

Psalms 119:9-16(ESV) ⁹How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ¹²Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! ¹³With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. ¹⁴In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. Gimel

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20(ESV) ¹⁰He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. ¹¹When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? ¹²Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. ¹³There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, ¹⁴and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. ¹⁵As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger. ¹⁸Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. ¹⁹Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

Hebrews 4:1-13(ESV) ¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” ⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Rev. Gary Lewis Hendrickson

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Lutheran Church

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Down and Outers

Mark 10:23-31 (ESV) ²³And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴And the disciples were amazed at his

words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” ²⁸Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

I recall watching some police show on television a while back where some very well-to-do men were playing a game of cards. All was going well until one of the men began to lose. I don't recall exactly what the rules of this game were, but it took a rather lengthy process for someone to lose. Finally, one man did lose. It was time to “pay up!” The losing player casually walked over to a nearby table where there was a loaded revolver. He picked up the revolver. To me, it looked like this must be a game of Russian Roulette where the loser had to spin the chamber of the revolver and pull the trigger with the gun pointed at his head. And I was right; however, these well-to-do men were in no physical danger themselves. Instead, whenever they lost, they went to the table and picked up the revolver and handed it to someone they had paid to take their place.

Apparently, these men had no difficulty finding “down and outers” to spin the chamber, place the gun to their heads, and then squeeze the trigger. Whether there was a “click” or a shell firing didn't appear to make any difference. If the result was a “click,” that person received a sizable amount of money. If the result was a shell firing, the sizable amount of money went to his heirs. Many people were willing to squeeze that trigger to obtain that money for themselves or their heirs. I can't imagine I that I would ever do something as foolish as playing this game. It wouldn't matter how much money I had the chance of winning. Yet there are many people in this land who—out of desperation or just plain lunacy—would participate in such a game.

Often, when I put certain situations in a different context, I find my own attitude somewhat changing. When I think of sinners, and knowing that this certainly includes me, I ponder whether a sinner would put that gun to his or her head and squeeze the trigger for an opportunity to escape hell. I've read a few stories of people who died and were resuscitated back to life who claimed they were in hell before being brought back to life. Their stories of their experiences in hell were filled with agony, pain, fear, aloneness, and a complete willingness to do anything to get out of there. In honesty, I must ask myself, “Would I be any different?” And sadly, I know that I would squeeze that trigger to escape the realities of forever damnation.

From a spiritual perspective, I am truly one of the Down & Outers because of my sinfulness. I was born under the curse of Original Sin. That means that my inherited sinfulness separated me from God at birth. And from that moment on, my own sins have continued to add to that impenetrable wall that separates me from God. Left on my own, my eternal destination would certainly be a much-deserved eternity in hell. And it is the same for you and everyone else in the entire world! There is absolutely no wiggle room when calculating the odds of us deserving eternal damnation. The odds are 100% in favor of damnation.

Many in our land attempt to beat the odds when it comes to some form of gambling. They enjoy the rush, excitement, and anticipation of winning. Professional gamblers don't try to beat the odds; rather they play when the odds are in their favor. They calculate the odds of winning and then play accordingly. Professional gamblers can win millions a year. But most amateurs or beginners just lose. The odds are just what they are; they can't be beat in the long run. Gambling casinos make loads and loads of money based on the premise that when the odds—ever so slightly—favor the house, the house always wins in the long run. Although people are aware of this fact, multitudes of folks continue to flock to the casinos with the presumption that perhaps they'll get lucky and beat the odds.

No matter how clear or precise the Bible is with its warning of eternal damnation for sin, many pay little attention to what the Word of God says. The Biblical proclamation is "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). And this warning is not only a physical death, but a spiritual death as well. That's as black and white as it gets. People will usually not have any qualms about admitting that they've sinned a few times, but they stubbornly resist the notion that this statement applies to them. They believe they are the exception. Many hold on to the false hope that they will not be held accountable for whatever sins they have committed. They believe that they can do whatever they want with impunity because of who they are—and who they believe God to be.

Millions of people in this country enter sweepstakes, like Publisher's Clearing House, or purchase lottery tickets with the hope of winning. When challenged with the odds against their winning, these folks often attempt to defuse the inquiry by stating that someone has to win—and it just might be them! Now the mathematical odds of winning the lottery are typically somewhere in between 18 million and 120 million to 1. Still, many hard-liner players hold fast to the premise that someone has to win. Even as the odds of winning are put into different contexts—such as you're as likely to be struck by lightning 6 to 45 times as you are to win the lottery—folks are not dissuaded from playing.

We've all heard the big push that proponents have used to legalize a state lottery: help fund education. Their premise is that all we must do is throw money at education and "abracadabra" the learning problem will be resolved. And supposedly, that's what our state and many others have been doing since the lottery was legalized. Yet, we've all heard reports about how the math and science skills of our school age children are not improving. We're behind many other nations—despite all the money we're spending. There's no doubt that good teachers, good facilities, and good curriculum will help the education process. However, it seems that money alone has been somewhat unsuccessful in getting our young people to WANT to learn.

Often there has been a lot of talk in our land about leveling the playing field when it comes to personal finances. Fueling this action is the premise that the rich are getting richer and the poor are becoming even poorer. Solution: tax the rich and provide some stimulus for the poor. It may sound like the government really cares about the working class in our land. However, we need to balance that information with studies that have been done about the lottery in our land. These studies reveal that 20% of the players contribute 82% of all lottery revenue. And the makeup of these players is disproportionately low-income, minority males who have something less than a college education. Instead of our government encouraging prudent financial decisions among the poor in our land, they've opted to let them fund the greater portion of the lottery.

Does a person really have a reasonable chance of winning? Listen to these statistics: the odds of you dying from flesh-eating bacteria are 18 to 120 times more likely than winning the lottery. If you're a golfer, the odds of 2 people in your foursome getting a hole in one on the very same hole are

better than the odds of you winning the lottery. Dying from a bee sting or snake bite is 180 to 1,200 times more likely than winning the lottery. Don't like those odds? You are 300 to 2,000 times more likely to be legally executed in this country than you are to win the lottery. One final comparison from the Internet: you are 450,000 to 3,000,000 times more likely to die in an asteroid collision with the earth in 2029 than you are to win the lottery. Even with these astronomical odds, masses continue to play the lottery.

The devastating problem revealed with people continuing to play the lottery is that we observe the same pattern when it comes to their spiritual destiny. People continue to "roll the dice" about where they're going to spend eternity. And the devil has the game fixed. No matter what idea people come up with, no matter what they may try, no matter how clever it is, and no matter how hard they try, all these paths and attempts will lead the pursuer directly to everlasting damnation. From the devil's perspective, he doesn't much care how people get there—just that they do get there. The evil one works very hard to keep the people that Christ died for on the cross away from the Gospel message and the only One who can save them. The devil doesn't care if a person is a moral person, a good person, a liked person, a popular person, or even a helping person. If he keeps people away from Jesus Christ, they have no hope of being saved. They're going to end up in hell—along with the devil and all his fallen angels (Matthew 25:41).

There is only one way to be a spiritual winner in this lifetime—and that's by trusting in Jesus Christ for your salvation. With Jesus, there are no odds of whether you'll be in heaven. He died on the cross for everyone's sins. There wasn't even one sin from the past, present, or future for which Jesus didn't pay the full redemption price. His goal was to save everyone—and the eternal benefits of His death on the cross made that possible. God doesn't coerce anyone to believe and follow Jesus; however, those who do believe are guaranteed life eternal when they leave this earth behind. Those not following Jesus and refusing to trust in Him for their eternal destiny will be excluded from the heavenly domain by their own choice.

Playing the Odds may be just innocent fun for some folks who enjoy gambling, entering a sweepstakes, or playing the lottery. But there is no way that it can be innocent fun when it comes to a person's spiritual destiny. There is only one way to heaven—and Jesus is that way (John 14:6). Every other way will lead to an eventual dead end with no way out. Playing the Odds with one's spiritual destiny is downright foolish and unnecessary. Jesus is the only sure way when it comes to "Down and Outers," like you and me, obtaining a place in heaven!