

# SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY HELPS

## The Alternative to Gambling

### Emphasis Passage: Philippians 4:19

**King James:** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

**New King James:** And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

**New International Version:** And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

**New American Standard:** And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

**Holman Christian Standard:** And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

**New Living Translation:** And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

## HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible verses related to gambling:

Exodus 20:3, 15, 17; Proverbs 1:19; Proverbs 15:27a; Proverbs 21:25-26; Proverbs 28:25; Jeremiah 6:13; Matthew 6:19-21, 24; Romans 14:21, 23c; I Corinthians 10:24, 31; Ephesians 4:28; Philippians 2:3-4; Philippians 4:11-13; I Thessalonians 5:22; II Thessalonians 3:6-12; I Timothy 5:8; I Timothy 6:10

## CONTEXT

Philippi was a leading city in one of four administrative districts in Macedonia. It was a Roman colony where Paul established a church during his second missionary journey after answering God's summons to go there (Acts 16:6-12). It was there that he won several people to Christ who became the foundation of a church: Lydia and her household, the slave girl delivered from an evil spirit, and then, as a result of God's intervention after he and Silas had been cast into prison, the jailer and his family. Paul had great affection for this church. More than once they had supplied financial and emotional support to Paul in his missionary endeavors. Philippians 4:19 is part of Paul's expression of gratitude to his dear friends at Philippi.

# SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

## Introduction

A recent newsletter from the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling stated that Americans lost \$68.7 billion by gambling in 2002, the latest year for which figures are available. That was an increase of \$3.4 billion over 2001 and represents seven times the amount consumers spent on movie tickets in 2002.

But the costs are much greater than just the dollars that are lost. By far, the greatest cost is the destructive impact on the home and family. Families often are destroyed because one or more family members are involved in gambling. For example, a Wisconsin landscaper lost his business, his family, and his freedom because of gambling. It all started in 1997 when he stopped by a casino on the way home from work. He won \$900 that day. But he eventually gambled away \$150,000 of other people's money—money he got for contracts he never fulfilled, for selling his business over and over, and duping other people into helping him gain assets he could sell to support his habit ([www.madison.com/wisconsinstatejournal\\_local/65971.php](http://www.madison.com/wisconsinstatejournal_local/65971.php)).

### I. Facts about gambling

*Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines gambling as “the act or practice of betting: the act of playing a game and consciously risking money or other stakes on its outcome.”

A study of gambling-related crime in Canada (“Examining Police Records to Assess Gambling Impacts: A Study of Gambling-Related Crime in the City of Edmonton,”

<http://www.ncalg.org/library/library.asp?url=StudyGamblingCrime.pdf>,

March 2003, p. 6) offers the following definition: “the betting or wagering of valuables on events of uncertain outcome. Inferred in this definition is that:

(1) an element of risk is involved, (2) there is a winner and a loser—money, property or other items of value change hands, (3) at least two parties are involved in the activity—a person cannot gamble against him/herself, and (4) the decision to gamble is made consciously, deliberately, and voluntarily.”

Gambling is an act of the will in which a person risks something of value with the hope of getting something belonging to someone else.

There are many different reasons people give for gambling. The following list was gathered from several sources.

1. Recreation/Fun. This is one of the two “hooks” used by states to get people to vote for the introduction of gambling (the other being to raise needed education funds).
2. Support charity. Charity is the generous act of giving of one's means to help someone less fortunate. Charitable gambling is a contradiction in terms. It is not charity. It's just gambling.
3. Escape mechanism. A person may temporarily escape one problem only to eventually face another (gambling addiction) *and* the old problem that didn't go away. It just hid for a while.

4. Win money. Far more often, money is lost and debt piles up as the following facts demonstrate: (a) the household debt of 67 percent of Gamblers Anonymous members was due to gambling, and 44 percent had stolen from work to pay gambling debts [Rex M. Rogers, *Seducing America: Is Gambling a Good Bet?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997)] and (b) 55.7 percent of return gamblers hope to win enough to pay off more than \$10,000 in gambling debt while 19.6 percent of return gamblers hope to win enough to pay off more than \$50,000 in gambling debt (Montana Gambling Study Commission, [www.videogamblinginfo.com](http://www.videogamblinginfo.com), June 8, 2001).
5. Recover previous losses. But every occurrence of gambling is a losing proposition. The odds do not go up the more a person gambles.
6. Cope with feelings of boredom, frustration, worthlessness, hopelessness, depression, and rejection. The truth is that gambling will only intensify all of those as losses pile up (with the exception of boredom).
7. Greed. The desire to get something for nothing. The Bible calls this a sin (Col. 3:5).

There are several signs of a gambling problem. Gamblers Anonymous (“Questions and Answers,” [www.gamblersanonymous.org/qna.html](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/qna.html), p. 3) gives the following three:

1. Inability and unwillingness to accept reality. Hence the escape into the dream world of gambling.
2. Emotional insecurity. A compulsive gambler finds he or she is emotionally comfortable only when “in action.”
3. Immaturity. A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort on their part seems to be the common character pattern of problem gamblers.

Some people believe that the casting of lots in biblical times was a form of gambling (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6, 8, 10). This is not so. The casting of lots was merely a method used to determine God’s will.

The only mention in the Bible of actual gambling is on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion when the soldiers gambled for His garment rather than splitting it up (Matt. 27:35). This is hardly a positive reflection on the practice of gambling. However, the Bible has much to say about greed, one of the primary motivations for gambling (Prov. 15:27; Ezek. 33:31; Matt. 23:25; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15; and Col. 3:5). Gambling also may be a response to a person’s covetousness (Prov. 1:19) or laziness (Prov. 21:25-26).

## II. The alternative to gambling (Phil. 4:19)

Gambling is an attempt to meet one’s own wants or needs, not through diligence and hard work or reliance on the graciousness of God, but through chance.

There is a difference between wants and needs. Alexander Maclaren (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 15, p. 71) says, “If we do not get what we want we may be quite sure that we do not need it. The axiom of Christian faith

is that whatever we do not obtain we do not require. Very desirable things may still not be necessary.” Paul S. Rees (*The Adequate Man: Paul in Philippians*, p. 121) says, “Full many a time the child of the Father will be called upon to leave the interpretation of ‘need’ in higher hands than his own. No set of Christians since St. Paul’s day find it so easy to erect their *wants* into *needs* and their *desires* into *necessities* as the Christians of the Anglo-Saxon world in this twentieth century.” We must learn to distinguish between what we want and what we really need.

God is able to meet “all” needs—not just part of them. There is no need that will go unmet. He will also meet them completely. The word translated “will meet” in Philippians 4:19 (NIV) is a word that means “to fill up” or “to complete” (see Strong’s #4137). There is no real need we might have that God is not able to fulfill completely.

The tense of the verb (future active indicative) also indicates that one may have to wait for God’s own timing to receive His supply. We must learn that the absence of an immediate answer to our need is not an indication of either inability or stinginess on His part. His delay may be part of teaching us to totally trust Him and wait patiently on Him.

The alternative to gambling is to learn contentment with what God bestows on us according to His grace. Brian L. Harbour (*Living Joyfully*, p. 121) says, “Chapter 4 (of Philippians) shows the contentment in Paul’s life. The reason for his contentment was that Paul had discovered the inalterable adequacy of God. His joy, his submissiveness, his purpose, his contentment—all are rooted in this declaration which is one of the Bible’s great promises.”

## **Conclusion:**

Andrew Glazer, a professional poker player who also writes a column on gambling for the *Detroit Free Press* (“Smart Gamblers Get Addicted, Too,” [www.freep.com](http://www.freep.com), February 1, 2002), says that even smart gamblers are subject to becoming addicted to gambling. Glazer describes one professional poker player who makes large sums of money when he plays poker. But the poker player/journalist has watched this man throw away thousands of dollars on games that he knows little about playing. Why? Because he is addicted to gambling. Glazer points out that lots of people who gamble think they are too smart to become addicted. But he has some strong words to say about that kind of thinking. “Intelligence is no guarantee against a gambling addiction. Being smart isn’t a safeguard. Don’t walk into a casino and think that only dumb people will lose lots of money, because smart people can lose lots of money too . . . few people are invulnerable to the lure of the bad bet, and before you walk into a casino convinced that your intelligence will save you from this lure, think again.”

## **What Can One Person Do?**

- Become familiar with the “Ten Questions About Gambling Behavior” that help in determining whether or not a person is addicted to gambling (see [www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)).
- Refer anyone you know who has a gambling problem to Gamblers Anonymous.

- Install a filtering system that prevents access to gambling sites on all your computers (see [www.bsafeonline.com/family](http://www.bsafeonline.com/family)).
- Never buy a lottery ticket or visit a casino. An addiction may begin that first time.
- Begin a gambler's recovery ministry in your church.
- Ask your church to purchase and use *Chance to Change*, a 13 week Christ-centered gambling recovery program (phone 1-800-475-9127 or visit [www.faithandfamily.com](http://www.faithandfamily.com) for more information or to order).

## SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own thoughts and reflections.

**Create Learning Readiness:** Using the information in the Context section of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide, describe the background for Paul's letter to the Philippians. Also share the material in the Introduction section.

Say: Gambling is a booming business in America today. According to an article in the student newspaper at Ohio State University, *The Lantern*, Internet gambling alone has jumped from \$2 billion in 2001 to \$6 billion in 2004. The article also states that between 15 percent and 35 percent of that amount is spent by college students.

Say: It is such big business that several colleges and universities are beginning college programs to train casino workers (see "Gambling Goes Academic in Calif.: Colleges to Offer Worker Training" in the accompanying Fact Sheet for more detail).

Ask: How would you define gambling? (After time for responses, cite the definitions given in point one of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Ask: What are some reasons people give for gambling? (Write answers on the board. After time for responses, state the seven reasons along with the comments given in point one of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide).

Say: There are many more reasons why people gamble that we haven't named today. (State the following reasons if they are not included in the list compiled above: to feel challenged, as a reward, be part of the crowd, to feel important, to feel powerful and in control, curiosity, as a hobby.)

Ask: Do you know people who gamble? Of all the reasons we've named, which do you think they would give for their gambling? Do you think some of the comments might be useful in trying to help them understand the folly of their gambling? Why or why not?

Say: There are at least three signs of gambling problems. (Using the material in point one of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide, describe the signs.)

Ask: Do the people that you know who gamble (if participants indicated earlier that they knew someone) exhibit any of these signs of a gambling problem? Can you think of any other signs that a person might show that would indicate a gambling problem?

Ask: What does the Bible say about gambling? (Allow time for responses. Write answers on the board.)

Say: Some people believe that the casting of lots in biblical times was a form of gambling (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 18:6, 8, 10). This is not so. The casting of lots was merely a method used to determine God's will. The only mention in the Bible of actual gambling is the on the day of Jesus' crucifixion when the soldiers gambled for His garment rather than splitting it up. This is hardly a positive reflection on the practice of gambling. (Have someone read Matt. 27:35.)

Ask other participants to read some of the following passages aloud: Prov. 1:19; Prov. 15:27; Prov. 21:25-26; Ezek. 33:31; Matt. 23:25; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15; and Col. 3:5. Ask participants to identify the attitude in each verse that might lead a person to gamble.

Say: Though the Bible does not give any specific reasons why a person might gamble, it does name some attitudes people have that might lead them to gamble.

Ask: Can you name any of those attitudes? (Write answers on the board. Using the material at the end of point one in the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide, cite the reasons given. Ask someone to look up and read aloud the passage of Scripture describing each one.)

Say: In Philippians 4:19, Paul stated that we can rely on God to meet our needs. (Have participants read the passage from several different translations if available.)

Say: For many people, gambling is an attempt to meet one's own wants or needs, not through diligence and hard work or reliance on the graciousness of God, but through chance.

Ask: What is the difference between wants and needs? (After responses, read quotes from Alexander Maclaren and Paul Rees in point two of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.)

Ask: According to Paul, how much of our need is God able to meet?

Say: Paul also indicates that God is able to meet our needs completely. The word translated "will meet" in the NIV is a word that means "to fill up" or "to complete."

There is also an indication that we may sometimes have to wait on God's answer to our needs. The verb is a future tense that indicates God's answer may not be immediate.

Ask: Does that mean that God is unable to meet our need or that He is stingy? What other reason might there be for God to wait in meeting our needs? (To teach us patience and trust)

Say: The alternative to gambling is to learn how to be content with what God gives. (Read Brian Harbour quote in point two of the accompanying Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.)

Say: This week, I want you to think of some reasons against playing games of chance you would give someone who tempted you to gamble. I'll ask you to share those with the group next week.