

# BEYOND THE BET

**Faithfully Triumph over the Temptation of Gambling  
7 Steps to Overcoming Gambling Addiction**



**JOSEPH AMATURO**

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# Chapter 6

## Step #1: Just Breath

*"If you don't like something, change it.  
If you can't change it, change your attitude.  
Don't complain."*  
- Maya Angelou

I know we are starting with our recovery process, however, I want to just side-track for one quick story. It's an account of someone I knew and how he lost everything because of gambling. My story, provided above, was one of first defeat and then hope, now full recovery. But I also want to share the other side of the coin. The reason I decided to write this book was because I care about you and don't want you to end up like my friend, whom we'll call John.

As a child, John watched his parents scrape by paycheck to paycheck. He vowed it would be different with him. John placed his first bet with a bookie during his freshman year of college. He found himself in debt within weeks. Later, he stole \$600 from his first employer, a supermarket, to cover gambling debts. At age 22, John made his first trip to the Indian casinos in Connecticut.

"The casinos were an escape," he said. "They gave meaning to my life." They also helped him block out the depression caused by his earlier gambling activities. Sometimes he would make the two-hour drive twice each weekend. Other times he gambled as many as 50 hours straight. His relationships with his

parents, friends, and even girlfriends crumbled as his obsession with gambling grew. His savings account dwindled to nothing. He embezzled \$96,000 from the stock brokerage where he worked, then wrote \$100,000 in bad checks. Even his arrest, jail time, and subsequent placement under house arrest didn't deter him. He still went to Connecticut with an ankle bracelet on. Nothing mattered to him but gambling.

John died at the age of 54 from a massive heart attack. He was in the casino at a blackjack table when he stood up and then immediately collapsed. It was later found that his heart attack was caused by the overabundance of stress he had from his gambling addiction.

This is a sad account of someone who didn't want to change. We are starting our recovery process in this chapter, but the question you need to ask yourself right now is, are you committed to recovery? You must decide now, before moving forward with this program. Because, unfortunately, if you are not truly committed to recovery, I'll tell you right now that this program won't work for you.

\*\*\*\*\*

If you're still reading, that means you've fully invested in recovering from your gambling addiction. And I am proud of you for making the commitment and continuing on for **YOU!**

The first step to turning your life around is to slow down and relax. Easier said than done, I know, but you must begin to slow down and take time to see the next steps in life. When you are in the throes of addiction, your life is in overdrive. You want to race to get to the fix that pleases your addiction.

There are many people who struggle with gambling. It is estimated that 2 million adults in the United States meet the criteria for gambling disorder, with another 4-6 million people struggling with problem gambling (National Council on Problem Gambling, 2020). The bad news is that gambling can take a toll on one's mental health. In fact, problem gambling has one of the highest suicide rates among all addictions. When we look at suicide in the United States, 3.9% of the adult population have suicidal ideations, and 0.6% attempt suicide each year (CDC, 2015). While this statistic is alarming, we find that for problem gamblers, there's even more cause for concern. It has been found that 37% of those struggling with problem gambling and 49% of those with a pathological

gambling disorder have suicidal ideations. Moreover, 17% of problem gamblers and 18% of those with a Gambling Disorder attempt suicide<sup>8</sup>.

The reason I mention these statistics is to show you are not alone. The stress of gambling caused me to contemplate suicide to remove my pain and suffering. Gambling destroys your mental state. But with support from your spouse or family, you can begin to slow, down, relax, and repair your mental state. Below, I'll share four strategies I use to unwind and refocus. I encourage you to share your addiction with your spouse and family if you have not already.

# 1

## Strategy #1: Meditation

Meditation is the first of three strategies to help you slow down and focus. Start to meditate daily in the morning and night for at least 10 minutes at a time. You can go longer as you go and learn its effectiveness, but start with 10 minutes at least once a day for now, but twice a day for true effectiveness.



### What is meditation?

Meditation is a practice that involves focusing or clearing your mind using a combination of mental and physical techniques. It is also the practice of mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity to train attention and awareness and achieve a mentally clear, emotionally calm, and stable state.

Scientists have also found that meditation "changes the structure and function of the brain in ways that help us to reduce stress and improve our ability to regulate emotion<sup>4</sup>."

Several apps have guided meditations that can be played on most devices. I use an app I purchased on my phone that has a guided 10-minute meditation. Practicing meditation decreases the inflammatory response in people exposed to psychological stressors, particularly for long-term meditators<sup>9</sup>. According to neuroscience research, mindfulness practices like

meditation dampen activity in our amygdala and increase the connections between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex. Both of these parts of the brain help us to be less reactive to stressors and to recover better from stress when we experience it<sup>9</sup>.

There are many different types of meditation but one I've had a lot of success with is breathing meditation in conjunction with body-scanning. Breathing is an element of life, but we only know one type of breathing. In this style of meditation, you will use different breathing techniques to help relax your mind and body.

One small note before we get into *how* to meditate. When you start meditating, you may struggle to clear your mind. But do not worry. It takes a lot of practice to do this and to learn how to return to your focus when your brain wanders. When you do get distracted, just try to bring your focus back to your breathing. Touching the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth is a Tibetan practice that may also help bring your focus back. Personally, I find that putting my hands on my stomach and chest to feel the rise and fall of my breathing helps me concentrate because it helps me use my senses to focus on my breathing.

## How to Practice Meditation

Here is my approach to a basic meditation for beginners:

1. **Choose a quiet spot that is free of distractions.** Turn off your phone, television, and other distractions. It is important to find an out-of-the-way place where you won't be distracted by calls, people walking in on you, or any interruptions. If you choose to play quiet music, select something calm and repetitive. I use ocean sounds because I love the sound of the ocean. I find that imagining the beach helps me relax.
  - You may also choose to use a guided meditation from an app or website.
  - Either sit in a comfortable chair or lay down on a mat or blanket. If sitting, your hands should be placed on your lap or by your side. If on the floor or bed, similarly place your hands to your side.

- If you are sitting, ensure you don't slouch or lean too far back. You should be in a comfortable chair with the small of your back against the back of the seat. Sit up straight and stretch your spine so that it is elongated.
- 2. **Set a time limit.** If you are just getting started, you might want to stick to shorter sessions of about 5 to 10 minutes in length. As I mentioned above, you should aim for at least 10 minutes per day, but this may be too hard in the beginning. In that case, try for 10 minutes once in the morning or once at night. After a week or so, you should feel more comfortable attempting 10-minute sessions twice a day.
  - If you're not using an app, set the timer on your phone or use a stopwatch, but don't use an alarm. Importantly, don't use the alarm tone you wake up with in the morning. That will be distracting and may cause you to lose the benefit of the meditation when it goes off.
- 3. **Pay attention to your body and get comfortable.** It is important that you pay attention to your body and ensure you are comfortable. If you are not, you will not be able to meditate, and you will not get the benefits. You will concentrate more on your discomfort and the pain than on the meditation.
- 4. **Focus on your breathing.** This is where the true benefits of meditation come from. Try taking deep breaths that expand your belly and then slowly exhale. Pay attention to how each breath feels.
  - Close your eyes and take a deep breath through your nose, filling your belly with air. This will take practice because our natural tendency is to fill our chests with air instead of our bellies.
    - To ensure you are breathing correctly, place the palm of your hand on your belly and see if you feel it expanding as you breathe in.
    - If not, keep practicing as you slowly inhale and exhale. Feel your hand move as your belly expands and contracts. It should extend past your chest as you look down.

- After filling your belly with air, hold your breath for three or four seconds, then slowly exhale through your mouth.
- As you exhale through your mouth don't push your breath all out at once. Instead, let it flow out slowly and naturally.
- When I breathe, I take in breaths for a count of four, then hold my breath for a count of four, and then exhale for a count of six to make sure I push all the air out of my body. Then I repeat the whole cycle.

5. **Notice your thoughts.** Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of meditation is not to clear your mind—as I said, your mind is inevitably going to wander. Instead, focus on gently bringing your attention back to your breath whenever you notice your thoughts drifting. Don't judge your thoughts or try to analyze them; simply direct your mind back to your deep breathing.

- In the beginning, it is very hard to focus on your breath without your mind wandering. This is ok. Bring your mind back using your tongue method or using your sensory of touching your stomach from above.
- I use an app that helps me and sometimes it will play a gong or quiet bell to remind me to bring my focus back to my breath or the present.

I recommend you start this today because meditation *does* take practice and is something that can feel beneficial at any time. Start with this breathing meditation, then explore other types of meditation, if you like. As a Christian, I try to use mantras as I breathe in and out. I invite the Holy Spirit to enter me as I breathe in and then I ask the Holy Spirit to take out any impurities or bad thoughts as I breathe out.



### Specific Meditation Types

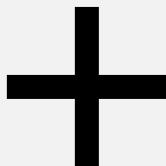
- Body-scan meditation: This practice involves scanning the body and noticing physical sensations.
- Breathing meditation: This type involves focusing on different breathing techniques.
- Loving-kindness meditation: This technique involves focusing your attention on loved ones, yourself, and others as you think kind and caring thoughts.
- Mantra meditation: This practice involves chanting a word or phrase, either aloud or in your mind.
- Movement meditation: This type of meditation involves focusing on movements of the body, either by moving specific parts of the body or observing the world around you during a walk.
- Object focus meditation: This type involves focusing attention on a specific object or mental image.

2

### Strategy #2: Positive Affirmations

I'll say more about the importance of staying positive in the next chapter, but right now I want to talk about my second strategy for slowing down and focusing: using positive affirmations to train your brain to release all the negative thoughts you've become accustomed to.

You have the internal power to heal yourself from your addiction. Positive affirmations allow you to suggest to your subconscious mind that you are not interested in your addiction and that it is not part of your life. Try repeating to yourself several times a day, "*I am free from gambling. It does not have a hold over me and I choose not to gamble.*" This sounds simple and preposterous, but it worked for me. Daily affirmations are an effective way to start weaning you off your addiction.



## What are affirmations?

Affirmations are positive statements that can help you to challenge and overcome self-sabotaging and negative thoughts. When you repeat them often, and believe in them, you can start to make positive changes.

You need to start referring to positive affirmations instead of referring back to the negative. Start saying, *"I am no longer gambling and it has no control over me."* Realize now, you are in control of your life and of your mind. You have power over your addiction; it does not have any power over you. As you progress with this step, the black hole that encompasses your mental being will begin to shrink and you will start feeling better and experiencing more self-control.

You might be tempted to consider affirmations as unrealistic "wishful thinking." But consider this: many of us do repetitive exercises to improve our physical health and affirmations are like exercises for our mind and outlook. These positive mental repetitions can reprogram our thinking patterns so that, over time, we begin to think and act differently.

Evidence suggests that affirmations can help you to perform better at work. According to researchers, spending just a few minutes thinking about your best qualities before a high-pressure meeting – a performance review, for example – can calm your nerves, increase your confidence, and improve your chances of a successful outcome<sup>10</sup>.

Affirmations have helped people combat low self-esteem, depression, and other mental health conditions, including addictions<sup>11</sup>. They have been shown to stimulate the areas in our brains that make us more likely to affect positive changes in regards to our health.

Affirmations may be more effective when you pair them with other positive thinking and goal-setting techniques. For example, affirmations work particularly well alongside visualizations. So, instead of just picturing the change you'd like to see, you can also write it down or say it aloud using a positive affirmation. The more senses you engage when saying your affirmations, the more your mind will force them into your subconscious.



### What is Visualization?

Visualization is a simple technique that you can use to create a strong mental image of a future event. With good use of visualization, you can practice in advance for the event, so that you can prepare properly for it. By visualizing success, you can build the self-confidence you need to perform well.

As you repeat your affirmations, picture yourself in the situation you want to be in. For example, I use the affirmation *“I am free from my gambling addiction and can refuse to gamble.”* As I repeat this affirmation, I picture myself looking at the gambling app or website and seeing the gambling site disappear. Sometimes I picture myself walking away from the casino or walking through it and not having the urge to gamble. I can walk through, see others playing, and hear the bells yet I am peacefully walking through and maybe stopping to eat, going into the gift shop, or just walking out the exit on the other side of the casino. This is an example of using visualization in conjunction with affirmations.

Affirmations are also useful when setting personal goals. Once you've identified the goals you'd like to achieve, affirmations can help you to keep yourself motivated to achieve them.

The power of affirmations lies in repeating them to yourself regularly. It's useful to recite your affirmations several times a day and have them pop up in your notifications on your phone. Put up post-it notes around your home or office so that when you feel an urge, you can look to a nearby positive affirmation to guide you through that tough moment. You also need to repeat your affirmations as soon as you engage in the negative thought or behavior that you want to overcome.

As you get better at your meditation and breathing, use your affirmations as your breathe and get into a relaxed state. Find three smaller affirmation statements of a positive nature and use one for breathing in, one for breathing out, and the last for when you hold your breath.

### How to Write an Affirmation Statement

There isn't a scientific or regulated way to write an affirmation statement. Think of a positive thought or something you want and put it into an

affirmation statement. Affirmation statements target a specific area, behavior or belief that you're struggling with, like gambling.

- **Think about the areas of your life that you'd like to change.** For you, it is gambling, however, it's a good idea to find other areas in your life you want to change. Do you wish that you had more patience? Or that you had the strength to repair relationships with friends and family who were hurt by your addiction? Write down several areas or behaviors that you'd like to work on in the space provided below. Be sure that they are compatible with your core values and the things that most matter to you, so that you'll feel genuinely motivated to achieve them.

<b>Areas or Behaviors to Work On in My Affirmations</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

- **Be sure that your affirmation is credible and achievable.** Base it on a realistic assessment of the facts. Affirmations are not magic spells. If you can't believe in them, it's unlikely they'll impact your life. Here are some examples of realistic affirmations.
  - *My work is recognized in a positive way by my boss and colleagues.*
  - *I am successful and my work is appreciated.*
  - *I am honest in my life and my work.*
  - *I'm grateful for the job I have.*
  - *I'm grateful to God for helping me get rid of my gambling urges.*
  - *I am successful in ridding myself of gambling urges.*
  - *I am excellent at what I do.*
  - *I am a positive role model to my wife and kids.*
  - *I am proud of my progress to quit gambling.*
- **Turn negatives into positives.** If you are struggling with negative self-talk – which is something we gamblers are good at – note down the persistent thoughts or beliefs that are bothering you. Then write affirmations that are the opposite of those thoughts and beliefs. For example, if you habitually think, "I'm not talented enough to progress in my career," turn this around and write a positive affirmation such as, "I am a skilled and experienced professional."
- **Write your affirmation in the present tense.** Notice the examples I provided are all written in the present tense. You must speak your affirmation as if it's already happening. God tells us to live by faith. Jesus said we need child-like faith to truly follow Him. Faith is speaking in the present tense. Faith is knowing God will provide us with what we need and speaking in gratitude, knowing that He has already provided it.
- **Say it with feeling.** Affirmations are more effective when they carry emotional weight. You need to want this change to happen, so every affirmation that you choose to repeat should be a phrase that's meaningful to you. For example, if you're worried about the day in the future when you may have sudden urges to

gamble, you can tell yourself, "I am really excited to take on new challenges today and replace gambling with a positive hobby."



## Strategy #3: Prayer

One of the things that helped me grow and get through the process of overcoming my addiction was prayer. We discuss more about prayer in Chapter 11, however I wanted to touch on it here a bit. There were days and nights when I would pray for several minutes just to plead with God for the courage to move forward.

During my recovery, I read *How God Changes Our Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* by Dr. Andrew Newberg. This isn't an explicitly Christian book by any means, so it is good for believers and non-believers. In it, Newberg says that engaging in 12 minutes of personal reflection and prayer each day can have a profound impact on our brains. Praying strengthens a unique neural circuit that specifically enhances our social awareness, empathy, and ability to love our neighbors by developing a heightened sense of compassion and subduing negative emotions.

Dr. Newberg also says that prayer and personal reflection help us maintain a healthy balance in life. As Christians, we rely on the hope of Jesus Christ. Prayer is one of the ways we develop a relationship with God. God desires for you to come to Him for help. I have two children. I know what my children need and what they want. I know my son needs money for gas in his car. I could go and just give him the money and walk away, but does that help me build a relationship with him? Not really. Instead, I want him to come to me and ask for the money. I want to talk to him about it, build a relationship with him, and know he is comfortable to come to me when he is in need. God our Father is the same. He desires personal relationships with each and every one of us.

Take time to pray. I sometimes use my meditation time to pray too. You can consider it killing two birds with one stone, but I find it relaxing talking to God and imagining His warm light over my body.



## Strategy #4: Removing Triggers

You need to remove triggers of gambling that can contribute to backsliding. Triggers are emotional, environmental, or social situations that remind you of gambling or stir up thoughts of gambling. Some triggers are obvious. You know to avoid visiting physical places that offer sports betting and casino gaming. You also know that the use of recreational mind-altering substances (alcohol and psychoactive drugs) cloud your judgment and may add to a back-slide. Unfortunately, trigger avoidance is more complicated than that. There are other less conspicuous scenarios that inflate your risk. By becoming aware of what these camouflaged cues are you may avoid falling prey to problematic gambling behavior. This strategy I've broken into subtasks to help identify triggers that I realized caused me to backslide while trying to recover.

### ***Watching TV***

This one may not come as a surprise. I needed to curb my television watching and frankly was happy to do it. Now, I spend more time reading. If you watch TV during, before, or after televised sporting events or stream games that allow commercials, then you know what we're talking about. Sports betting advertising is everywhere, and these ads are direct and powerful triggers. I would preface that I did watch movies on Netflix or other paid streaming apps that did not have commercials. This is more geared toward sports programs, news networks, and regular commercial programs where you can be subject to enticements to trigger gambling.

I don't have to tell you how FanDuel, DraftKings, or MGM flood their marketing departments with money so they can populate every other commercial. There is a reason why they do this: to get you to spend more money and place bets. Now, you don't have to stop watching TV, or even sports for that matter, but you do need to be mindful of the risk. For me, I had to stop watching sporting events because it triggered me to wager. I made a commitment to myself to never wager on sports again so I took all measures to avoid a fall. I didn't remove television cold turkey. It took time and a lot of self-control to gradually stop watching sports over three weeks or so. It was a very conscious effort because I used to love watching my favorite teams.

This is one of the more challenging triggers to avoid because my spouse and I used to visit friends or family, go to parties, or, if it was a Sunday, watch whatever local NFL game that was on TV. I would make a point to stay engaged, but I would either turn my back or go to another room. I was open with my problem and my friends and family were very supportive. I encourage you to be open too if you are in a place where there are trusted family and friends. They will help. Most times, they were compassionate towards me and turned the TV off or put something else on. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. You are not alone.

### ***Surfing Online and Phone or Computer Apps***

Consuming content on your smartphone is an even greater trigger than TV because there are endless offers that open up gambling apps that may already be on your phone. Let's face it, we are always on our phones. Not only will these ads be delivered when streaming sporting events or reading the "so-called" news, but they may also come from cookies that were stored on your device from past gambling site browsing and gaming. As a result, your primary form of daily communication can quickly become a weapon against your desire to stop gambling.

I started with an electronic accountability partner. I immediately cleared the history and cookies from my phone and computer web browsers. I followed the instructions for iOS devices and Android. (You can easily Google how to do this if you don't know how.) Next, I deleted all existing casino, sportsbook, and fantasy sports apps from my smartphone. As for the electronic accountability partner, I've used Gamban, an app that blocks access to betting websites and

apps on your device. Apps or programs like this help to enforce your commitment to stop gambling when your willpower doesn't.

### ***Sporty Social Gatherings***

Some social gatherings may trigger the urge to gamble. UFC PPV, March Madness, and Super Bowl parties are ripe with betting-related conversations between friends and family. If these gatherings take place with alcohol in the mix, your inhibitions will subside and you may be tempted to gamble. If you are comfortable telling your social circle about your problem you can ask that they keep related conversations at bay. I always recommend trying to open up to those closest to you at these events – because in most cases, they will try to help you.

In the beginning weeks of my recovery, it was hard to attend social gatherings where I knew more people besides just close family and friends would be there. One of my wife's friends always had Super Bowl parties and she invited everyone! When I say everyone, I mean *so* many people. She loved entertaining and hosting parties. I used to tease her and tell her that she didn't need all these friends and only needed a small circle of friends. I thank God I have an understanding wife because she loved to go to these parties of her friends, but agreed to stay home with me to help me with my recovery. This brings me back to one of my primary points: If you don't feel comfortable, discuss that discomfort with your spouse or partner. Keep in mind that your comfort level with social gatherings will change depending on where you are in your recovery.

### ***Participating in Office Pools***

This should be self-explanatory but should be mentioned. One of my weaknesses, when I was trying to recover, was giving up participating in office pools. The office sports pools included March Madness Brackets, NFL knock-out pools, football pools or games that had me pick scores or winners for the week, and so on. I think you understand -- have been in some of these pools too. These are a definite no-no when you are trying to recover. Don't even try to do it for fun. If you broke your leg, would you take the cast off to see if you can walk on it? No! You would be impeding the healing process of the bones. The same is

true for gambling. Your brain is in healing mode and taking this chance could jeopardize your recovery and limit your healing.

This is the easiest thing to avoid, or at least, that was my experience when I was recovering. Office pools are something you choose. You control your actions there and you can not blame anyone else if you fail. Kindly avoid any of these pools. I chose to get better and not participate.

Today, I can and do participate in March Madness brackets on my own for fun – with no inclination to gamble. I do stay away from office pools and such that involve money. I don't tempt myself with betting devices that use actual or fake money. If you were an alcoholic, would you go into a bar? Would you just try one drink because it's been so long? No! So don't tempt fate and yourself by rejoining that office pool after you get yourself clean.

This is the first principle or step to your recovery. There is a lot here and this process is not a sprint. This is a marathon.

I think it's important to remind you to take time to practice and learn the skills in this chapter before moving on to the next step. This is a cumulative stepped plan and each principle or step builds on the next one. Rushing through this book will not help you to be successful and may even frustrate you because it is a lot in a short span. It took me about eight weeks to complete all the steps and finally feel free from gambling. It may take you longer – or maybe you will do it more quickly! But this is not a race.

Great work!! I am proud of your first step by getting this free chapter. If you want to read more you can purchase the book on our website below.

Your **next step** is to go to our website or click the link below to schedule a 15-minute call with me NOW!! We can meet to discuss our situation and see where we can help you recover.

[Click HERE to schedule your call](#)

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“... with God, all things are possible.” - Matthew 19:26 NLT

You got this!

*Joe Amaturo*