

Hitting the Jackpot (2)

June 1995

Just as alcohol chemically enhances one's perception of reality, so gambling emotionally enhances the perception of reality. Watching a pack of dogs chase a fake rabbit holds little appeal until one wagers on a winner. It is the emotional high of risk and reward that makes otherwise mundane gambling activities so enthralling.

What happens when one becomes dependent upon the altered perception of reality? What results when the thrill of potential loss replaces even the desire for overnight wealth? *Addiction*. Gambling can easily become a powerful emotional addiction.

I have experienced this to a minor degree from my younger days. When I was in high school, I made a trip to Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands. The hotels in Guayaquil and Quito had casinos, and a friend and I decided to try our luck with the slot machines. We limited ourselves to about \$5, an admission itself that gambling can get out of hand.

That \$5 proved to be an emotional roller-coaster. First, I lost nearly all of it, but when I got down to my last few Ecuadorian "sucres" I won enough to keep going. Not satisfied with recovering a little bit of my lost "investment," I was intent on regaining the entire \$5. I would win, lose, lose, lose, win, win, lose, lose, win ... just enough enticement to stay at the machine and feed it coins. I don't remember how it turned out (I think I fell short of recouping the \$5), but I learned about the dangers of gambling from firsthand experience.

First, gambling enterprises are designed to make money, not lose it. Secondly, they are so structured as to entice people to play repeatedly. I may win big today, but lose tomorrow, the next day and the day after. In the long run, the establishment has gained more than it has lost. Thirdly, an uncontrollable addiction can form before you know it.

I witnessed gambling addiction while living in Reno, Nevada. The city's main industry was gambling-related tourism, a business that preys primarily upon the poor and spawns all kinds of related social ills. People would stand at the "one-arm bandits," filthy and in tattered clothing, their eyes glazed over, putting in silver dollar after silver dollar. It was a sorry sight.

"Oh, but that won't happen to me!" The worst thing we can do is underestimate the power of the devil. Self-control, not uncontrollable addiction, is the goal of every Christian.