

TEENS AND GAMBLING

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As Christians, we need to embrace a biblically-faithful theological perspective that not only informs our personal behaviors and choices, but which we can pass on to our kids as they grow up in a world that is doing everything it can to nurture them into a lifetime of gambling.



WORLD

What is Happening?

With sports betting legalized by the Supreme Court in 2018 and smartphones in the hands of almost all teens, we shouldn't be surprised that kids are jumping in on the action.

- The National Council on Problem Gambling reports that 60% to 80% of high school students report having gambled for money in the past year, and 4% to 6% of high schoolers are considered addicted to gambling.
- Yale Medicine reports that many gambling disorders begin, not surprisingly, during the impressionable years of adolescence. Maybe that's why college students are gambling at higher rates than the general population.
- At the level of personal and social costs, gambling is expensive. It's estimated that gambling addictions cost almost \$7 billion a year in the United States. Including addiction to gambling, the fallout extends to fueling crime, lost work time and decreased productivity, bankruptcy, poverty, depression, anxiety, suicide, illness, divorce, family breakdown, domestic violence, theft, etc. The ripples spread far and wide.
- Gambling can stimulate the brain's reward system much like drugs or alcohol, leading to addiction. Because they're at a formative and vulnerable developmental stage, teenagers are at great risk for compulsive gambling, or gambling disorder. This is defined as the uncontrollable urge to keep gambling despite the toll it takes on your life.



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WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

In his book *My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture*, Philip Ryken tells us that the church has long recognized the dangers of gambling. Ryken goes on to point out several reasons why gambling is a sin.

They are . . .

Gambling denies God's providence. God has promised to provide everything we need (Philippians 4:19). However, God doesn't instruct us to gamble to get it. Rather, we are to work for it (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Gambling is bad stewardship of the resources we've been given. Ryken writes, "Everything that we are and have belongs to God (Romans 8:14; Psalm 24:1), and it has been given to us to meet our needs and to bring glory to God." Our gambling puts what God owns at risk, believing the lie that we might get something of greater value.

Gambling is stealing. Every time we gamble we are attempting to profit from someone else's loss. Yes, people win from time-to-time, but there are also losers. . . who lose a lot more than the winners win. This is why the dictionary defines "gamble" as taking "a risky action in the hope of a desired result," along with "a risk of loss and a chance of profit."

Gambling is rooted in coveting, which is forbidden in the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:17) and addressed by Jesus (Luke 12:15). If you're in it for the money, you're coveting what you don't already have.

Gambling is both fueled by and fuels that love of money, a thirst which the Bible says will never be satisfied (Hebrews 13:5; Ecclesiastes 5:10). Jesus warns that in the attempt to gain the whole world, one may lose their soul (Mark 8:36).





WALK

Conversation Starters and Questions:

- Before addressing the issue with your teenagers, begin with a parental self-assessment. Do you gamble? Casinos? Sports betting? Online gambling? Lottery tickets? Raffles? Your example speaks loudly, setting the “gambling bar” and impressions for your kids. Hypocrisy is not an option.
- Rather than ask, “Are you gambling?”, ask your teenagers if they think gambling is prevalent among their peers. Follow up with questions asking why they think their peers are gambling, and how they see their peers gambling. This will give you a deeper sense of the more general perception your kids have about gambling in their circle of friends and the resulting peer pressure they might feel to gamble themselves.
- Ask, “Do you think gambling is harmful? Wrong? Helpful? Addictive? No big deal? Why or why not?”
- Watch a televised sporting event and do two things: 1) Count the number of gambling messages that appear on the screen/commercials, and 2) Discuss the methods marketers use to present gambling as a safe and normal activity.
- Point out the gambling addiction warning included with each commercial. Discuss the reasons why that warning is always included. Look for opportunities to list the gambling dangers/outcomes listed earlier in this CPYU Parent Prompt.
- Ask your teenager if he/she has or is gambling. If so, find out how much money they are gambling. Take steps to intervene by removing phone apps, and if necessary, the smartphone itself. Look for ways to hold them accountable, and secure the help of a qualified Christian counselor if there is a gambling problem. We want to protect them from themselves and steer them into seeing their use of money as an issue of faithful discipleship.

For further reflection: Gambling isn't bad because you might lose money. Rather, gambling is bad because gambling is willful disobedience to God which leads to losing one's soul.

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(Matthew 6:19-21)*



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