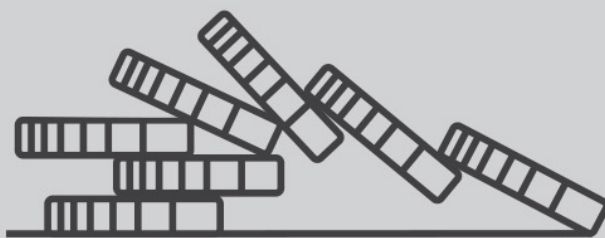




THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

GAMBLING: THE HIDDEN COSTS



LUKE RININGER

Contents

Introduction	3
Part One: The Appeal of Gambling—What’s Really at Stake?	4
The pull of the win	4
The myth of mastery	5
Mood swings and false highs	5
The unthinkable	6
A tragic story that could’ve been mine	7
The real question	7
Part Two: The Hidden Costs—Emotional, Relational, and Spiritual	8
What you don’t see at first	8
The emotional toll: an underestimated weight	8
The relational damage: trust erodes in the shadows	9
The spiritual gap: what happens in your heart	10
A hidden tax on the soul	10
Part Three: Turning from Idols—Repentance and Renewal	12
The idols we don’t recognize	12
The illusion of control	12
A story from the end of myself	13
Real repentance is possible	14
The lie of “one last time”	14
Transformed minds, transformed lives	14
Part Four: Walking in Freedom—New Habits, New Heart	16
Walking out what God has worked in	16
Stand firm—don’t go back	16
Remove the temptation	17
Empowered by the Spirit—you’re not alone	17
Placed in a family	18
Practice new habits	18
Growth takes time—think long-term like a strong stock	19

When you fall, get back up	19
Keep your eyes on Jesus	20
Conclusion.....	21

Introduction

Gambling often begins with excitement—a little thrill, a spark of possibility. It may start with betting on one game, filling out a March Madness bracket, or testing a new “failsafe” system you came up with for that trip to the casino. For a while, gambling might even feel like it’s working. The casino’s lights, energy, and adrenaline—they draw you in. Maybe you even walk away with more than you started. Gambling comes with a high and its real and really addictive.

But let’s be honest—you’ll run out of money long before the casino does. The house is built to win. These are billion-dollar industries because people like you and me keep going back. Over time, what once felt harmless and fun can quietly grow into something you no longer control. You stop gambling for entertainment and start gambling because you need to. And soon, the addiction takes far more than it ever gave.

If you’re reading this, maybe you’ve already begun to feel those losses. Maybe they’re financial—money you didn’t have, debts you didn’t expect. Maybe they’re relational—trust broken, relationships strained, phone calls avoided. Or maybe the losses are spiritual. You feel far from God, numb to prayer, empty after each bet. You might be tired of hiding, tired of chasing that next win, or tired of asking yourself how things got so out of hand. If that’s you, you’re not alone—and you’re definitely not beyond hope.

This life skill guide isn’t here to shame you. It’s here to help you walk honestly through your temptation and rely on Jesus to help. You don’t need to clean yourself up before turning to him. Jesus does the cleaning, and he wants you to trust him in all things. This guide is designed to help you look beneath the surface—to understand not just your behaviors but your desires. Gambling is rarely just about money. It’s often about control, escape, affirmation, fear, or emptiness. God sees all of that—and he offers something better.

This life skill guide will explore the appeal of gambling and the lies it tells, the hidden costs that often go unnoticed, the idols that pull us away from God, and the invitation to repentance, renewal, and lasting freedom.

Your worth is not measured by your wins or losses, but by Christ—who did not gamble as if he could lose but went all in on the cross to save everyone who would call on him. He gave it all so that you could be free, forgiven, and made new.

There is a better path; not an easy one albeit—but a true one. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The path away from gambling and toward freedom is not found in self-effort, luck, or willpower. It’s found in Jesus alone—the only way to true life, joy, and everlasting peace.

Let’s begin the journey.

Part One: The Appeal of Gambling—What’s Really at Stake?

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”—Ecclesiastes 5:10

The pull of the win

I’ve always been competitive. I hated losing (still do, if the truth be told). When I discovered gambling, it felt like the perfect extension of that drive. I was studying to become a math teacher—someone who saw patterns and probabilities, someone who thought, “I can figure this out. I can beat the system.” And at times, I thought I did.

I remember walking out of a casino with thousands more than I walked in with. I felt invincible. There was a rush, a sense of pride—like I had outsmarted the odds. At the craps table, when the dice were hot and the whole crowd was cheering, the atmosphere felt electric. I was the one on fire. There was applause, camaraderie, and adrenaline. It felt like winning a championship.

It wasn’t just about money; it was about identity—validation. Gambling gave me something else I didn’t even realize I was craving: admiration. It created an atmosphere where talking about your wins made you sound smarter than everyone else in the room. After all, you don’t often hear people boast in their losses. You hear stories about hitting a big parlay, multiplying your buy-in at the poker table, or walking away with a \$10,000 slot machine win. Everyone who talks about gambling sounds like a winner. So, I thought, “Why not me? Why couldn’t I be the one who figured it out, beat the odds, and built a life off a system that worked?”

I read books on how to count cards and promoted the best system to win in craps. I subscribed to experts who sold “can’t-miss” sports picks. I poured time and money into learning the angles. If there was an edge to be found, I wanted to find it.

I didn’t view it as reckless. I saw it as preparation. While others saw gambling as chance, I convinced myself it was a game of skill. The irony was that the more I thought I was in control, the more I was actually being controlled.

And do you want to know the truth? The wins were never enough. I always wanted more—the next big hit, the next rush, the next story to tell. I wasn’t just gambling for money, I was gambling for meaning. The system was beating me, and I was becoming more addicted by the minute. The casino made sure I stayed hooked: free meals, free rooms, and even free bets at the casino and sportsbook. I felt like royalty, and I had barely graduated high school. Unfortunately, none of those “gifts” were really free; they were bait to keep me coming back and staying even longer. Eventually, I lost all my winnings—plus a lot more.

These casinos and gambling platforms always win. They are built to win. That's why they're multi-billion-dollar organizations. People like you and me are the ones funding their success.

Gambling had become a counterfeit reward system. It promised excitement, wealth, admiration—but what it actually gave me was restlessness, anxiety, and spiritual emptiness.

The myth of mastery

Gambling preys on people who are wired like me—people who hate to lose, who believe they can beat the odds, people who deep down think that the more money they have, the more fulfilling life will be.

I had a “system” (so does everyone), but systems don't work when the game is rigged. That's the illusion: if you're smart enough, quick enough, strategic enough, you'll win—but it's a lie. As Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.” Gambling doesn't bring satisfaction—it teases and whispers false of promises. Then it draws you into depths you never thought you'd enter. With each cycle, the hunger grows louder.

What started as fun quickly turned into fixation. My mind was always running—calculating odds, tracking spreads, looking for the next “sure thing.” The high from a win wore off quickly, and the lows from a loss loitered longer each time. It became less about winning and more about numbing—numbing fear, disappointment, and the growing awareness that something was deeply broken inside me.

It wasn't just a hobby—it became a false identity. Gambling told me I was sharp, clever, strategic. It told me I was different from the average bettor. But those were lies. I wasn't beating the system. I was sinking into it and every attempt to master my addiction only resulted in it tightening its grip.

Mood swings and false highs

I didn't notice how much gambling began to control my emotional state. A win made me feel invincible but a loss sent me into a spiral. My mood was no longer my own—it belonged to the outcome of each bet. My sense of worth was being dictated by numbers and odds.

Friends began to distance themselves. I stopped going to casinos with others and started going alone. I watched the games I bet on alone. People didn't want to be around me when I lost, and I couldn't blame them. I became irritable, angry, and desperate. Still, I convinced myself the next win would fix everything.

Eventually, I wasn't even betting on things I cared about. I was placing money on tennis matches I didn't watch and cricket tournaments in places I'd never heard of. At that point, it wasn't about enjoyment or strategy. I was just trying to fill the God-sized hole in my heart.

I can still remember the feeling of waking up and immediately checking scores from halfway around the world. I had gone from calculated risk to blind obsession. That's when I knew I wasn't chasing success anymore. I was trying to escape.

The emotional rollercoaster was exhausting. Joy was replaced by anxiety. Peace was replaced by panic. I didn't recognize myself anymore.

The unthinkable

Gambling took me places I never thought I'd go. I began stealing—from friends, family, coworkers, and strangers. Many were people who trusted me. I maxed out credit cards and lied repeatedly to cover it all. The worst part was how normal it all felt. One compromise led to another until my conscience was barely a whisper.

I didn't feel guilty about what I was doing. All I cared about was trying to get my money back, and I was able to justify my actions in my own mind with thoughts like, "They'll understand once I hit big again. I just need one more shot." That kind of thinking is toxic—and it's terrifying how convincing it can become.

But the truth is, it wasn't just about gambling anymore. It started there, but it didn't end there—it spread. Once I was okay with lying, I found it easier to cheat. Once I justified stealing, I stopped seeing people as people—they became means to an end. I was consumed with self-preservation and pleasure. I crossed lines I never thought possible.

At the time, I wouldn't have called it sin. I didn't know Jesus. I didn't understand the language of conviction or repentance. I called it being "desperate." I called it "survival." I told myself, "Everybody's got issues. I mean, at least I'm not a murderer." But deep down, I knew I was breaking something sacred. I just didn't have the words for it yet.

As I drew closer to rock bottom, my life lost all sense of meaning and purpose. I wasn't living anymore. I was simply surviving.

A wise pastor once said, "Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay, and cost you more than you ever wanted to pay." That was my story.

And gambling wasn't the only sin I got tangled in. Because I didn't know Jesus, and because I didn't have him anchoring my life, the sin that began with money eventually spread into other areas of my life too. When you ignore conviction in one area, it gets easier to ignore it everywhere else.

Sin is never static—it grows and infects, and when we try to manage it instead of kill it, sin manages us until it mangles us. At the right time, God intervened and radically changed my life by setting me free from the grip of gambling. And He is ready and willing to free you too.

A tragic story that could've been mine

I know a man who hid his gambling for years. His family had no idea, and when everything finally came to light, the damage was devastating. He lost his house, his marriage, and his daughters. It wasn't that this man didn't love his family but that his addiction to gambling had grown too big to hide and too powerful to fight on his own.

That could've been my story. Maybe it's already your story—or close to it. More than money is at stake here; peace, integrity, relationships, and your soul are also in jeopardy.

The real question

What is it you're really chasing? Maybe it's the feeling of control in a life that feels uncertain. Maybe it's the approval that comes from a big win, or the rush that helps you forget your stress, pain, or regret. Maybe it's the dream of finally getting ahead—of proving to others, or yourself, that you're not a failure.

Gambling doesn't just offer money. It offers a false sense of meaning.

Jesus doesn't offer empty promises. He offers rest. He says to the hurting:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

—Matthew 11:28–30

If you're worn out—mentally, emotionally, spiritually—he's not waiting to scold you. He's ready to carry you. The road ahead may be hard, but you won't walk it alone. He is the only one who can give you true and everlasting rest. And when you finally step out of the fog, you'll find what gambling never gave you: peace. Not the peace of a winning streak, but the peace of a Savior who loves you, even when you lose.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think gambling has offered you emotionally, socially, or spiritually?
2. How has your sense of identity or mood been tied to winning or losing?
3. What false promises have you believed, and what have they actually cost you?

A Prayer to Begin

Father, forgive me for relying on money more than You. Help me to follow You in every area of my life, and be all in for You. Amen.

Part Two: The Hidden Costs—Emotional, Relational, and Spiritual

“A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.”—Proverbs 28:20

What you don’t see at first

No one starts gambling thinking it will destroy their life. The appeal is fast money, fun, and maybe even a chance to prove something. It begins with excitement and possibility—a win here, a hot streak there, the sense that you’ve found something that works.

But the damage gambling causes doesn’t usually show up all at once. It creeps in quietly, masked by the adrenaline and the thrill. The wins are front and center in your perception over everything else. Making the last thing you notice those things you’re losing. By the time you realize the firm grip gambling has on you and what this addiction is really costing you, the pattern is already deeply rooted and the habit is formed.

The losses aren’t just financial—they’re emotional, relational, and spiritual. As Proverbs 28:20 warns, “Whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.” The race for quick money doesn’t lead to peace—it leads to pain. There’s a trail of destruction that’s easy to overlook until the damage becomes insurmountable.

This session is about seeing the trail clearly. It’s about identifying the deeper costs—the ones no one talks about when they’re cheering a win, hiding a loss, or placing “just one more” bet.

The emotional toll: an underestimated weight

Gambling doesn’t just affect your wallet—it affects your heart. It begins to shape how you see yourself, how you regulate your emotions, and how you process your day-to-day life. A good day is when you win, a bad day is when you lose, and somewhere along the way, your mood becomes dependent on odds, outcomes, and numbers that are completely out of your control.

There’s a specific kind of anxiety that comes with gambling. You may feel it before placing a bet, while the event plays out, or afterward as you obsess over what you should have done differently. It may show up in your body as restlessness, tension, or insomnia. Emotionally, you may experience anger, numbness, or even despair. And when you lose, the pressure to win it back builds quickly—often at the cost of your peace, your sleep, and your sanity.

This is what emotional captivity looks like. You’re no longer managing your emotions—they’re managing you. A win might make you feel untouchable. A loss might make you feel worthless. In both cases, your worth is tied to something that cannot hold the weight of your soul.

Over time, your sense of identity becomes entangled with your performance as a gambler. I once placed a massive 12-game parlay during March Madness, chasing a dream payout that would've crossed six figures. One by one, the first eleven teams won. I was on the edge of a life-changing win—until the twelfth and final game went into overtime. I still remember sitting there, heart pounding, as it came down to the last possession. A player from the opposing team launched a shot from nearly three-quarters of the court. It went in. Game over. My team lost. And just like that, \$9,000 vanished—along with the fantasy of what I thought that win would fix.

The emotional high was replaced with a crushing low. I wasn't just disappointed—I was sick. It felt like everything had been building to that moment, and it unraveled in an instant. That's the emotional torment gambling creates: irrational hope followed by devastating collapse.

It's no longer just something you do—it starts to define who you are, and that's a dangerous place to live.

The relational damage: trust erodes in the shadows

Gambling is rarely just a personal problem. Its consequences ripple outward, impacting those nearest to you. Maybe you've already seen this in your own life—relationships strained by secrecy, distance, or financial stress. Maybe you've begun to hide things from your spouse, your parents, or your friends. Maybe you've found yourself canceling plans, dodging questions, or withdrawing emotionally from people you love.

Even when intentions are good, lies are often the first domino to fall. A small excuse here, a delayed payment there. Promises are made to keep the peace, but eventually they get broken. Trust, once damaged, is hard to rebuild, and when those around you can't trust your words or your actions, the relationships begin to fracture.

Perhaps you've borrowed money and didn't repay it. Maybe you've made commitments and failed to follow through. Or maybe you've even taken money that wasn't yours—telling yourself you'd return it as soon as things turned around. But the thing about gambling is that “when things turn around” rarely comes—and if it does, it's never enough.

And then comes the isolation. You may start to believe that no one would understand what you're going through—that if people really knew, they would walk away. So, you keep your distance and avoid conversations that could expose you. What you need more than anything isn't another win—it's being fully known and fully loved.

That kind of love can only be found in God and he already knows everything. There's nothing you've hidden that he hasn't seen. God's not turning away from you, he's waiting to heal what's been broken.

The spiritual gap: what happens in your heart

At first, gambling might not feel like a spiritual problem. It might feel like a strategy, a hobby, or a way to blow off steam. But over time, it can slowly change your heart—and that's when the spiritual danger becomes clear.

Gambling competes for your affections. It grabs your attention, consumes your time, and draws your trust away from God and toward something else. When gambling becomes a source of hope, relief, control, or meaning, it begins to function like a god. It becomes an idol—one you rely on when life feels uncertain or painful.

If you're a Christian struggling with a temptation to gamble, slowly and gradually you may find yourself no longer interested in praying, opening your Bible, or seeking God because your focus is elsewhere. Deep down you know what you're doing is wrong, but you don't want to address it—not yet at least. Eventually, wins start to feel like confirmation that your strategy is working, while losses start to feel like punishment or “bad luck.” Either way, the center of your trust has shifted away from God and toward yourself.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In other words, what you value most will always shape what you love most. If your thoughts, hopes, and plans revolve around gambling, your heart will follow.

One of the clearest signs of this shift is how much time you spend thinking about, planning, or recovering from gambling. Check your screen time. Track your thoughts. Are you more fluent with betting lines than with Scripture? Are you more emotionally affected by a win or loss than you are by a worship song, a sermon, or time in prayer?

God hasn't stopped loving you but you may have stopped listening. When you stop listening, your soul grows numb. Not dead—but distant. You're not abandoned. You're just distracted. And distractions are the enemy of intimacy with Christ.

The good news is this: God's love is not performance-based. You don't have to earn your way back. You just have to turn toward Him, and He will meet you there, every time.

A hidden tax on the soul

What's the real cost of gambling (and no, it's not just losing money)? The real cost is the hidden tax on your soul—the constant emotional drain, the broken relationships, the silence between you and God. These costs don't show up on a balance sheet, but they add up fast and they leave you depleted, ashamed, and exhausted.

If you've reached that place—or if you're headed there—you don't have to stay there. There is a way out. Proverbs 28:20 doesn't just warn against rushing after riches; it points toward something better: faithfulness. Faithfulness may not feel flashy. It won't give you the same

adrenaline as a hot streak but it gives you something that gambling never will—peace: peace with God, others, and yourself.

Faithfulness develops slowly. It's not about winning big; it's about walking daily—in repentance and with integrity and humility before God. It's about choosing honesty over secrecy, trust over control, and surrender over striving.

Gambling promises life but delivers loss. Jesus promises rest—and he delivers every time. He doesn't call you just to avoid sin. He calls you to a new way of life—a better and free life with himself at the center. The door to that life isn't locked. It opens the moment you decide to tell the truth, bring your sin to God in repentance and place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, Jesus died the death you and I deserve to die. And he rose to offer new life to all who believe in him. You don't have to carry the weight of your sin anymore. Jesus already paid the price.

Reflection Questions

1. Where have you seen gambling impact your emotional, relational, or spiritual life most clearly?
2. What patterns of hiding or avoidance have you noticed in yourself?
3. What might change if you trusted God with what you've been trying to manage on your own?

A Prayer to Begin

Father, I have tried to live life my own way and be my own god and savior. Please, help me to surrender everything to You and walk in Your truth. I don't want to hide anymore. Teach me to walk in light and live in freedom. Amen.

Part Three: Turning from Idols—Repentance and Renewal

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

The idols we don’t recognize

When we think of idols, we might picture statues or ancient altars. But in our world, idols are far more subtle. An idol is anything—good or bad—that begins to take God’s rightful place in our hearts. It’s what we run to for comfort, control, validation, escape, or identity. For many of us caught in the trap of gambling, this activity isn’t just a habit—it’s a god.

Slowly and quietly, gambling becomes more than entertainment—it becomes a master. Every master other than Jesus will eventually lead us into ruin.

Idols demand everything and give nothing in return. They entice us with control but enslave us to outcomes we can’t guarantee. They offer meaning but steal our peace. They whisper promises of a better life while slowly draining the life we already have.

Romans 12:2 calls us to something entirely different. Instead of being conformed to the world’s patterns—chasing pleasure, performance, and quick fixes—we’re invited to be transformed by renewing our minds. That transformation begins with repentance: turning from idols and turning back to the God who created us, loves us, and offers true life.

The illusion of control

One of the most deceptive aspects of gambling is the illusion of control. You study the lines, analyze the trends, build a system, and convince yourself that this time it’s going to work. Occasionally, it does—for a while but no amount of strategy can overcome a system built to take you down.

The deeper issue isn’t the system itself—it’s what we’re really trying to control. For many, gambling isn’t just about money. It’s about self-worth, stability, or the fantasy of finally proving we’re not failures. It becomes a way to fix something that feels broken inside.

Here’s the truth: no amount of success at the tables, on the apps, or with a bet can fix what only God was meant to heal. We’re not just looking for wins—we’re looking for peace, purpose, and identity—which cannot be found in odds or outcomes. God invites us to lay down the illusion, to surrender the need to control everything, and to stop trying to fix ourselves through idols that cannot save. Instead, God calls us to be transformed by his truth and grace.

A story from the end of myself

The last time I walked into a casino, I was 20 years old. I drove for over four hours by myself to Windsor, Canada. I don't remember the exact time I arrived, but I remember how quickly I lost control. Within 30 minutes of walking through the door, I had lost \$2,000. I wasn't just disappointed—I was depressed.

I drove back across the border to Detroit, found a branch of my bank, and withdrew more than \$5,000—money that had just been deposited to pay for my next college term. All my credit cards were maxed out. I had no other legal way to get more money. I wasn't thinking clearly and I was desperate to hit it big. So, I drove straight back to Windsor and before I knew it all \$5,000 was lost.

As I started the long drive home, I barely had enough gas in the tank to make the trip, and then, about two hours from my front door, I got a flat tire. I pulled over onto the shoulder, completely broken. I didn't just feel stuck—I was stuck. I had nowhere to turn or hide while on the side of the road, out of money, out of options, and out of hope.

There I was—literally on my knees, changing a tire in the dark, realizing I had nowhere to go and nothing left to give. I was empty. You know those memory flashes that hit you in moments like that? I remembered a few times I had been invited to church when I was younger. I used to think church was boring and Christians were weird. I mean, I believed in God, and Jesus sounded good—so I figured I was good, right? But in that moment, I had nowhere else to turn.

By the time I got home, it was just early enough that I could make it to the morning service at the church I once wrote off. That day, God radically changed my life.

I couldn't explain everything I felt in words but I knew I was a sinner. That part was easy to admit. I knew I wanted something different—something real. I wanted to live for a Father who loved me and a Savior who died for me. That day marked the beginning of a new life. Not because I fixed myself, but because Jesus met me in my brokenness and paid my debt in full.

It hasn't always been perfect. There are still moments I wrestled with shame. At times I feel the pull to gamble again. Through it all, God has been patient, gracious, and faithful. He didn't just forgive me—He walks with me, and I know I will never be the same.

Even now, 17 years later, writing this still brings tears to my eyes. Not because of how far I fell—but because of how far he reached to bring me home. What God did in me; he is ready and willing to do for you.

Real repentance is possible

Repentance is more than just regret. It's more than feeling sorry. It's turning away from sin, and turning toward God. It's not just about stopping bad behavior—it's about letting God renew your heart, mind, and desires.

Gambling is a sin—a particularly destructive one. If you're addicted to gambling or tempted to start, I urge you—repent of your sin and trust in Jesus.

Romans 12:2 doesn't tell us to just avoid the patterns of the world. It invites us to be transformed. That transformation doesn't happen through willpower—it happens through surrender. Through soaking in the truth of God's Word, confession, and trusting in His mercy more than your mistakes.

You don't need to be perfect to repent; you just need to be honest. You don't have to understand everything right now. You just have to bring your brokenness to the One who can heal it. Repentance is how we turn away from the idols that enslaved us—and how we return to the God who loves us. In that turning, everything begins to change.

The lie of "one last time"

Maybe you've thought, "Just one more time. Then I'll quit." That is the voice of addiction. It speaks softly but deceitfully. "One more time" never comes.

Once, in the middle of a desperate stretch, I bet \$900 on a horse. It wasn't even a good horse. I knew it didn't have a real shot (this horse basically only had three legs). But the idea that maybe—just maybe—this would be the win that changed everything was too strong. I spread \$300 across the board on this longshot, hoping for a miracle.

The horse broke before the race even started...That day I felt crushed. Not just because of the money, but because of what it revealed in me. I wasn't chasing fun—I was chasing fantasy. Hoping a bet would fix what was broken. That somehow, if I could just hit the right ticket, everything in my life would be okay.

But idols don't rescue. They destroy. They make promises they can't keep, and when everything falls apart, you're left carrying the shame.

Transformed minds, transformed lives

God doesn't just want to clean up your behavior. He wants to give you a new heart, mind, and identity. When you're saved, you're adopted into his family. You become a new creation—indwelt by the Holy Spirit, made for fellowship with the living God, and called to worship and grow in Christlikeness. You were not created to live in secrecy and shame; you were made to shine the light and truth of Christ to all those you come into contact with.

Renewal begins when we stop trying to fit into the world's patterns and start allowing God's truth to reshape the way we think. It's not about religion. It's about transformation. You may still feel a draw to gamble and hear the lies whispering in your head, but you don't have to listen to them. God's Word is louder, and his grace is stronger.

He can change your story, and he will—if you let him.

Reflection Questions:

1. What idols—such as control, success, approval, or escape—has gambling created in your life?
2. What has been your understanding of repentance, and how might that need to grow?
3. Where do you sense God calling you to surrender and trust Him more deeply?

A Prayer for Renewal

Father, I confess that I have chased after things that can never satisfy. I don't want to conform to this world any longer—I want to be transformed by You. Change my heart and help me walk in the freedom that comes through Christ alone. Amen.

Part Four: Walking in Freedom—New Habits, New Heart

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”—Galatians 5:1

Walking out what God has worked in

Freedom is not just something you feel in a moment—it’s something you live out day by day. By now, you’ve recognized gambling for what it really is: a destructive counterfeit that promises excitement and reward but leads to bondage, brokenness, and despair. You’ve also taken a hard look at what it has cost you emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. In the last session, you saw that real repentance means turning from false gods and returning to the living God who calls you to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus.

This final session is about moving forward—walking in freedom. It’s about learning to live as someone who’s been adopted by God, set apart by him, and empowered by his Spirit to live a new kind of life. It’s not about being perfect overnight. It’s about practicing new habits that flow from a new heart. This is the path of sanctification, the ongoing journey of becoming more like Jesus.

You may still feel vulnerable. You may still be tempted. You may still hear the lies whispering to you when life gets hard. But take heart—God is not done with you, and He’s not asking you to walk alone.

Stand firm—don’t go back

Paul’s words to the Galatians are urgent, “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” These early Christians had been set free by the gospel, but they were being tempted to return to rule following in order to merit God’s love rather than freely receive it in Christ. Paul saw it clearly—this was just another kind of bondage, and he pleads with them, “Don’t go back!”

For you, slavery came in the form of gambling. It may have begun as harmless entertainment, a game, a thrill but soon it became a chain. If you’re not careful, the pull to return will resurface—often when you’re tired, discouraged, or lonely.

You may think, “I can handle it this time. I’ve changed. I’ll set limits. I’ll just bet a little.” But that’s the same lie that trapped you before. Freedom in Christ means drawing a firm boundary. Not because you’re trying to earn God’s love, but because you already have it. You’re not trying to prove yourself anymore—you’re guarding what God has already given you. You’re free. Don’t submit again.

Remove the temptation

If you're serious about walking in freedom, you have to create space for that freedom to grow. That means removing the bait that once hooked you.

Start by deleting every gambling and sports betting app from your phone—do it right now. Don't wait until the end of this session—do it immediately. While you're at it, clear your browser history, block access to gambling sites, unsubscribe from the "betting experts," and set restrictions if needed. Most importantly, ask someone to help with accountability. You may even have them set a password protected restriction on gambling sites on your browser in order to make it harder for you to bet.

Some people might think that all sounds extreme but Jesus said, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away" (Matthew 5:30). He wasn't being literal—but he was deadly serious. If something is pulling you away from him, you shouldn't try to manage it—you must remove it and fast. After all, your soul is on the line.

This isn't about legalism. It's about freedom. You are choosing to eliminate what enslaved you so you can walk in the fullness of life God intends. You're not depriving yourself—you're protecting your soul.

Empowered by the Spirit—you're not alone

One of the greatest lies the enemy tells us is that we're on our own, and once we leave the casino or close the app, we're left to figure out this new life by sheer willpower but that couldn't be farther from the truth.

When you surrendered your life to Christ, you weren't just forgiven—you were filled. The Holy Spirit now dwells within you. He's your Helper, your Guide, your Comforter. He convicts you when you stray, empowers you to obey, and reminds you of your identity as a beloved child of God.

Galatians 5:16 tells us to, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Walking in freedom isn't about trying harder—it's about yielding more deeply to the Spirit's work in you.

Start your day with a simple prayer: "Father, fill me with your Holy Spirit. Help me to walk in Your way and not my own." You'll be amazed how He gently redirects your thoughts, renews your strength, and reshapes your affections over time. You're not alone. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in you.

Placed in a family

One of the remarkable things about becoming a Christian is realizing that being united to Jesus means being united to his people. Having God as your Father means having his children as your siblings. There is nowhere where this reality is made more clear for Christians than in the context of the local church. Sure, local churches aren't perfect. But if they're biblically ordered and healthy, the church stands as one of the best way for saved sinners to walk in the light.

Whether it be through hearing encouraging sermons, experiencing loving accountability from your fellow members, seeing corrective discipline exercised and rightly fearing the consequences of sin, or receiving rebuke from one of your elders, the local church is Jesus's plan to help you grow to look like him. If you're recovering from a gambling addiction, consider being honest with one of your elders or a few friends in the church who can walk alongside of you. If you don't have a church, consider going to "www.9Marks.org/churchsearch" to find a church that is healthy and ready to help you grow in Jesus.

Practice new habits

Breaking old habits isn't enough—you need new ones. You don't just stop gambling; you start living differently. This is where sanctification becomes practical. Sanctification is the process by which God makes you more like Jesus. Yes, you are sanctified now but sanctification is ongoing on this side of glory. It happens as you train your heart and mind to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Here are some key habits to begin building:

1. Renew Your Mind Daily

Romans 12:2 reminds us to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind." That means replacing the lies of gambling culture with the truth of God's Word. The more you read and meditate on Scripture, the more your desires begin to change.

You might begin with Psalms or the Gospels. Use a reading plan or devotional guide. Even ten minutes in the Bible each morning can re-center your mind on what truly matters. The battle is won or lost in your thoughts—so equip yourself.

2. Pray Honestly and Often

You don't need polished words or to sound like a thesaurus; just speak to your loving Father in a humble and reverent manner. Share everything with him: your thoughts, fears, victories, and temptations. Prayer is the lifeline of freedom.

Daniel prayed three times a day, even in exile. Jesus rose early to commune with the Father. The early church prayed in the midst of suffering. When prayer becomes your habit, you begin to see yourself and your circumstances through God's eyes—not just your own.

3. Tell the Truth—Stay Accountable

You weren't meant to fight this battle alone. Whether it's a friend, pastor, small group, or support program, you need people who know your struggle and speak truth to you.

Isolation is the playground of relapse but community is where healing grows. Choose someone who will ask the hard questions. Be honest, and if you stumble—run toward accountability, not away from it.

4. Invest in What Lasts

Gambling trained your heart to seek quick hits and fast wins but God teaches us to value faithfulness, patience, and long-term fruit.

Start small—invest in your relationships by calling a family member regularly, volunteering at your church, serving someone in need, or writing someone a letter sharing how much they have meant to you in your life. Every small act of faithfulness builds a foundation for joy.

Don't underestimate the power of consistency. You don't need a jackpot—you need a harvest, and a harvest comes with time.

Growth takes time—think long-term like a strong stock

Spiritual growth doesn't happen all at once. It's more like a long-term investment than a quick return. Think of sanctification like a strong stock in the market. Day to day, the price might rise or fall, have ups and downs, moments of doubt, struggle, and even failure. However, when you zoom out over five, ten, or twenty years, there is an upward trend.

That's what the Christian life is like. You may fall or stumble but if you keep seeking Christ, walking in the Spirit, and practicing new habits, the trajectory of your life will have an upward trend toward Christlikeness. Don't obsess over the daily fluctuations—focus on the long-term trend.

When you fall, get back up

Let's be honest: even with new habits, strong boundaries, and deep desire, you might still stumble. Freedom in Christ does not mean you'll never face temptation or failure. It means you know where to run when you do.

If you fall, don't give up. Don't spiral into shame or try to hide it. Confess it to God, bring it into the light, and reach out to someone. Repent quickly and start again. God's grace is not a one-time offer—it's a daily invitation.

Proverbs 24:16 says, "The righteous falls seven times and rises again."

Your freedom isn't dependent on a perfect record. It's dependent on a perfect Savior.

Keep your eyes on Jesus

Ultimately, walking in freedom is not about behavior management—it's about heart transformation, and that comes by keeping your eyes on Jesus.

When you remember what He did for you on the cross. . .

When you see how he walked out of the grave to give you a new life. . .

When you grasp how deep and wide His love is for you. . .

. . .you'll stop chasing lesser thrills. Your heart will no longer be satisfied with counterfeit hope.

This is the Christian life—not a life of sterile rule-following, but a life of vibrant love and joy in Jesus Christ, and it's what you were made for.

Reflection Questions

1. What practical steps have you already taken to remove access to gambling? What else needs to go?
2. Which new habit (Bible reading, prayer, accountability, service) do you feel most drawn to begin cultivating this week?
3. What lies about your identity still try to define you? What does Scripture say instead?
4. How can you remind yourself daily that sanctification is a process, not a race?

Prayer to Begin

Father, thank You for setting me free in Christ. Help me walk in that freedom every day—strengthen my heart, reshape my desires, and lead me by Your Spirit. Help me grow in Christlikeness for Your glory. Amen.

Conclusion

Freedom in Christ is not just about walking away from something destructive—it's about walking into something far greater. Throughout this life skill guide, you've taken a serious look at the hidden costs of gambling: the emotional highs and lows, the deceptive belief in a system, the spiritual erosion, and the relational damage. However, you've also seen the powerful invitation of the gospel—an invitation to return to the Father, to live as a beloved child, and to walk in newness of life.

Maybe your journey has been marked by deep regret. Maybe you've lost money, relationships, or years you can't get back. Here's the truth: no matter how far you've gone, you are not beyond the reach of grace. Jesus didn't come for the cleaned-up and put-together—he came for the broken, the desperate, and the enslaved. He came for you if you would repent of your sin and trust in him for salvation.

You've learned that repentance is more than behavior change—it's a heart turning back to God. You've been reminded that sanctification is a process, not a perfection contest. You've also been challenged to build new habits rooted in God's Word, prayer, accountability, and service. None of this is easy but it is worth it because Christ doesn't just set us free—he teaches us how to stay free.

There will still be moments of weakness. There may even be setbacks but you're not the same person you were when you started this journey. You're learning to live as someone who is adopted, chosen, filled with the Spirit, and being transformed. The old patterns don't define you anymore—Christ does.

You may not see all the fruit yet and that's okay. Growth takes time, just like a long-term investment. If you keep walking with Jesus, keep renewing your mind, and keep surrounding yourself with truth and accountability.

If you've walked through this life skill guide alone, I want to encourage you—don't stay isolated because freedom flourishes in community. Find a church, a small group, or a trusted mentor who will walk with you, and don't be afraid to share your story. Your experience—your struggle and your healing—may be the very thing God uses to help someone else break free.

The path ahead won't always be easy but you're not walking it alone. Christ goes with you, his Spirit lives in you, and his promises will never fail you. So, take the next step—not perfectly, but prayerfully—not with fear, but with faith. The chains are broken and the door is open. Walk in freedom—fully and freely, as a beloved child of God.

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”

—Romans 8:15

Bio: Luke Rininger is a high school teacher in Columbus, Ohio. He and his wife have three boys. Luke has degrees from Ohio University (Math Education), Grand Canyon University (Master of Education), Southern Seminary (Master of Divinity and Doctorate of Educational Ministry).