

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

HE WHO CHASES FANTASIES LACKS JUDGMENT

Emphasis Passage: Proverb 12:11

Parallel Translations

King James Proverb 12:11 He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.

New King James Proverb 12:11 He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, But he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding.

Holman Christian Standard Proverb 12:11 The one who works his land will have plenty of food, but whoever chases fantasies lacks sense.

New International Version Proverb 12:11 He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.

New American Standard Proverb 12:11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.

Revised Standard Version Proverb 12:11 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense.

New Living Translation Proverb 12:11 Hard work means prosperity; only fools idle away their time.

New Jerusalem Bible Proverb 12:11 Whoever works his land shall have bread and to spare, but no one who chases fantasies has any sense.

Hebrew Text—Proverb 12:11

יִשְׂבַּע־לֶחֶם אֶדְמָתוֹ עֹבֵד
will be satisfied with bread, his land The one who works

תִּסְרֹלֵב: חֲיִקִים וְרָמַדָּף
lacks understanding. fantasies but the one who chases

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

עֹבֵד (*ôbēd*) – Qal, active, participle, masc., singular

(5647) עֹבֵד (*ābad*) – work, labor, serve, till

וְרָמַדָּף (*ûm^eradēp*) – Piel, active, participle, masc., singular

(1692) רָדַף (*rādaph*) – pursue, chase, follow after

רִיקִים (*rēqim*) – adjective, masc., plural
(7386) רִיק (*rēq*) – empty, vain, worthless

CONTEXT

This passage is written in a typical Hebrew poetic style called antithetical parallelism. This particular type of poetic style balances two opposing concepts in its two main lines. One line presents the positive side of the issue and the other line presents the negative side. A quick look at Proverb 12:11 reveals that the first half of the proverb presents the positive side and the second half presents the negative side. In addition, this proverb balances specific words and concepts against each other between the two halves. Notice that the concepts of labor for gain, i.e., works/chases, source of expectation for gain, i.e., land/fantasies, and gain, i.e., abundant food/lacks judgment are all balanced against each other.

SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Introduction

Gambling is not a new activity for Americans. In our nation's earliest days gambling was just as available as it is today. In fact, some of our earliest universities used lotteries to help them raise much-needed money for their fledgling programs. Columbia University, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, and William and Mary were all partly financed through lotteries, especially their building projects. Casino-type gambling was also popular in those days and even into the early 20th century. In the early 1900s, Hot Springs, Arkansas was called "the Monte Carlo of the Middle West."

Eventually, however, Americans became aware of the many problems caused by gambling and began electing officials who were opposed to gambling. It is no wonder that people would respond in this way. Gambling is an extremely destructive activity to individuals, communities, and families.

God has no use for gambling either. While there is no Bible passage that says "Thou shalt not gamble," there are numerous Bible passages that speak in principle against gambling. The Bible passage studied here offers very clear counsel on gambling as well. The contrast that is created between these opposing units applies very clearly to the issue of gambling. This proverb opposes gambling as a legitimate activity for three specific reasons.

I. Gambling is a false form of labor

Gambling does not qualify as a biblical form of work. The Hebrew word translated "work" (*ʾōbēd*) implies the application of personal effort directed at accomplishing something of value. This word is usually translated as "serve." For example, it is used to describe those who served King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 17:19) and those who serve God (Ps. 135:1). In fact, this is the typical Old Testament word for "slave" or "servant." The person who "serves" or "tills" the land then is a person who puts himself into the activity. He is serving the land by investing his time and energy in it. There is no room in this word for laziness or inactivity. Gambling is a pursuit rather than work. It fits in the second half of the proverb rather than the first half. The Hebrew word translated "pursues" (רָדַף, *rādaph*) means to chase after

something to attain it (Dt. 16:20) or to chase someone to catch him (Dt. 28:22). This certainly sounds like what many are doing when they gamble. Few people who gamble are ever satisfied with the results of their activity. Regardless of the amount they win, most gamblers continue to pursue other wins. Real, legitimate work on the other hand is satisfying. Solomon observed, "The sleep of a laborer is sweet" (Ecc. 5:12). The word "laborer" in this passage comes from the same root as the word "work." In other words, a person who puts genuine effort into producing gain is satisfied with the result and can relax, knowing that he has invested himself in his gain and achieved his goal.

II. Gambling invests in nothing

Work condoned by the Bible is effort expended in a particular endeavor that offers a reasonable expectation of positive return. This return may take on various forms, but the laborer can expect some degree of positive increase for his effort. In this proverb one who works his land is investing his energy in agriculture and can expect a harvest as a result. This person is investing himself in a tangible source of return.

A person who gambles is not investing in anything of lasting value. He is merely pursuing "fantasies" (*rēqim*). The Hebrew word translated "fantasies" means "empty" (2 Kgs 4:3) or "worthless" (Jgs 9:4). Something or someone that is called *rēqim* has no value. There is nothing there to which to assign value. It is essentially a vacuum. Gambling produces no product, provides no service, and does not contribute to the wellbeing of a community. Instead, gambling risks money on chance. It is not invested on behalf of the gambler in anything that possesses intrinsic value.

While the stock market has been abused by some who have chosen to take great risks for great gain, a proper approach to stock market investing is not the same as gambling because the investor is placing his money in a company that has value. If he chooses to, he can get his money back by selling his ownership in the company. While some companies are certainly bad investments, the wise investor diversifies his investments in order to offset unexpected losses. The gambler on the other hand can only choose between varying degrees of risk. No equity is available to the gambler. It is a winner take all proposition, or better, a loser lose all proposition. While some have argued that gambling should not be treated as an economic enterprise but rather as entertainment, the extent to which it is abused by millions of people reveals that it is a very poor source of entertainment.

III. Gambling reveals poor judgment

The proverb changes focus at this point in its comparison between these two activities. The person who works is rewarded with gain. The clause translated "will have abundant food" translates two Hebrew words—(שָׂבַע לֶחֶם). The second word in the clause is the typical word for "food" or "bread." The first word in the clause usually means "to be satisfied," but it can also mean "to have excess." In either case, the point is clear—the person who invests his effort in worthwhile pursuits will be rewarded with gain.

On the other side of this comparison is the person who chases fantasies. This person has no gain. Whereas work yields a good result, the pursuit of fantasies only leads back to the beginning of the process. The proverb declares that the person who has chosen to pursue fantasies began with a faulty proposition. This person intended to realize gain from emptiness. The endeavor was doomed from the start. The word translated "judgment" is the Hebrew word (לֵב, *leb*). It is often translated as

“heart” in the Old Testament. Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 467, note that among other things the *leb* is the “seat of thought and intellect” in the Old Testament. Essentially then this proverb blames the pursuit of empty activities on the person’s inability to make prudent decisions. A person who uses sound judgment will not make this mistake.

Conclusion

The evidence of history and of the millions of broken lives today because of gambling testifies to the validity of applying Proverb 12:11 to the issue of gambling. Gambling is a scourge to people and communities wherever it occurs because it represents the opposite of fruitful, productive human activity. Rather than investing in something worthwhile, the person who gambles chases empty promises and reveals that he is not thinking clearly. The biblical answer to providing for our needs is genuine work, in which the laborer invests his life in those things that produce real benefit for himself, his family, and the world.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- As much as possible, refuse to shop at stores that provide gambling opportunities.
- Find other people in your church or community who share your concerns.
- Write to your state representative and state senators about your opposition to gambling.
- Provide gambling information to the people in your church.
- Observe anti-gambling Sunday in your church.
- Ask your pastor to preach a message about gambling.
- Write letters to the editor and share your observations about the problems caused by gambling.
- Contact community and other religious groups and ask them to work with you to defeat or repeal gambling legislation.
- Pray for God’s power to help you get rid of gambling in your area.

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible verses about gambling

Exodus 20:3 - gambling violates the principle of Lordship,

Matthew 6:24 - gambling violates the principle of spiritual priorities,

Exodus 20:17 - gambling violates the principle of love

I Corinthians 10:23-24 - gambling violates the principle of stewardship,

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 - gambling violates the principle of work,

I Thessalonians 5:22 - gambling violates the principle of witness,

Romans 13:1-4 - gambling violates the principle of the civil magistrate

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 answers.

Create Learning Readiness: Share some examples of gambling problems mentioned in the accompanying fact sheet.

Ask: Do you think very many people would gamble if they couldn't win something?

The members will agree that winning is a large part of people's motivation for gambling.

Say: So, even people who say they gamble for entertainment are probably still expecting to win something of value. It isn't only about entertainment then is it? Most people who gamble expect to gain something of material value. These people expect to invest something of themselves in order to realize a positive gain. The Bible condemns this approach to material gain. Let's look at Proverb 12:11 to see why God feels this way about gambling

Call on a member to read the Proverb.

Say: This passage is written in a Hebrew poetic style called antithetical parallelism. This particular type of poetic style balances two opposing concepts in its two halves. One half presents the positive side of the issue and the other half presents the negative side. A quick look at Proverb 12:11 reveals that the first half of the proverb presents the positive side and the second half presents the negative side. In addition, this proverb balances specific words and concepts against each other between the two halves.

Ask: Can you see the parallel concepts in the two lines?

Ask them to identify them. They should see the similarities between works/chases, land/fantasies, and abundant/lacks.

Ask: What idea do these parallel concepts have in common?

works/chases = labor for gain, land/fantasies = source of expectation for gain, abundant food/lacks judgment = gain or its absence

Say: The contrast between these three ideas speaks very clearly to a biblical position on gambling.

Say: Let's look at the first group of words—works/chases. Both of these activities involve effort to get something. But they seem to view it from different perspectives.

Ask: What is the difference between working to gain something and chasing something for gain?

Working to gain something is more concrete. The worker knows what he is working at. To pursue something means to chase after it in the hopes that you will catch it. Maybe you will, maybe you won't. There is much more uncertainty involved.

Ask: Now let's think about gambling. Which of these two ways is most like gambling and why is that?

Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary share the information about this from the first point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Say: Let's look at the second group of words—land/fantasies. Both of these are sources people look to for gain. But they are obviously very different sources.

Ask: What is the difference between working the land and chasing fantasies?

When a person works the land, he is investing himself in something tangible. The land is there and it is a source that has proven its ability to provide a harvest. One who chases fantasies is investing in uncertainty. The source of gain is only imaginary and has no proven ability to provide a harvest, only a chance for it.

Ask: Now let's think about gambling again. Which of these two ways is most like gambling and why is that?

Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary share the information about this from the second point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Say: Let's look at the third group of words—abundant food/lacks judgment.

Say: These two concepts don't balance the same way as the other two. The other two parallels are both talking about the same ideas—gaining something and a source for gain. But this parallel actually contrasts the basic idea. The first half of the proverb says the person who works his land gains abundant food. The second half of the proverb says a person who chases fantasies lacks judgment.

Ask: In what ways are the concepts in this last group different?

Whereas work yields a good result, the pursuit of fantasies only leads back to the beginning of the process. The proverb declares that the person who has chosen to pursue fantasies began with a faulty proposition. This person intended to realize gain from emptiness. The endeavor was doomed from the start.

Share with the members the meaning of the word "understanding" from the third point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Ask: So what does this proverb say is the real problem behind the decision to gamble?

The proverb blames the pursuit of empty activities on the person's inability to make prudent decisions. A person who uses sound judgment will not make this mistake.

Ask: In light of the teaching of this proverb, what should be our response to gambling?

Ask: How can we help other people think biblically about gambling?

Let the members talk about this for a while. Help them come up with some clear ways they can become involved in helping people to stay away from gambling.

Say: Very good. Let's try to do these things this week, and let's start our next study by talking about what we accomplished.