



Winter 2004/2005 *Go! Online* Bible Study

## Betting Against Gambling

### Materials:

- *Go! Online* Download Video: *Gambling: OK or Wrong?*
- Computer, monitor or video projector to display video
- Copies of *Go! Online* Group Activity for “Betting Against Gambling” (one per student, as described below)
- Copies of Winter 2004/2005 *Go!* magazine for each student (unless they’ve already been distributed)

### Video Introduction:

When you’re ready to begin your study, prepare to play the *Go! Online* download video called *Gambling: OK or Wrong?* It is 2 minutes, 34 seconds long, and it features a group of Christian students answering questions about gambling. It’s intended to help your group focus on the issue as you begin your study.

Before playing the video clip, ask your group to think about how they would answer the questions asked. If you have extra time for discussion, you could watch the clip in segments, asking your students to discuss their answers to each question after watching the students on the video.

### Transition:

Ask your students to raise their hands in response to the following questions, then encourage them to discuss their answers to the final question.

- How many of you know an adult who gambles occasionally or regularly?
- How many of you know a student who gambles occasionally or regularly?
- How many of you know anybody who seems to have a real problem with gambling?
- Why do you think gambling is so popular in our culture lately?

Say something like the following:

**Gambling is everywhere these days. One by one, states are adding lotteries that both support their economy and give citizens the chance to bet a dollar at a time on a big payoff. On television, shows about poker are gaining in the ratings. People play cards, go to casinos, bet on sports and look for other ways to spice things up with gambling. Studies show that teens are big into gambling, too. In some high schools, as**



many as 90 percent of students admit to gambling in one form or another at least once a month.

The Bible doesn't say anything about gambling, specifically. There's no command that says, "Thou shalt not gamble." However, God's Word has plenty to say about the issues surrounding gambling. After we look at five of them today, we'll have a better understanding of the dangers of this popular pastime.

### Group Activity:

Hand out copies of the Group Activity for "Betting Against Gambling." The sheet will allow your students to follow along and fill in the blanks on each of the five points we'll be covering today, as well as taking notes.

### 1. Greed is a sin.

Some of you might have thought about writing the word "Gambling" in your blank for the first point. The Bible doesn't specifically say gambling is a sin, but it's very clear about the reason many people gamble—greed.

Listen to these things that Jesus listed as evil: "evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, lewdness, stinginess, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22, HCSB).

Sometimes, we don't think of greed ("excessively wanting more than one needs") as being that big of a sin. But Jesus listed it right along with sexual sin, murder and lying. Greed is a sin. Why is it such a big deal? Because it's a way of saying, "What God provides isn't enough for me."

Check out these verses from 1 Timothy 6:9-10: "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (HCSB).

You've probably heard one of these verses misquoted as, "Money is the root of all evil." The verse actually talks about "the love of money." One of the traps that people fall into when they're trying to get more money is gambling. And for millions, gambling has definitely lead to destruction, pain and ruin.

Lots of people gamble because of their greed for money. That's a sin.



## 2. Gambling is addictive.

But what if you could gamble without greed? What if it was just for fun, excitement, entertainment? Well, greed isn't the only problem with gambling.

Any guesses on what the “a” word is for point 2? [Allow a few guesses.] Gambling is addictive. Like alcohol, drugs and other things people get hooked on, gambling is hard for some people to stop. It's deceptive, because it always seems like you can get your money back with just one more bet. Or it feels like you need the excitement of having a bet on something to keep life interesting.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of teenagers and college students are in the process of burying themselves in gambling debts because they just can't give it up. What's the best way to make sure you don't get hooked on gambling? Stop now. Or, even better, don't start.

When describing Christians who get sucked back into wrong living by bad influences, Peter wrote, “They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them” (2 Peter 2:19, HCSB).

That's what gambling does: It promises quick financial freedom, but it actually delivers slavery to addiction, creditors and anxiety.

Paul admitted that not everything is sinful, but that Christians must not let themselves be controlled by anything but God: “‘Everything is permissible for me,’ but not everything is helpful. ‘Everything is permissible for me,’ but I will not be brought under the control of anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12, HCSB).



## 3. Gambling is destructive.

So what if you could gamble without being motivated by greed or getting addicted? Gambling is still a problem. For one, on a wide scale, gambling is powerfully destructive.

Someone said that the lottery is a tax on people who are bad at math. That's a funny line, but it's true in a way. The odds of winning the lottery are one in millions. So who is most likely to gamble on the lottery? Poor people who desperately need money. They're willing to risk what they have the least of in hopes of getting what they need.

Obviously, someone wins the lottery, but 99.99 percent of people lose. In reality, lotteries take advantage of poor people. Listen to what Proverbs 22:16 says about doing things that hurt poor people: “Oppressing the poor to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich both lead only to poverty” (HCSB).

In addition to all the pain and heartache caused to families, communities and students, gambling is destructive because it hurts poor people.



#### **4. Gambling can be a sign of misplaced trust.**

These last two issues have to do with why gambling can be a problem in our relationship with God. The first is misplaced trust.

Who meets all of our needs? [Don't answer yourself; force someone to say that God meets our needs.] Who provides us with everything in our lives that could be called "good"? [Again, wait for someone to answer.]

It's true; James said every good gift comes from God, and Jesus said that the Father will always meet our needs. When people gamble in an attempt to meet their needs and get more money, they're actually risking what God has provided to get more than He's given. That's not trusting God.

Here's what the writer of Hebrews said: "Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, HCSB). For a gambler, choosing not to gamble is a way of trusting God to meet his needs.

#### **5. Gambling can be sign of misplaced hope.**

Some people who gamble are reaching for far more than just getting their needs met. They're hoping that the excitement of winning and making a fortune will finally give them a life that's really worth living.

How much do you think it would take to give you the ultimate lifestyle? [Allow time for discussion. Avoid condemning people for admitting that they've thought about this. Maybe you could acknowledge that we all sometimes fantasize about being rich and having the best of everything.]

It's not wrong to want the best things; that's normal. The problem is that in this life, money will never bring us the meaning, peace of mind and happiness we tend to think it will. Solomon, the richest man of his day, said over and over, "Everything is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 3:19, NIV). Some wealthy people struggle with depression because they discover that money doesn't really make them content. Gambling to make our dreams come true almost never works; when it does, those dreams don't satisfy.

What is worth living for? What is worth hoping in? The only goal worth focusing on beyond living for God today is our future with God in heaven. Peter wrote, "Set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13, HCSB). Hebrews says that hope is the anchor for our souls.

And guess what? Once we get to heaven, Paul taught that we will be wealthier—and happier—than we could ever be here on earth: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints” (Ephesians 1:18, HCSB).

People who gamble to make their hopes come true are hoping in things that just won’t pay off in the long run. Even if they beat the odds and get them.

### **Conclusion:**

In the end, there’s one more reason to think about whether gambling makes sense in your life. People who know we’re believers in Jesus are watching us. Do they see us as people who are looking to God to meet all our needs and trusting Him to take care of us? Or do they see that we’re just as desperate for money and excitement as everyone else?

This verse gets quoted a lot because it’s true: “Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15, HCSB). If they don’t see our hope is in God for the things that matter—if they see we’re most hopeful for money—they’re not going to ask why we believe in Jesus.

Close your study time in prayer, asking God to help all of you to understand the realities of gambling and to make wise decisions about your attitudes toward it as it grows more popular in our society.

As they leave, make sure each of your students has a copy of the Winter 2004/2005 issue of *Go!* magazine. Encourage them to check out “Rolling the Dice” on page 42. It’s a round-table interview with a group of Christian teens about the whole issue of gambling.



Copyright ©2004, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30022,  
[www.go.studentz.com/leader](http://www.go.studentz.com/leader)