



Close to Home Study Guide

Dealing with Gambling

1. Opening (1 minute)*

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

Dear God, some of us are carrying heavy burdens and we are weary. Draw us to yourself and give us rest. Help us to learn from you and follow in your way to life and peace. Amen.

2. Story-telling (7 minutes)

Summarize Barb’s story. How did she start gambling? What factors led her to continue? What finally led her to stop? What resources were especially helpful to her? If appropriate, ask how many in the group know someone who has a problem with gambling. How is their experience similar to or different from Barb’s?

3. Review of pamphlet (10 minutes)

- Review the definitions and statistics on gambling in “The problem of gambling” on pages 4-5. Also, look at the side-bar on page 5 and the various phases of gambling addiction given in the side-bar on page 11. What stands out to the group as you look over this information? Why is gambling so potentially destructive?
- Given the problems associated with gambling, why is this increasingly accepted and available in the U.S. and Canada? For a provocative article on this question, see “Russian Roulette” by Phil Wagler, at <http://www.thirdway.com/wv/> (7/31/2009.)
 - What arguments favor lotteries and the gaming industry?
 - What local agencies or programs receive funding or donations from lottery receipts? Is this acceptable? Why or why not?
 - Which type of gambling is most accessible or popular in your community? What problems result? Who is asking questions about this or organizing to address these problems?

4. Reading of Scripture text (14 minutes)

- Read the story of the crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17. If there is time, act out the story or give everyone the opportunity to be the bent-over woman and hear Jesus’ words, “...you are set free from your ailment.” What did people notice about this experience? What feelings did they have?
- Read paragraphs 2-5 of “Gambling, the Bible, and the Christian story” on pages 6-7. What other Christian teachings has the group heard about gambling? Why was Barb so reluctant to talk with her pastor? If someone in your congregation had a gambling problem, who would they go to?

*The suggested time frames are for a 45-minute session. With more discussion and storytelling, you will need to adjust upward, and possibly extend to a second session.

- Notice how often shame and guilt accompany gambling. Some understand guilt as a healthy emotion that allows us to know when we've done something wrong, whereas shame is a negative feeling imposed by society or the people around us. How do you define shame and guilt? Where do these feelings come from and how do they help or hinder one in seeking help?
- Read the section, "Trusting God's love and grace." Notice especially the last paragraph. Why was it important for Barb to experience God's unconditional love? What other resources helped her find release from her addiction?

5. Steps toward healing (12 minutes)

- Examine the "Steps toward wholeness" on page 8-9. Which step might be the most difficult? What are some specific ways the congregation can walk alongside someone who struggles with gambling?
- Why is it so important for people to talk with others, as well as understand their motivation for gambling?
- Return to Barb's story. What could she have done differently to manage the stress and depression she experienced, in order to resist the temptations of gambling?
- What resources are available in your community for dealing with some of the underlying issues which often lead to addictions?
- Why is it also necessary to recognize that "financial gain does not come through games of chance" (Step #6)? Why is this recognition so difficult? How does our society support the myth that financial gain through chance is possible, even desirable?
- Highlight the sentence in Step #7: "Gambling addiction....is not the core of who you are." How does your congregation teach and demonstrate this truth?
- Provide information on local resources, therapists, and 12-step groups which assist in dealing with gambling addiction.
- Encourage the church library to purchase the books listed on page 11.
- Pray for all those struggling with gambling, as well as their family members and friends, that all would find grace, release and healing.

6. Closing (1 minute)

Loving God, we know you long to set us free from bondage. Yet, sometimes we are like the woman in the synagogue, bent over with anxiety, shame, or habits we cannot break. Heal us. we pray. Fill us with your love, strength and courage and help us stand upright. May we also walk with others on this healing journey and rejoice as they grow strong and whole. Amen.



This study guide is written by Linda Gehman Peachey, Director for Women's Advocacy in the Peace and Justice Ministries section of Mennonite Central Committee US. It is one of a series of free downloadable study guides for the Close to Home pamphlets, which can be ordered from the Mennonite Publishing Network of the Mennonite Church (see www.mpn.net/closetohome) or the Mennonite Brethren Kindred Productions (www.kindredproductions.com/closetohome).