

No Empty Bet

For teens ages **12–14** · about **45–60 minutes** · *Moral Issues for Teens · Personal Integrity & Character · game **Stack the Deck?** · built on **Colossians 3:17, Ephesians 4:28, and 1 Timothy 6:10***

Your students see gambling everywhere — sports-betting ads on every game, loot boxes in mobile games, scratch-off tickets at the gas station, poker nights on streaming, friends adding five dollars to a March Madness bracket. Culture sells it as harmless fun and easy money. This session isn't a finance lecture — and it's not only for students whose families struggle with gambling. It is a clear biblical look at why betting is a bad deal: it profits from someone else's loss, it sidesteps honest work and stewardship, and the love of money has a way of hooking people who swore they'd stop at "just once."

Before you teach anything, pray.

Some students already bet on games or open loot boxes without calling it gambling. Some have family debt they do not talk about. Ask the Spirit for clarity without contempt. You are teaching stewardship and love for neighbor — not shaming a kid who did not know the word for what they were doing.

The heart of the lesson

Gambling is not neutral entertainment. At its core, one person's win requires another person's loss. That is the opposite of Ephesians 4:28, where Paul commands thieves to stop stealing, **work honestly**, and **share with those in need**. Betting trains the heart to chase gain without giving value — and 1 Timothy 6:10 warns that the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. Some wander from the faith and pierce themselves with many griefs chasing the rush.

Gambling profits from someone else's loss.

Christians are called to do everything — word and deed — in the **name of the Lord Jesus** (Colossians 3:17). That includes how we handle money God entrusted to us. Stewardship means remembering that God owns it all; we manage faithfully, work diligently, give generously, and refuse shortcuts that turn neighbors into marks. The world's myth says one more bet could fix everything.

Scripture's truth: satisfaction does not come from the size of the pile but from wisely managing what you already hold.

Don't start — the first bet opens the door.

COLOSSIANS 3:17

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the **name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

1 TIMOTHY 6:10

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

How the session flows

- 1 Odds hook.** Name where teens see betting normalized. ~7 min
- 2 Stewardship vs. shortcut.** Teach work, giving, and the money trap. ~12 min
- 3 Play the game.** "Stack the Deck?" two-team showdown. ~12–15 min
- 4 Quiet honesty.** Reference card, private reflection. ~5 min
- 5 Worksheet.** In class or take-home reinforcement. ~15 min
- 6 Close with faithfulness.** Prayer and a clear "don't start" standard. ~8 min

Screen for the game, printed reference cards and worksheets, pens, and a leader ready to connect students to help if family gambling or debt is surfacing — without forcing public disclosure.

Leading it, part by part

Odds hook

Ask where they have seen betting this week — not as a confession round, but as cultural awareness. Sports apps, card games for money, raffle tickets, mobile loot boxes, crypto hype, "free" spins. Let them list it. Then land the math nobody prints on the banner: the house, the app, and the algorithm are built so most people lose over time. Someone's loss funds someone else's win. That is not loving your neighbor; it is using them.

Stewardship vs. shortcut

Teach three contrasts. **Worldly view:** money equals luck, status, and escape. **Biblical view:** God provides; we work, give, and manage as stewards (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 4:2). **Root issue:** the heart craves money more than God — and craving grows when you feed it (1 Timothy 6:10). Symptoms in teen life: secret betting, chasing losses, lying about spending, feeling a rush when you "almost" win, treating loot boxes like harmless games.

Read Colossians 3:17 and Ephesians 4:28 aloud. Hold up the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) as faithful stewardship and Achan (Joshua 7) or Gehazi (2 Kings 5) as greed that destroyed families. God's way out: honest labor, generous giving, contentment, and refusing the first bet that opens the door.

Play the game

Run "Stack the Deck?" twelve to fifteen minutes. Round 1 sorts biblical wisdom from betting culture; Round 2 names Scripture stories about greed and stewardship; Round 3 handles brackets, apps, and family pressure; Round 4 drills the key verses. Bridge back: every card asked whether you will live as a steward or a gambler.

Quiet honesty

Hand out the reference card. Promise plainly that nobody is collecting it. Give five quiet minutes for students to circle whether money tempts them through games, family habits, or "just for fun" bets. Keep the room calm — shame pushes secrets; clarity invites change.

Worksheet

Structured practice — verse lookups, truth checks, one scenario response, and one stewardship action for the week. Good for pairs or take-home. The reference card addressed the heart; the worksheet reinforces Scripture.

Close with faithfulness

Pray for contentment and honest work. Invite students to delete the betting app, leave the money pool, or talk to a leader if gambling is already tangled in their week. Offer hope: God can reorder a heart that chased the wrong rush — but wisdom says **don't start** what you will have to fight later.

Take it further

Discussion questions for small groups or a follow-up week:

- What does Colossians 3:17 require in "whatever you do"?
- What does Ephesians 4:28 say instead of taking shortcuts? (work, share)
- What warning does Paul give about the love of money? (1 Timothy 6:10)
- How is gambling different from earning money through honest work?
- Why does "just once" or "just five dollars" still matter? (Proverbs 22:7; habits)
- What does faithful stewardship look like for a teenager? (1 Corinthians 4:2)
- How can loot boxes, sports bets, and card games for money be forms of gambling?
- What will you do this week to honor God with money instead of betting it?

A final word

Teach the standard without mocking kids who did not know better and without glamorizing the rush. Your students will face a specific offer soon — the bracket, the spin, the "free" bet, the loot box. Give them Scripture, give them the game, give them the card, and trust the Spirit to make "no empty bet" sound like the road that actually keeps peace, trust, and faith intact.