

Tough Questions 2026

Week 2

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

April 19, 2026

All right, I'm in the hot seat once again as we continue our series that we started last week called Tough Questions, where I have taken this as an opportunity to answer questions that you all have submitted to me about life and about the Bible and about church and everything else. And so I am just going to jump in today so that we can get through as many questions as possible. But I do want to quickly tell you the process as to how I come to these answers. I am answering these questions from, first and foremost, a biblical perspective.

If it is a black and white answer in the Bible, that's where I'm going to go first in order to answer these questions. Secondly, if the Bible doesn't address this question, whatever question you asked, in a black and white answer, I am going to look for certain truths or perspectives from Scripture that would give us some guidance in how to answer that question. And finally, if the Bible doesn't talk about it specifically, and it's very difficult to look for truth from Scripture about that question, then we're just going to pray for wisdom and for logic.

And obviously, I've done a lot of research to answer these questions to the best of my ability so that I can give you wisdom in how to move forward. Now, as I said last week, and as you already know, obviously I'm not God. So even as you hear me answer these questions, realize that I view this as a conversation between friends. We are a family, and so we're coming together to try to answer these questions.

And so because of that, I do ask that you give me the freedom and the right to reserve the right to change my opinion in the future if I'm given more information or insight, and I'm obviously not talking about those issues that have a clear biblical mandate. I will not change my opinion in the future on those things, all right? Just on some of these gray areas, which can be difficult. So let me pray, and then we're going to jump in with our first question that I promised you we were going to get to. So let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather today as we humbly come before you, praising You for Your goodness on our lives. Lord, we run into questions in this world in which we live, questions of what is right and what is wrong, and how should we respond? What are you asking us to do? Lord, as we honestly seek Your will and as we honestly seek Your direction, I pray that You would grant us wisdom, not just as we read Your Word, but as we just talk about the life and the world in which we live, that we would be obedient to what You ask us to do.

And so, Father, would you meet with us today? Grant us your wisdom. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So the very first question that I told you we were going to get to this week that was asked multiple times is this. What is the church's stance on gambling and what is a biblical response? More specifically, many people ask the question, is gambling a sin? So let me answer the question and saying both yes and no. Thanks for coming. Have a good week. I'm glad you're here.

No, I'm joking. Let's talk about this. Let's dive into this. Now, very first, I want to make sure that I do read to you the position paper of the missionary church on gambling. Many of you know that we are part of a larger church organization called The Missionary Church, not just in the United States, but worldwide. And we do have a

position paper as to our stance collectively on this idea of gambling. And so I will read that, but then we will dive even further past just this response that the missionary church has. All right?

So here is the missionaries church's response on gambling. The missionary church reaffirms its opposition to gambling and lotteries, including those run by the government. These are socially, morally, and economically destructive. They can be rooted in covetousness and violate the biblical work ethic. We believe that gambling in any form is potentially addictive. It can be a social evil that feeds upon the greed and sells a set of fantasy values that exploit people.

It can be especially harmful to the poor who can least afford to forfeit their financial resources on the promise of instant wealth. The tragic result is often deepened poverty and increased welfare roles, to say nothing about the emotional damage or the disillusionment experienced by the vast numbers of planned losers. Gambling can undermine the economic base of a nation in that it reduces the purchasing power of people. Money that is gambled by wage earners therefore cannot be spent to purchase goods and services of constructive and productive businesses.

Compulsive gambling may cause the indolence and self-delusion, the breakup of families, crime, the loss of jobs, and even suicide. Since we deplore the exploitation of the weakness of humanity, those things that we all struggle with, the Missionary Church calls upon all who are in positions of influence and decision-making to seek other means by which to raise revenue. We further call upon churches and schools to conduct programs that will inform people of the potential evils of gambling.

Now, I want you to notice one thing in that entire statement, there is no Scripture, all right? This is just based on the collective wisdom of those that have gone before us. And now that I have read that, let me give you two other statements to help in our discussion. Contrary to what you may have heard, the Bible does not explicitly or literally prohibit gambling. In fact, as I've done research and many other have done research before me, it really doesn't mention the idea of gambling at all.

So let's define the word gambling. What does it mean to gamble? There are four truths that help us define gambling. Truth number one, something valuable is put at risk. Truth number two, something belonging to someone else is at stake as a prize. So somebody has put in something. Number three, an element of chance is involved in determining the outcome. And number four, no new wealth is created in the process. This is what I mean when I use the word gambling.

So this idea, you don't see anywhere in Scripture as we define gambling. The closest thing that we have about gambling being mentioned in the Bible is the act of casting lots. Have you guys heard of this before? In the Old Testament, they would cast lots, and it truly was similar to rolling something like dice that would determine an outcome to a question or a decision. And so they would roll these dice, and it was trying to determine God's will, if you can even comprehend that, as they would roll these dice to determine what they should do.

We do know that this practice in the church and amongst God's people was done away with in the New Testament with the introduction of the Holy Spirit. We no longer have to roll dice to determine God's will. Also, one other mention in the New Testament is of the Roman soldiers who are at the foot of Jesus at the cross as the soldiers have divided up all of his clothes, which was all he possessed. And there was one garment left, his undergarment, that could not be divided.

And so it says that they cast lots to see who would get that piece of his clothing. Now, before I read what I think is the best answer that I have come up with concerning this based on a lot of research, let me give you a few questions that I think you should ask before you and I consider gambling, but not just gambling, anything we do in life. So I've come up with this list of questions that I think would be good for all of us to ask before we gamble. Number one, why am I betting in the first place? What are my intentions?

What am I trying to do here? Number two, is it just a fun thing that I'm doing with friends? Or number three, am I in a pinch with money and I'm hoping that this will help? Am I hoping to kind of gain some kind of windfall of riches that's going to change my life? Or do I just love the high that I get when I win? Are you only doing it for that rush of energy when you win the big pot or you get all the money, whatever it is? Is that your goal? Or are you just bored? And you're just looking for something to do, in which case there might be a lot of better things to do.

And finally, what I think is one of the greatest questions that you can ask about anything you're doing in your life. Do people in my life know that I do this or is it hidden? I have found in my own life and in talking with others that if we instinctively want to hide what we're doing, then we also instinctively know what we're doing we probably shouldn't be doing. Not just in gambling, every area of life. And so I think these are good questions for us to ask as we are making decisions. And let me give you one final question that you're all going to hate because it's a hard question to ask.

And it's this, have I talked to God about this or am I afraid of what he might say? It is usually a good sign if you are doing something in your life on the side and you're kind of like, "Well, I don't really want to ask God about it because I'm afraid he's going to say no, so I'm just not going to ask." That's probably a good sign that you should ask God about it. You should clear it up with him and go, "What is my reasoning? Why am I doing this?" Maybe it's something I'm holding on too tightly. Now, I'm going to give you a response here with some Scripture because I want to look at this from a biblical perspective.

And as I've already shared with you, the Bible does not give a black and white answer when it comes to gambling, as we are defining it and as we understand it, and as we are dealing with it in our county right now with the ideas of casinos and everything else. Now, a lot of this statement is not original with me, but I have compiled it all together and thrown in some of my thoughts, but it's the best that I can come up with. So here we go. The Bible does not specifically condemn games of chance, gambling, betting, or the lottery.

The Bible does, however, warn us against the love of money. Many of us know these scriptures, 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." And I want you to notice, we've talked about this many times. It doesn't say for money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is the love of money. It is about your heart or your desire towards it. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your lives free from what?"

The love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." So there's some scriptural wisdom for us. Other wisdom that we have, wisdom says to avoid shortcuts to prosperity. Proverbs 13:11 says, "Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears, but wealth from hard work grows over time." Now you need to understand about the book of Proverbs. Proverbs are not like commandments.

It's not saying, "Thou shalt not do this," or "Thou shalt do this." The book of Proverbs is a wisdom book. From wisdom literature, it's basically saying, "Based on life experience, based on conversations that have happened with those that have experienced life, here are some good little pieces of wisdom." It's what a parent would say to you, right, as you were growing up. And so the parent is looking at you saying, "Listen, wealth from these get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears, but wealth that comes from hard work is good and it grows over time." Scripture also says about this idea of work that we are to work hard and earn a living.

2 Thessalonians 3:10, the apostle Paul says, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule. The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." In other words, this idea, work. God has created us to work. Work is not a result of the fall or of sin. We were created to work. Proverbs again 14:23 says, "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads to poverty." This idea that we were created to work. Most gambling I can't say all.

Most gambling is motivated by a love of money. People place bets with the hope of quick or easy riches, which Scripture says is foolish. Materialism can often be the root of gambling. The Bible mentions events of luck or chance in contexts other than gambling or betting. These are the examples that I shared. This idea of casting lots was God's prescribed method of choosing between the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat. In Leviticus, chapter 16, they literally would cast lots.

Joshua cast lots to determine the allotment of land to various tribes as they would go into the promised land. And as a result of simply casting lots, they were accepted as God's will in Joshua 18:10. Nehemiah, who goes back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, casts lots to determine who would live inside the walls and who should live outside the walls. In Nehemiah 11:1, in the New Testament, the apostles, the last time we see this in Scripture, the apostles cast lots to determine the replacement of Judas in Acts 1:26.

Remember, Judas was taken from them and they had to replace his position amongst the apostles. And so they cast lots as to which it should be between two men that were both worthy of that. Each of these occasions in the Old Testament and the New Testament proves the truth of Proverbs 16:33 that says the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. They were following this example that God is in charge of everything. None of these instances of casting lots have to do with betting or the transfer of goods.

So although it is appropriate for us to look at them in Scripture, it doesn't really deal specifically with this idea of gambling. Gambling, by nature, takes advantage of the misfortune of others. In order for one person to win, someone else, usually multiple others, must lose, and for a Christian to risk money. And the off chance that he will gain even more, according to Scripture, is foolish, but to actively seek the financial benefit of yourself from somebody else's losses, many would consider beyond foolish actually unethical.

Even in those games that require a certain amount of skill and do not rely solely on luck, the gambler is seeking to benefit from the misfortune of others and playing into a rigged system. The aim of a casino is to take money in large sums and give little in return. We know that about all businesses, right? They exist to make money, not to give money. That's why they exist. Now let's talk about sports betting, which is becoming increasingly more popular and more accessible by the day with phones on your app and everything else.

Now, some will argue, and potentially rightly so, in its defense, saying that sports betting is harmless entertainment. Some say that betting on a team, especially if it's a fantasy team, and if you don't know what that is, don't even worry about it, that betting on a team or a fantasy team actually requires some research and some skill to be successful. But critics against that will say, "But gambling of any kind can lead to addiction," which is true. But simply because something leads to addiction is not why we say we shouldn't participate in it.

Because if that were the case, we couldn't have McDonald's or Culver's or Wendy's or any of these restaurants, right? Because some people get addicted to that. So that in and of itself is not the reason to do it. But it's important to recognize the trap that it could be. Critics also point out that gambling of any kind can lead to this idea of putting your life at risk or those around you. According to the National Council of Problem Gambling, about 5 million Americans can be classified as compulsive gamblers. Five million. So that's beyond just fun.

That's compulsive gamblers. And critics point out that sports betting can easily harm the integrity of the sports in question when players are bribed to shave points or throw a game. And if you don't know what that is, that's great too. Don't worry about it. But that's already happening. There are lots of stories that are coming out of players and coaches and referees that are caught up in this love of money. And so they begin to do things to alter the outcome so that they or others they know can win. So even with sports betting, there are several ethical and moral concerns that we should talk about.

It just may not be wise. State and national lotteries are another form of gambling. Lotteries tempt people with the possibility of quick riches and are marketed as a way to fund education and other social programs. And I need to make sure to inform you, yes, those lottery monies are used for those programs. However, it seems that those

that the lottery is supposed to help are actually being hurt. A recent study has shown that US households and this was amazing to me when I read this. This is from 2019.

So this is seven years old, but it's the newest data I could find. US households in the lowest income brackets spend 13% of their annual household income on lottery tickets. 13%, that's not just a dollar here or a dollar there. 13%, that's a big amount of your household income. In contrast, the highest earners in the United States spend just 1% of their money on lottery tickets. Now, I took a moment because I wanted to think through that. Let's think through that logically. They're probably spending close to the same amount of money on lottery tickets.

But for those that are wealthy or making more money, 1% is a smaller percentage of their income, so it isn't affecting them as much. Whereas those in the lower-income areas are spending 13% of their money on lottery tickets. And the chances of winning the lottery are infinitesimal. Do you like that word? The whole system truly, if you look at it, does prey upon the poor. Now let me read to you what I would say is my concluding statement. Does the Bible forbid a friendly wager between two players that are going head-to-head on the tennis court or the golf course?

What about paying a dime into the kitty for a bingo card or entering a raffle or filling out a March Madness bracket in the office pool? The answer is no. The Bible does not explicitly forbid these things. When it comes to betting of any kind, followers of Jesus should use discernment in examining their motives, their testimony, and their responsibility to steward their resources wisely. Now, I want to share with you some personal testimony with this.

This is maybe confessional time, so I'll feel better when I leave, okay? So I was raised in a church that held that stance on gambling, and it was pretty black and white, even at that time. If you look at the missionary church stance on gambling, like just don't do it, you're not supposed to do it, even to the point of it being sinful. And so it was something I never really thought about growing up. And then my wife and I got married, and on our honeymoon, we were out in California. We drove past a casino. And we had just gotten married a couple of days before, and we did this crazy thing that I have to be cautious how I describe it, but it was called the dollar dance. Does anybody know about this?

I have to tell you what it is, okay? So you pay a dollar and you'd get to dance with the bride or groom, right? So we had a stack of, I don't know, 50 or 60 \$1 bills that we had with us when we went on vacation. And I said, "Hey, let's just go into the casino. You'll get five bucks. I get five bucks. Let's go play the nickel slots." We'd never done it before. Neither of us had ever been in a casino. And so we go into the casino and we have our \$5 each and we start pulling the handle and I have no idea what's even on the screen. I don't even know if I'm winning or losing, right? Unless it tells me at the bottom what's happening.

And so we played our \$5 on the slots and we checked out and come to find out I walked out \$20 ahead and she walked out \$50 ahead. So we were \$70 ahead. So the way I look at it from any casino, I'm \$70 ahead in that. But let me explain to you as God has been working on my heart and I've been trying to think through this. I think when I went into that casino and I did that, even up to the point of me doing this research, I just felt like I beat the casino. When in reality, even with slot machines, somebody else put in that money, not the casino. Somebody else lost that money.

That's how I gained that money. Now, I thought about taking \$70 and giving it to somebody today so that my conscience was clean. But it's not like I mean, I didn't steal that money from somebody, but somebody had to lose in order for me to win. And so even the idea of slot machines or some of these other things, it is very hard to get away from the fact that somebody is losing in order for you to win. And there's just something that just doesn't settle right in my spirit with that. And so even with this concluding point, the Bible doesn't talk bad about it. I'm hopefully not just giving you an answer.

My goal today is definitely not to have you have a stance on gambling or casinos because I said so. I hope you hear that, right? Or because someone else says so. My whole goal in this entire series of tough questions is to help you be able to answer these questions on your own so that you don't have to come to me or come to somebody else and go, "Well, I just believe because so-and-so said." I want you to be able to have a logical conversation. So here is my conclusion on the matter.

While I hold no judgment over those who choose to gamble, I do encourage everyone to pause and reflect for just a moment, if you are considering venturing into this field of gambling, that the rewards are enticing for a reason, though typically small, but the risk could be life overtaking. The benefit doesn't overcome the risk for me. Proverbs 13:11, again, says, "Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow." So with all of this said, because some of you did ask this specific question, my vote for a casino in Steuben County would be no.

But I do believe that that decision should be left to the people of our community and not one person. Do you guys hear what I'm saying? It should be a collective vote of our community. I don't think one person should make that decision for all of us. And even though I would vote no for the casino, you have to know my heart. I would love if we had a great hotel in our community. I would love if we had another nice restaurant that we could go to and visit. I just wish it didn't have to come via a casino. But unfortunately, for whatever reason, these businesses, we can't support them or we can't have them.

And I know that it would solve a lot of other problems in our community by having the casino come, but my vote would still be no because of the potential risks to those that I love and I care about. Again, please hear me. My goal is not to change your opinion because I said so. I want to teach you to answer these questions yourselves and have logical conversations. Can I tell you what burdens my heart a lot more right now than whether we have a casino or not in Steuben County? My heart is way more burdened by the way the conversation has been happening in our community. I get so burdened when I go on social media and I try to stay off of it.

You guys have to know I try to stay off of social media. Maybe someone needs to convince me I don't need to do this, but so many people ask me questions about what's going on in the community and what's right and wrong and whatever else that if I were to get off of it, I would have no idea what's even happening. And so I feel like I have to at least stay on to know what's happening, but it burdens me to do so because I see all of the mudslinging and the things that are going on. Here is my goal for you a lot more than yes or no to the casino. Here is my goal.

My prayer for all of us that are representing Christ and representing Fairview would be that when we interact with others in person and online, I am more concerned with how you represent God than with what your answer is to this question. You guys hear what I'm saying? I think all too often we are just misrepresenting God not in how we're answering the question, but in how we are answering the question and how we are coming across. I feel that we need to show the love of Christ and I can honestly sit across the table from somebody that has a complete different view than I do and still represent Christ in my opinion.

Yeah, well, not just yeah. I think that's important for us to understand because I think that the enemy wants to use this to divide people and churches, to divide a community, to divide whatever he can divide because he wants chaos. That's what he wants. And I refuse to let him get chaos in my heart and in my life, in my family, and in my church family. I refuse to let that happen because I'm not going to let him win. So there you go. Just a little joke. If your over under was three, I hope that you bet the under because we've gotten one.

If you don't gamble, you don't know what I just said, that's fine. We're going to get to question number two today. This will be the last one for today. And I did make the decision after first service because I have so many more questions and it just took me way too long to get through that that I am going to continue the series next week. So I will get towards more next week. For those of you that didn't get your question answered, you're clap,

right? We're going to try to get to them. Let's just get to this last question. It's a very good question. When people die, can they look down and see what is happening on Earth?

Now this question is asked often or most even talked about when somebody has lost somebody they love and they want to believe that they're still connected with their loved ones somehow, that their loved one from heaven. Obviously they're assuming they went to heaven, right? Somebody from up above. Can they look down? And can they see what's going on? And they want to stay connected. Now, again, you need to know it's a great question because Scripture doesn't explicitly mention this idea one way or the other. It doesn't talk about it. We just want to believe it to be true or not believe it to be true. So let's look at where Scripture does guide us then.

Since there's no black and white, we look at a reference to Luke chapter 15 verse 7, where we read, "I tell you the truth that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent." Now, why do we look at this verse? Well, because this verse does share with me at least a little piece that there are some people in heaven that know what's going on here on earth, right? If there's celebration that's taking place. Now, what we don't know from this Scripture is whether it's God celebrating, the angels celebrating, or everybody in heaven celebrating.

It doesn't say who is doing the celebrating, so it doesn't really help us and say, "Well, can they all see what is happening here?" We don't know based on this, because we don't know who is doing this celebrating. But it's a verse that gives us some insight. Other people want to look at Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1, where we read, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance, the race that is marked out for us." Some people want to look at this verse and they see this cloud of witnesses as those that have passed before us, that are up in heaven, almost in a circle looking down on us and rooting for us to succeed.

I can't argue against that because it doesn't give us enough information, but I will share with you, as many of you already know, that the Scriptures that we have today included with the chapter, divisions, and the verses, were not there in the original texts. So when I look at Hebrews 12:1, I want to go back to what was there in the previous chapter, in chapter 11, where you read about the heroes of our faith. The author is sharing about all these heroes that have gone before us.

And I believe how I would interpret Hebrews 12:1 is that the author is saying, "Look back at all of these witnesses that we have had, and let's live up to the example that they have left for us." I think that that may be more appropriate, but again, we could have a conversation about that. Now let's go to logic. As I have a logical mind, I think to myself what I know to be true about heaven and what I know to be true about earth. And I say this, if heaven is a place where there is no more pain, no more suffering, no more tears, then the ability to see what is taking place on Earth would diminish that joy.

If I'm in heaven and I can look down and see what is happening on Earth, I don't think I can live a painless, sufferless life because I'm going to see those I love making bad decisions. I'm going to see those I love not coming to know Christ. And so just logically speaking, this is not Bible, okay? This is just me using my head and trying to think through this. I don't think logically it would make sense for people in heaven to see what is happening on Earth because it would take away that lack of pain or suffering or hurt. One final thing we can look at in Scripture. Many people like to look to the story of the rich man in Lazarus in Luke chapter 16.

Many of you know this story. You have the rich man. You have Lazarus who is the servant and they both pass away and the rich man goes to hell and Lazarus goes to heaven. And so it says that the rich man can see beyond this vast expanse and see Lazarus there. And so there's this idea, well, maybe they can see what's going on. But we have to pay very close attention to this. First, we don't know. Is this a real story or is this kind of an imagery or whatever? We don't know that. But we should note that the rich man is in hell and he can only see across the chasm to Abraham and Lazarus.

He's not seeing to earth. You do notice that, right? He's not seeing anything, so it doesn't really help with that answer. And no one is viewing the earth. And Lazarus is never mentioned as seeing the rich man. So maybe from that side, you can see the other side, but from this side, you can't see that side. I don't know. Again, this is all we have. And so we're trying to look at only what we are told. The Bible doesn't specifically say that people in heaven cannot look down on us, so I'm not going to be dogmatic about it. Most of the times that people ask this question or are wondering about this, is that a funeral service, or they've just lost someone they love?

And again, they would make the statement, you know, "Oh, I know that they're in heaven and they're looking down on us." I never will stand up and go, "Oh, actually, I don't think the Bible says that." That's fine. If people want to believe that, I'm not going to be dogmatic about it. You know It's okay, but just logically, I'm not really sure. Now, I'm not going to get fully into this because it will bring more questions, which we will get to next week. But even as we ask the answer to that question, can people see down from heaven? Can I just tell you that as we study God in Scripture, God is very clearly outside of space and time.

And so it is possible, and I've shared this with you before, that when we die, we also are outside of space and time as well. And this would mean, if that's true, that no one needs to be in heaven or hell right now anyway. And I just confused a lot of you. That's fine. You can think about it this afternoon. Which leads to another question that somebody did ask, where do people go when they die? Is there kind of this middle place before heaven and hell or not? And that is a question that we will get into maybe next week. I don't know if I'll get down to that one or not, okay? But it's this idea we could be outside of space and time.

Now again, here's my goal, as I close in prayer. As we talk about these questions, these are great questions. Thank you guys for submitting them. You've made me think. You've made me do research that I probably normally wouldn't have done, and so I appreciate that. My encouragement to you is that as you have these questions, as you have these conversations, you have everything available to you that I have available to me. Look up Scriptures first. Look what the Bible has to say. If you don't know the Bible well enough to even know where to go, you can do a Google search on that. It's okay. Like, where does the Bible talk about such and such? And then begin to look through that.

Have conversations with others. Don't get in arguments with others. Love others as we ask these questions. These are great questions. Questions that we all deal with in my prayer is that as we try to answer these questions and as we try to work through this, that it will actually draw us closer to God and closer to each other. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for who you are. We thank You for Your Word, which does guide us and lead us as we have these conversations. Lord, we pray that Your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And so help us to be obedient to you, to your direction, to your leading, to your guiding. We do continue to pray and ask for your wisdom as we answer some of life's difficult questions. I pray that it would draw us closer to you. Lord, would you receive the praise? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.