Gambling Addiction / Rich Young Leader

Gambler: “Just one more game and that pile of money will be mine! I’ll win the next one, I know I will. My luck has to change soon. ...Everyone else has had their turn to win it must be my turn by now. ...Every game I play, I’m getting better almost won that last one, if only she didn’t have that extra winning card. This time I’ll win the prize.”

Carol: Welcome to Women of Hope, I’m Carol...

Tammy: ...and I’m Tammy. Have you wanted to win a game that badly? Have you ever had thoughts like those? Maybe you’ve stayed up late into the night playing a game with your family and friends because you wanted the money that the winner would get. Today we want to talk together about gambling.

Carol: Gambling is when you play a game or bet money on the *chance* that something will happen. You might bet money on which horse will win the race...or what number will appear on the dice. And even though, the game or the race is fun and entertaining, there’s a high chance that you really won’t win.

In most forms of gambling, it’s likely that you will lose *all* the money you have bet. And a very, very small chance that you will win. But the excitement of that win, even when it happens very rarely, is what makes people try again, and again, and again.

Tammy: Gambling is found all around the world and people bet on many different things. How do people gamble where you live? Some people bet money on who will win a horse race. Others bet money on who will win a game of cards or who will win a fight. Maybe your friends play card games at parties, or bet on who will win the big football match. The lottery may also be a popular form of gambling where you live, or buying money tickets.

Carol: Gambling is often seen as a way to have fun and relax. It can seem like a way to enjoy time with your friends and family. Perhaps even a way to celebrate. But there’s a darker side to gambling that many people don’t like to talk about. Gambling can become an *addiction*. It can take over a person’s life and ruin it! It can mess up their life and family, just like an addiction to alcohol, drugs or pornography.

Tammy: So how can playing a game or making a bet really hurt someone? What do you think?

Well, let me explain a little of how your body works. When you win in a sporting match or a card game, even if you’re not gambling, your body makes a happy chemical called *dopamine*. When dopamine is released it can make you feel happy and satisfied.

Take food as an example, when we eat food that we really like, it makes us feel good, so we want to eat that same food again to feel the same feelings of happiness. Dopamine is creating those feelings.

Carol: So for people who begin to gamble often, their bodies have made a connection between feeling good and gambling. So when they have not played a game, or won some money for a period of time, their body has not released the dopamine that makes them feel good. They may start to become depressed, they might shake and even have stomach complaints. Their body has become addicted to the good feelings that dopamine by way of the gambling has created.

So how do we know when gambling has become an addiction for us, and not just a fun activity?

Tammy: Today on Women of Hope we're talking about gambling. Maybe someone in your home has been caught in the trap of gambling. When gambling becomes the focus of your thoughts a lot of the time, and when you begin to spend more time and money on it than you planned to spend, then it becomes a problem.

Carol: Experts in the area of problem gambling, say that there are three stages people go through when gambling. You don't usually become addicted to gambling the first time you try it. The addiction happens over time and for some, it happens faster than others.

Tammy: Let's talk about the three stages that people go through as they become addicted to gambling:

At the beginning, when a person begins to gamble they're often excited by winning. They're winning money, they feel good and happy.

Carol: - Oh, but then, as they gamble more and more they begin to lose. They find that they spend more and more money, but don't win much back. Gambling isn't as much fun anymore, but many people will just keep doing it. They want to feel that winning feeling again.

Tammy: Or maybe they're in debt so far so they need to win to fix their financial problems. Often people at this stage will hide their spending from friends and family and begin to borrow money just to keep gambling.

Carol: - Finally, the last stage, is when the gambling addiction has become a serious problem. The person will spend large amounts of time and money on gambling.

Tammy: They may start to experience serious debt problems, their family is angry with them and they may even lose their job. Some people addicted to gambling will try breaking the law to fix their problems. Or sadly some will take their own lives.

Carol: Now the question is**,** does all this sound familiar to you? Or is there someone in your family who's gambling, and you're worried about them – or about your family finances? Maybe as you listen you realise that gambling has become a serious problem for you or someone you love. Let's talk about some of the signs that you can watch for to know if gambling has become an addiction.

Tammy: Watch how the person deals with money! This is one way you can tell if gambling has become a problem. Do they owe lots of money to the bank or, to their family and friends? Are they struggling to pay bills on time? Do they often ask others if they can borrow money? Are they stealing money to gamble with? Or has jewellery or any other valuable items disappeared from the house?

Carol: Also, think about the person's moods and their personality. Have you noticed their moods changing more than usual? Are they depressed or sad a lot of the time? Maybe you've even noticed them lying to family and friends? Are they missing work or being secretive about where they've been? When you see them, do you often feel like they're not really listening to you?

Tammy: Gambling addiction often begins in hard times in people's lives. Just like other addictions, gambling is often not the only problem a person is facing.

It may be in times of pain and grief that people start to gamble or gamble more often. Maybe they're grieving for a loved one who recently died. Perhaps they've lost their job or had a huge fight with a family member. A night of playing cards might make them forget their pain for a little while and they enjoy themselves. They feel happy again. So they do it the next night, and the next night, until they suddenly realise they've played cards every night for a week, and spent the money they needed for bills, rent and food on gambling at cards.

Carol: Living with someone addicted to gambling is hard. Your feelings may be all mixed up. You may be trying to hide their gambling from your neighbours or other family members. But at the same time, you are very angry with them for gambling and spending all your money again. You may be angry because they may have borrowed or even stolen money from you with no way to pay it back. He or she may have sold family possessions or run up huge debts.

You may even have been threatened and so you're afraid for your safety. And yet, they are your family… maybe your daughter… or your husband… and you love them. But if you're afraid for your safety, or the safety of your children, you must get help straight away– even if it means leaving the house.

Carol: We've been talking together today about gambling and the way it can take over and hurt many lives.

In God's word, the Bible, there's a story that talks about a man who thought a lot about money and how his choices caused him to turn away from God. This story is found in Luke's gospel, in chapter 18. Let's listen as Tammy reads this story for us.

Tammy: "A religious leader asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good. And you know his commands: 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not tell lies about others. You must respect your father and mother.' "

But the leader said, "I have obeyed all these commands since I was a boy."

When Jesus heard this, he said to the leader, "But there is still one thing you need to do. Sell everything you have and give the money to those who are poor. You will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me." But when the man heard Jesus tell him to give away his money, he was sad. He did not want to do this, because he was very rich.

When Jesus saw that the man was sad, he said, "It will be very hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

Carol: That was a very interesting conversation isn't it? The leader wanted to know how to live forever and what did Jesus tell him? He told him to follow the Jewish laws and commandments that God had given his people. Those are the rules about not murdering, committing adultery or stealing that are often called the Ten Commandments.

Tammy: The man seemed happy with that reply didn't he? He was a man who had lived by the Jewish laws. His actions towards others were perfect. No one could fault his behaviour. He thought his eternity with God was safe and sure.

Carol: But Jesus had one further challenge for the leader, a challenge that tested his heart! He said, "Sell everything you have and give the money to those who are poor. You will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me." You see, Jesus knew that even though this man's actions looked perfect from the outside, his heart was not perfect.

Tammy: This young man loved money, and he was proud that he kept the law. These were the most important things to him. These were what he trusted. He couldn't admit that he could never be perfect before God, and that he needed God to forgive him and give him a new heart. I wonder if you trust in your own good actions so that God will accept you? We can never be good enough,

that's why God sent Jesus, to take away our sins. We always depend on God's loving kindness, not our good deeds.

Carol: That is so right, Tammy. God wants the hearts of people to be loyal to him more than anything else. And Jesus knew that this leader's heart was not loyal to God at all. And so he gave the leader a challenge or perhaps an opportunity, to show the true state of his heart. "Give your money away to those who need it and follow my ways," challenged Jesus! But look at the leader's response.

Yes, he became very sad wasn't he! He didn't want to give away his wealth. He didn't want to follow Jesus! It would cost him too much.

Tammy: Jesus' words show that perhaps he wasn't surprised by the leader's response. He said, "It will be very hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

Carol: Now that is a picture! Do you ever do stitching with a needle? Then you know how small the eye of a needle is! It's smaller than your smallest fingernail. Smaller than an ant or a grain of rice. It's very, very small.

Tammy: Do you have camels where you live? Do you know how big they are? Bigger than a dog or a sheep! Bigger even than a cow! Certainly not something that could fit through the eye of a needle is it? It's *impossible* for a camel to go through a needle's eye. And this is how unlikely Jesus said it was that rich men would follow God and enter his kingdom.

Carol: So why do you think is it so hard for rich people? Perhaps it's the fact that they have lived their lives depending upon themselves or their money for their life and happiness.

To follow God means to trust him and do what he wants with our lives, our time and our future. That is a hard thing for a rich man! Many rich people are proud of how important they are in society. They're proud of how hard they've worked and what they have accomplished. To follow God means doing what *God* wants them to do. It means being humble and depending on God to forgive us, to help us to live right, to provide for our needs like our clothing, food and our shelter.

But the great thing about this story from the Bible is that it doesn't end here, with Jesus' words of *difficulty* for the rich. The story continues on. Let's listen together to the end of the story.

Tammy: "When Jesus' followers heard this, they said, "Then who can be saved?"
Jesus answered, "God can do things that are not possible for people to do."
Peter said, "Look, we left everything we had and followed you."

Jesus said, “I can promise that everyone who has left their home, wife, brothers, parents, or children for God’s kingdom will get much more than they left. They will get many times more in this life. And in the world that is coming they will get the reward of eternal life.” (Luke 18:18-30 ERV)

Carol: I love Jesus’ words here. If it’s impossible for the rich to enter God’s Kingdom on their own, how do people get eternal life? And Jesus gives them this special answer, “God can do things that are not possible for people to do.” God can make this change in our hearts. Men and women, rich and poor, old and young can all enter God’s kingdom when they trust him and follow him with their lives. In other places in the Bible we *do* see rich men and women who *did* follow Jesus. So it’s not impossible, it just needs to be done with *God’s* power.

Tammy: We’ve been talking about the story in God’s word, the Bible – about the rich young leader who came to Jesus to ask what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus knew he was a good man, who had obeyed all the laws. But there was one thing he would not do – give away his riches to the poor. So, he went away sad.

Carol: Jesus’ followers heard the conversation and they asked Jesus, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus’ answer was very clear. He said, “God can do things that are not possible for people to do.” Just in case, these words were not encouraging enough. Jesus replied with two more promises of hope.

Tammy: “I can promise that everyone who has left their home, wife, brothers, parents, or children for God’s kingdom will get much more than they left. They will get many times more in this life.”

Carol: Jesus suggests here that following him won’t always be easy. Perhaps friends and family will ignore us. Perhaps we will be persecuted for our love for Jesus. But Jesus promises that though hard things that might happen to us because we follow him, we will be rewarded.

But that’s not all. Jesus also promises that, “in the world that is coming they will get the reward of eternal life.” If we follow Jesus, and live our life by God’s guidelines, we live the way he wants us to live, he will reward us in our lifetime. We will receive a lot more than we give. But more importantly, he also gives us the promise of a heavenly reward – eternal life to spend with God.

Tammy: Eternal life… that’s just what the rich leader asked about at the beginning of the story wasn’t it? The rich leader began by asking how to get eternal life! How could he live forever with God? And Jesus gives the answer. In this life those who make *living for God* the most important thing, will live forever with God after they die. Would you like to spend eternal life with God, the father?

Carol: If you want to know more about how you can have eternal life with God the Father, we would love to hear from you. You can write to us in care of this station or at Women of Hope.

Tammy: The email address is TWRWomenofHope@twr.org**.** That's TWRWomenofHope@twr.org**.** Or if you've missed a program or you want or hear it again visit our website TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

Carol: We do hope you will be with us again. Goodbye and God bless you as he speaks to your heart today.

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