

LEADERS BOOK

OFF LIMITS

TOUGH TOPICS
CLEAR ANSWERS

TACKLING ISSUES THAT MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER TOO CONTROVERSIAL

BY GENE DEVAUGHN



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OFF LIMITS

TACKLING ISSUES THAT MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER TOO CONTROVERSIAL

You've probably heard that "politics and religion" should be avoided in conversations because they're just too controversial. But I've noticed a few other topics that we tend to avoid even in church. Topics like gambling, suicide, homosexuality, the paranormal and even laziness. These issues are becoming more and more prevalent in our culture so we have to address them from the perspective of God's love and truth. In this study, nothing is too controversial. Nothing is off limits!

02

Session 1
Gambling

10

Session 2
Suicide

18

Session 3
Homosexuality

25

Session 4
Laziness

31

Session 5
Psychics, Mediums & the Paranormal

Written & designed by Gene DeVaughn
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Session 1 (All Scripture is English Standard Version unless otherwise noted)

Gambling (Various Passages in Proverbs)

On the way to see a movie with his buddies, 19-year-old Greg Hogan Jr., asked to stop at a bank so he could cash a check. Once inside, he walked up to the teller and handed her a note that said he had a gun and wanted money. With \$2,871 in his pocket, the Lehigh University sophomore, who was also class president, the chaplain's assistant, and the son of a Baptist minister became a bank robber.

Why? Because he had racked up nearly \$5,000 in gambling debts playing online poker and needed to find a way out. What he found was a 10-year prison term.

("Luck of the Draw" / Living With Teenagers / November 2007)

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) reports that:

- 30% of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 have gambled on sports or other games of skill.
- Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 have the highest rate of gambling problems of any age group.
- Between 12 and 24% of pathological gamblers attempt suicide. The rate of suicide among the wives of pathological gamblers is three times greater than that of the general population.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide>)

Now, before we go any further, let me say there is not a passage in the Bible that specifically says, "Do not gamble." There's also not a passage that says, "Don't do drugs" but we know the widespread destruction they cause.

Let's admit it, everyone would like to be wealthy, but we'll see in this session that it matters to God *how* we get wealth and *why* we want to be wealthy.

Not everyone who gambles will become addicted or ruin their life.

I simply want you to hear the other side of the story which you will never hear on the casino commercials or see on the billboards.

So let's look at some of the most common reasons people give for gambling and see what God says about it.

1. If I gamble and hit it big, I won't ever have to worry again.

Actually, Paul said your worries have only begun if your goal in life is to be rich:

1 Timothy 6:9-10 *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."*

If Mankind's "love of money" leads to "all kinds of evils" then we should be extremely cautious of gambling which only feeds our "desire to be rich."

The word "**snare**" means a *trap* or *noose*.¹ Many people view money as a magic rope by which they can climb out of all their problems, only to have that same rope choke the life out of them like a noose!²

Proverbs 10:22 *"The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it."*

Two things are obvious in this verse:

- When God makes a person wealthy, it's a blessing.
- There must be other ways to get wealth, which brings sorrow rather than blessing.

Proverbs 15:6 *"In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked."*

¹Strong, James: *The New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996, S. H8674

²Thomas, Robert L.: *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition*. Anaheim : Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981, S. H8674

God is not promising that all righteous people are going to be rich. However, the Bible says "The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains" (Ps. 24:1) therefore God can bless the righteous *whenever* and *however* He wants.

Believers are literally connected to the Source of all things, but if you try to get wealth in *any* way that violates God's principles then "trouble" will accompany that wealth.


Listen to some real-life stories that you won't hear on the Lottery commercials. These true stories are not from a "Christian" source that is biased against gambling. I found them easily at www.bankrate.com.

They show the "temptation, ruin and destruction" that often comes with wealth apart from God:

William Post won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988 but now lives on his Social Security. He later said, "I wish it never happened. It was totally a nightmare." A former girlfriend successfully sued him for a share of his winnings. It wasn't his only lawsuit. A brother was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill him, hoping to inherit a share of the winnings. Within a year, he was \$1 million in debt. Now he lives quietly on \$450 a month and food stamps.

Suzanne Mullins won \$4.2 million in the Virginia lottery in 1993. Now she's deeply in debt to a company that lent her money using the winnings as collateral. She borrowed \$197,746.15, which she agreed to pay back with her yearly checks from the Virginia lottery through 2006. When the rules changed allowing her to collect her winnings in a lump sum, she cashed in the remaining amount, but she stopped making payments on the loan. She blamed the debt on her uninsured son-in-law, who needed \$1 million for medical bills.

Ken Proxmire was a machinist when he won \$1 million in the Michigan lottery. He moved to California and went into the car business with his brothers. Within five years, he had filed for bankruptcy.



Willie Hurt of Lansing, Michigan won \$3.1 million. Two years later he was broke and charged with murder. His lawyer says Hurt spent his fortune on a divorce and [drugs].

Charles Riddle of Belleville, Michigan won \$1 million. Afterward, he got divorced, faced several lawsuits and was indicted for selling cocaine.

Janite Lee of Missouri won \$18 million. She was generous to a variety of causes, giving to politics, education and the community. But eight years after winning, Lee had filed for bankruptcy with only \$700 left in two bank accounts and no cash on hand.

One Southeastern family won \$4.2 million, and eleven years later, the couple divorced, sold the house and they split what was left of the lottery proceeds. The wife got a very small house. The husband moved in with the kids. Even the life insurance they bought ended up getting cashed in. Their financial advisor said, "It wasn't the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow [they had hoped for]."

Proverbs 19:23 *"The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm."*

As I said at the beginning, all of us would love to have more money available to us but *true* happiness is when you can lay down at night and "rest satisfied" because God is your greatest desire.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 *"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity."*

2. If I gamble and hit it big, I won't ever have to work again.



Genesis 2:15 *“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden **to work it and keep it.**”*

The very first man that God ever created had a job and a purpose. God never intended for people to sit around and do nothing.

Ephesians 5:15-16 *“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*

If I'm honest with you, a huge bank account and a tropical island does sound pretty appealing – and that's fine for a vacation – but we were never meant to sit around and trust in riches. It's been said that an idle mind is the devil's playground and the following verses prove this to be true:

Proverbs 19:15 *“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.”*

Proverbs 20:4 *“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn, he will seek at harvest and have nothing.”*

Proverbs 15:19 *“The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.”*

When you depend on hard work and the blessings of God; the path to success is a wide-open highway! The irony of gambling is that most people will never hit it big and they end up working *harder* to fund their gambling habit.

A good friend of mine got divorced because his wife wouldn't stop gambling and it almost ruined him financially. She started gambling small amounts of money just for fun but it eventually consumed her life.



David Lucas, a young man from Minnesota, went to a tribal casino with some friends and was hooked. Like most gamblers, he's had big highs and big lows. One time he sat at a table and won \$500. Another time he went in with \$100 in his pocket, lost it all, withdrew \$300 from the ATM and lost that too. For a fast food worker, that \$400 loss was significant. He's still a weekly visitor at the casino and says, "I think it used to be a problem for me, but now I try to be smart about when I go." ("Luck of the Draw" / Living With Teenagers / November 2007)

3. If I gamble and hit it big, I won't ever have to wait for anything again.

Proverbs 13:11 *"Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it."*

We value things more when we work hard and accumulate them "little by little." On the other hand, we've all seen people who have everything handed to them and they take it all for granted. Quicker is not always better!

Proverbs 20:21 *"An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end."*

Proverbs 21:5 *"The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty."*

Lottery winners often struggle to handle newfound wealth and fame, and many become tied up in lawsuits or estranged from family and friends. One study claimed that instant millionaires have about the same level of happiness as recent accident victims. "Winning the lottery isn't always what it's cracked up to be," says Evelyn Adams, who won the New Jersey lottery not just once, but twice, to the tune of \$5.4 million. Today the money is all

gone. She said, "Everybody wanted my money. Everybody had their hand out."

By Ellen Goodstein, Bankrate.com

Proverbs 28:19-20 "Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. ²⁰ A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished."

4. I can win God's approval of my gambling as long as I give part of it to the church.

Proverbs 16:8 "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice."

Proverbs 15:16 "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it."

Jack Whittaker won \$113 million in a Christmas Day drawing. He donated more than \$7 million to three churches in West Virginia and California.

Sounds like a great guy, right? But listen to the rest of his story:

One night during a late-night visit to a West Virginia strip club, Whittaker opened a briefcase filled with \$545,000 in cash and cashier's checks in front of a club employee. Whittaker was soon drugged, and the briefcase was stolen, police said. The money was recovered, and two club employees were arrested. But the incident put a spotlight on Whittaker's habits, which police said included frequent strip-club visits and high-stakes gambling at a dog track and casino. Whittaker declined to talk about the incident or other parts of his life he deemed private.



He later paid security guards to watch his home and office. Whittaker said his 16yr old granddaughter lost almost all of her friends. He went on to say, "She's the most bitter 16-year-old I know. She doesn't communicate with almost anybody but me. I'm working on it, though." By Ellen

Goodstein, Bankrate.com

Luke 16:11 [Jesus said] *"If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"*

Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher, told of how he would sometimes visit Monaco as he traveled around the world. He loved the beautiful gardens of a casino in Monte Carlo. The gardens there were beautifully landscaped and he was quoted as saying they were some of the "most beautiful in the world." Then suddenly Spurgeon stopped visiting those gardens when he traveled through Monaco. He stopped because of a conversation he had with another Christian friend who also loved to visit the gardens. When Spurgeon's friend quit visiting, the owner asked him why. Spurgeon's friend answered, "Well, I never gamble. And since I would be making no contribution to your business, I don't think it's fair that I take advantage of your gardens." The owner said, "Oh, but your presence would prove very profitable to me. Were it not for respectable people like you who merely visit the gardens, I would lose many customers who actually gamble!" The owner went on to say, "Even though you would never play, your presence on the grounds contributes greatly, although indirectly to my revenue." The owner smiled at Spurgeon's friend and said, "You see, there are a lot of people who have no intention of gambling, but they feel quite at ease following people like you into the gardens. And from the gardens, the transition to the gambling tables is quite easy indeed." After hearing his friend tell that story, Spurgeon later said, "I never again went near the gardens of Monte Carlo."³

³ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.