

# GAMBLING

Betting Your Life Away



June Hunt



HOPE  
for the Heart



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JUNE HUNT



AspirePress

Torrance, California



Gambling: Betting Your Life Away  
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Aspire Press, a division of Rose Publishing, Inc.

4733 Torrance Blvd., #259

Torrance, California 90503 USA

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Printed in the United States of America  
010513DP

# CONTENTS

<b>Definitions</b> .....	9
What Is Gambling? .....	10
What Are Different Types of Gambling?.....	14
What Are Two Types of Compulsive/Pathological Gamblers? .....	18
What Is God's Heart on Gambling?.....	22
<b>Characteristics</b> .....	27
What Are the Three Stages of Compulsive Gambling? .....	28
What Are General Characteristics of Problem Gamblers? .....	32
What Are Signs of Problem Gambling? .....	35
What Are Characteristics of Compulsive/Pathological Gamblers? .....	36
<b>Causes</b> .....	39
What Attracts People to Become Gamblers? .....	40
What Is the Root Cause of Gambling Addictions? .....	43
What Is the Worst Gamble with the Greatest Risk?.....	47
<b>Steps to Solution</b> .....	52
How to Know Whether You Are a Problem Gambler .....	56
How to Target a Transformed Life .....	61
How Objective Data Promotes Prevention .....	67
How to Walk Your Way Out of Debt .....	71
How to Conduct a Crisis Intervention.....	74
How to Grasp What the Bible Says about Gambling.....	81

Dear friend,

I, too, have been skeptical. I didn't know what to think. Imagine this scene:

Inside the banquet hall: commendation. Outside the banquet hall: condemnation.

He is one of 32 players in the National Football League receiving the Ed Block Courage Award, a prestigious prize for demonstrating a steadfast commitment to sportsmanship and courage. His teammates voted unanimously for him. To them, no one shined more—on and off the football field—than their Philadelphia Eagles' quarterback.

He is genuinely grateful for the group's support, responding, "I'm very humbled to be here. I'm blessed to be voted by my peers to be here. This is an opportunity I will cherish forever."<sup>1</sup> But a chiding crowd outside isn't cherishing a single moment. A protest sign tells a sobering tale: "No Award for Dog Killers."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, many in the crowd have not forgotten the infamous moment in December of 2007, when Michael Vick was sentenced to 23 months in prison for running a brutal dogfighting ring, supplying gambling money, and then lying about it.

To be sure, the crimes committed on Michael's 15-acre property in rural Virginia were nothing short of deplorable. Abhorrent tales surfaced at the trial: Pit bulls were tortured and killed for substandard performance. Electrocution, drowning, and hanging were the malicious means used to dispose

of dogs that had outlived their usefulness. Smaller dogs were abused and killed while serving as “bait dogs.” Michael, himself, admitted to killing up to eight pit bulls and bankrolling the dogfighting operation named “Bad Newz Kennels.”<sup>3</sup>

For these heinous crimes, Vick served every minute of his nearly two-year prison sentence.

After his release, however, Michael approached The Humane Society of the United States, offering to be a part of the solution to the gambling-fueled crime of dogfighting. Named the Associated Press’ 2010 “Comeback Player of the Year,”<sup>4</sup> the star quarterback now travels the country speaking at churches, schools, and community events in an effort to steer at-risk youth away from the savage sport that can command tens of thousands of dollars per bet. According to Michael Markarian, COO of the National Humane Society, “[The children] are really moved after they hear Michael Vick’s story. It turns them away from dogfighting.”<sup>5</sup>

Michael has made peace with God and says, “The main thing is, I don’t want to disappoint God.”<sup>6</sup> While in prison, he fully yielded his life to Christ and now makes Him the priority in his life.

A key figure in helping Michael stay on course in his walk with Christ was Tony Dungy, former coach of the Indianapolis Colts—winners of Super Bowl XLI in 2007. Tony visited Michael in prison, called at least once a week, and maintained close contact after his release. Aware of the critical role that accountability and support play in recovery, this

exceptional Christian coach helped Michael rebuild his life so that it would no longer be controlled by gambling, but instead be controlled by God.

Michael heavily leaned on his mentor during the first year following his release from prison, not anticipating the tremendous struggle he would face in the transition. “I thought the transition would be easy, but it was hard,” Michael recalls. “I did things I never thought I would do, like studying and working by myself. I stayed close to my faith, constant in prayer, and close to Tony’s calls and texts.”<sup>7</sup>

Michael’s determination to manifest a redeemed life is driven by one word: *disappointment*. “I don’t want to disappoint my family, Tony, or Roger (Goodell, the NFL commissioner). God has blessed me with a second chance—that is something I will value forever. I don’t want to let Him down.”<sup>8</sup>

While God offers Vick a second chance, many former fans and animal lovers have made no such allowance, as evidenced by a second protest sign outside the award ceremony: “Vick: We Have Not Forgotten.”

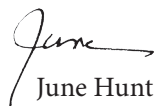
Make no mistake, God hated Michael’s inhumane treatment toward the very animals He created. He hated Michael’s addiction to the gambling and bloodlust associated with dogfighting. Even so, God never gave up on Michael because he is also one of His creations and now, one of His children. Since Michael received Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior, not only are his sins forgiven, they are remembered no more.

Yes, the Lord says, “*I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more*” (Hebrews 8:12). Contrary to the condemning accusers who refuse to forgive, God is holding a sign in heaven that reads, “Michael: I Have Forgotten.”

Have you secretly struggled with a gambling addiction? Do you personally understand this painful predicament? Today is the day God can forgive—and forget—your compulsive gambling. He wants to *and He will* when you finally surrender your will to His will.

My prayer is that the *biblical hope and practical help* found within these pages will be powerfully used by God to set you free.

Yours in the Lord's hope,

  
June Hunt



# GAMBLING

## Betting Your Life Away

Pete Rose, nicknamed “Charlie Hustle,” delighted baseball fans for decades by slamming balls past dazed outfielders and scoring runs that put him at the top of his game and at the top of his league. He won the National League Batting Title and the Gold Glove Award as an outfielder. He was named the league’s Most Valuable Player, and he was MVP in the World Series. His biggest baseball accomplishment came when the celebrated slugger broke Ty Cobb’s all-time batting record with hit number 4,193.<sup>9</sup>

In 1989 baseball great Pete Rose was tagged with another title—“gambler”—which left a lingering shadow over his once shining reputation. He should have heeded this biblical warning.

**“The prudent see danger  
and take refuge, but the simple  
keep going and pay the penalty.”  
(Proverbs 22:3)**



## DEFINITIONS

Although Pete Rose grew up in Cincinnati, a city with a reputation for conservatism, his boyhood neighborhood gave a black eye to that reputation. Bars and nightclubs lined the streets. Inside was an overabundance of roulette wheels, slot machines, and tables filled with blackjack, craps, and poker players. Resembling a mini Las Vegas, bookies were readily available to assist with wagers on horse races, and madams promoting prostitution brashly posted signs for all to see.

Pete first accompanied his father to the racetrack at age six, and countless trips back continually fueled his exhilaration for the thrill of the “big win.” For thirty years Pete was a “regular” at the racetrack, with more than a dozen “Pick 6” tickets winning him more than a million dollars.<sup>10</sup>

Pete expanded his gambling experience to wagering on sports, with football and basketball being his favorites. He quickly discovered that the games became more exciting when he played the dual role of both spectator and gambler. But despite some big wins, Pete regretfully admitted there were many more big losses, “and not just money.”<sup>11</sup> Sadly, to gamble is to run the risk of one day saying ...

**“Yet when I hoped for good,  
evil came; when I looked for light,  
then came darkness.”  
(Job 30:26)**

## WHAT IS Gambling?

Athletes participate in sporting events and play to win, while spectators watch the play and speculate about who will win. Some spectators place bets on the outcome. The athlete hopes to achieve a reward by winning, while the gambler hopes to achieve a reward by picking the winner.

Both winning the race and winning the bet on the race are accompanied by an emotional and chemical high that can be as addictive as any drug-induced high. Likewise, winning can create a compulsion to place bet after bet, perhaps initially lining the pockets, but then ultimately emptying them.

Additionally, whether beating the competitor or beating the odds, the urge to win can take precedence over every relationship, every responsibility, and every resolve of the will. Some are greedy for money, others for fame, and still others for power, but all are pursuing the exhilaration of the high!

In contrast, the biblical book of wisdom states ...

**“Better a little with the fear of the LORD  
than great wealth with turmoil.”  
(Proverbs 15:16)**

- ▶ **Gambling** is betting or taking a calculated risk for monetary or personal gain when the outcome is uncertain. Various terms are commonly used in the world of gambling:
  - **Wagering money** on games of chance or skill (or “gaming”) with the hope of winning more money. (Classic betting games include

poker, blackjack, dice, bingo, roulette, and slot machines.)

- **Laying bets** on the winner of a future competition (putting money on horse and dog races, boxing and wrestling matches, chicken and dog fights, sports car races, and other sporting events).
- **Taking a chance** on a “long shot” (lotteries with astronomical odds; the odds of winning a Powerball jackpot are 195,249,054 to 1.4).<sup>12</sup>
- **Risking the loss** of something highly valuable (gambling away a month’s salary, savings account, school tuition, car, house, even an inheritance).
- **Staking your life** on something dangerous or rash; endangering something or someone because of risky behavior (from drag racing to cheating on taxes and not repaying the Mafia).
- ▶ **Pari-mutuel gambling** occurs when gamblers aren’t making wagers against “the house” (the gaming establishment), but rather against fellow gamblers.<sup>13</sup>
  - Includes a percentage of total winnings that are fixed, but the amount a winner receives depends on the total amount bet by all gamblers
  - Involves a “betting pool in which those who bet on competitors finishing in the first three places share the total amount bet minus a percentage for management”<sup>14</sup>

- Comprises the most common type of racetrack gambling (for example, horse and dog races)
- ▶ **Trifecta** (also known as a triple) is a system of betting in which the gambler must pick the first three winners in the correct sequence (from the Latin root *tri*, which means “three,” and *fecta*, which means “perfect”).
- ▶ **Gaming** refers to gambling on games of chance, especially casino and video gambling.
- ▶ **Gamblers’** number one downfall can be their struggle with greed.
  - Greed is a selfish, excessive desire for more than what is needed.<sup>15</sup>
  - “Greed” in Greek is *pleonexia*, which means “striving for material possessions,” usually by taking advantage of another.<sup>16</sup> Notice this warning from Jesus: “*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions*” (Luke 12:15).
- ▶ **Gamblers** are typically enticed by coveting.
  - “Covet” in Hebrew is the word *chamad*, which means “to delight in, to desire,” and is used both positively and negatively.<sup>17</sup>
  - Covet means to strongly desire what belongs to another or to be consumed with envy. The last of the Ten Commandments says, “*You shall not covet ...*” (Exodus 20:17).

Those who engage in gambling not only run the risk of losing their money, but also losing their freedom. Casinos are full of those first entrapped and then enslaved by this addiction. But gambling can also result in death: death of a personal relationship or death of a right relationship with God.

The Bible says ...

**“There is a way that appears to be right,  
but in the end it leads to death.”  
(Proverbs 16:25)**

## **Self-Controlled Gambling**

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**QUESTION:** “What could be wrong with trying to supplement my earned income with occasionally gambling if I can control my impulses?”

**ANSWER:** Gambling is the effort to quickly increase your income by putting your confidence in luck rather than consistently entrusting your life to the sovereign Lord.

- ▶ Gambling breeds greed. Research has shown that the number of compulsive gamblers increases between 100% and 550% when legalized gambling is brought into an area.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ Within 50 miles of a casino, the prevalence of multiple problems and compulsive gamblers roughly doubles (called the “50-2x Rule”).<sup>19</sup>

**“The plans of the diligent lead to profit  
as surely as haste leads to poverty.”  
(Proverbs 21:5)**

## WHAT ARE Different Types of Gambling?

According to Pete Rose, “Ask any real gambler and he’ll tell you: It ain’t about the money—it’s about the action!”<sup>20</sup> Pete admitted that his gambling became out of control after breaking Ty Cobb’s batting record. After such a monumental accomplishment, the need for the next thrill consumed his life, and gambling fueled that needed exhilaration.

“The more I gambled, the more I needed to gamble,” he confessed. “And the more I lost, the more I tried to double-up to win back what I had already lost. I kept pushing the limit until I was so mixed up.”<sup>21</sup> Pete was on the wrong road, doing everything except what was right. The first book of the Bible warns ...

**“If you do not do what is right,  
sin is crouching at your door; it desires to  
have you, but you must rule over it.”  
(Genesis 4:7)**

Once the exhilarating ecstasy of winning has captured the mind, will, and emotions, all bets are off on the likelihood that people will find freedom on their own. Only the transforming work of the Holy Spirit has the power to bring freedom and to sustain freedom. Compulsive behaviors are always dangerous because they can become all-consuming to the point of taking control of people, altering their belief systems and driving risky behaviors. Choice is surrendered and self-control is stripped of its power as the compulsion to gamble rules and reigns.