. *But so is Abel.*

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Here's the hope ... Abel lives. We live in incurably dangerous times and the acceptance of this is important for church leaders to own. But do not forget the hope: treatment is a worthy option for troubled kids. It is the only alternative. It goes far beyond denial or doing nothing at all. It goes further than a helpless hand wringing fret or a prayer without feet. It's why we say relentlessly at Rosecrance, "Life's waiting. Treatment works." Take God seriously. God is an awesome God. Take Easter seriously—even *humorously*—yes, humorously for its outrageous, disturbing and transformational promise. God is not finished with his intention to make all things new. Hope and healing are on the way. We wait and see. Better yet: we take action. We move forward to partner with God to bring it on.

Here's a vignette, if only to put some teeth into what sometimes seems to be mere "hopium." I did business with a stockbroker the other day. He's a new guy on the company block. Ten years ago, he was a zoned-out patient in our adolescent program. Now, he is going to handle my money! Cain lives. But so does Abel. 

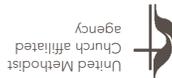


The Rev. Dr. William Lenters, D. Min.

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bread for the journey
is a bi-monthly news and views letter from
Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Rosecrance, Church
Relations Coordinator. Bread for the Journey
is written on behalf of people who live with
substance use and mental health disorders.
Together, and by God's grace, we will try to
make a difference.

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life's waiting