

# Sports Betting Is Coming to Your Church, Are You Ready for It?

Sports betting isn't just a problem for casinos or sports bars anymore – it's knocking on the doors of America's churches.

That's the message pastors heard loud and clear at a recent summit hosted by the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas. If your church isn't talking about sports gambling yet, it might be time to start.

As reported by The Christian Post, the summit was held at Travis Avenue Baptist Church and brought together pastors, researchers and advocates to confront what many believe is becoming a major spiritual and cultural issue – the rapid rise of digital sports betting.

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With just a smartphone and a few swipes, young men (and increasingly, women, too) are being drawn into a world that Pastor RaShan Frost says is built on deception and destruction. "The essential idea against gambling is that it thrives under the conditions of human covetousness, denying God as a provider and failing to be content in His provision," Frost says.

This isn't your grandfather's poker game.

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Since the 2018 Supreme Court ruling that opened the floodgates for legalized sports betting, digital platforms have exploded across the country.

“We’ve become just inundated with ads for all these opportunities to gamble money,” Frost adds, pointing to a growing trend among young men “who now have smartphones and their dad’s credit card and can really get into a lot of trouble.”

And it’s not just spiritual harm pastors are worried about. Frost warned that gambling reduces athletes to commodities and noted “18- to 22-year-olds receiving death threats” after bad performances that cost gamblers money. What kind of culture are we creating when a missed shot or dropped ball turns into a reason for rage?

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Pastor Matt Henslee of Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, found out just how deeply embedded the issue had become when he learned that teens in his youth group had already normalized sports betting. “That’s when it really hit home for me,” he said.

The summit offered more than just warnings. From using small groups as a platform for discipleship to urging pastors to engage lawmakers, speakers shared tools to address the crisis.

Greg Davis, president of The Alabama Citizens Action Program, put it bluntly: “Gambling is a lie; it’s a con job. Legislators don’t see what pastors see.”

The reality is clear: sports betting is no longer just a cultural issue – it’s a pastoral one. And if churches don’t take proactive steps now, they may find themselves behind the curve in helping their members, especially the next generation, navigate this growing trap.

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# Discover God's Will for Your Life

Marilyn Hickey loves to mentor people. She's been a school teacher, a pastor's wife and a Bible teacher, and she wants to pass on her mantle and raise everyone into the wonderful potential that God has for them.

Years ago, a woman mentored Marilyn, showing her valuable things that have sustained her to this day. Sharing her wisdom, Marilyn has compiled a wonderful resource, "Mentored by Marilyn," that discusses the will of God.

It's challenging to consider what God's will is for you. Sometimes you feel confused and people tell you different things, your circumstances can change and your health can be a challenge. But with God's help, you can figure it out.

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Do you want to know God's will for you? Do you want to get God's best for your life—the plan He has for you? You need to understand that there's the perfect will of God, permissive will of God and the overriding will of God. Sometimes God will move in a situation and override what's happening.

An illustration of God's overriding will is in the story of Balaam (Num. 22-24). Balaam was an iffy believer, up one day and down the next. He loved money. Balaam got a call from

Balak to come and curse the Israelites. He wasn't going to do it, but Balak offered him a lot of money. Balaam started to go, but we see the overriding will of God when his donkey gives him a hard time, crushing his foot against a wall. Balaam cursed the donkey, and the donkey talked back to him, saying, "Don't treat me like this; I've been a good donkey to you." So Balaam went to Balak and told him he would not say anything except what God said. Balaam looked down at the Israelites and instead of cursing them, he blessed them. The tribes were camped in a cross, and you cannot curse what God has blessed. (If you had a curse and gave it to Jesus and the cross, then when the curse came, the cross would have already taken it for you. So when you accept curses, you are accepting things that Jesus already took for you.) Like Balaam, you have a supernatural, loving heavenly Father who will override circumstances to get you in His will.

One of the most exciting things about having a relationship with God is to know His will for you. You need to know the sovereign will of God, the moral will of God and His individual will for you. You're not an accident, ' you're a divine appointment. God's plan for each person is unique. Want proof? Read Psalm 139 to be convinced.

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There are times when you think you blew it and missed God's will. Don't stress, God can create a new beginning for you. He can take circumstances and make them work for you, not against you. You need to learn how to hear God's voice, get to know His Word to be directed by it and practice the power of speaking in tongues. You need to know how to maximize your day God's way to be a high producer.

Do you want to know God's will continually? "Mentored by Marilyn," Volumes One and Two, will help you fulfill your calling and ministry.

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**Marilyn Hickey** founded Marilyn Hickey Ministries more than 45 years ago with God's vision to cover the earth with the Word. Marilyn co-hosts a daily television program, "Today with Marilyn & Sarah," reaching a potential viewing audience of over 2 billion households worldwide. Marilyn communicates deep biblical truths in a way that is understandable and practical for everyday life.

**Sarah Bowling** is on a mission to connect every one with the heart of God while loving those who are overlooked, excluded, and ignored. Led by Holy Spirit and anchored in the Word, Sarah seeks to inspire all to know the unconditional and transformational love of God in our daily lives. A Bible teacher, author, international speaker and global humanitarian, Sarah also co-hosts a daily television program, "Today with Marilyn & Sarah."