**Chutes & Ladders #1**

How many of you are familiar with the game, “Chutes and Ladders”? This is a game that actually originated as an ancient Indian game called, “Snakes and Ladders”.

Now today we view this as a kid’s game that’s all about luck, you roll, you land on a square, you might hit a ladder, you might hit a chute or a slide. It’s all luck right?

Now still today but certainly in the original version of the game it wasn’t so much about luck as it was these lessons in morality. A “ladder” equaled something “virtuous” and a “snake” equaled something like a “vice”. A virtue would be something like:

* generosity
* faith
* humility
* kindness

A vice would be something like:

* lust
* anger
* murder
* theft

So the idea of the original game was that if you hit enough “ladders” or “virtues” then you would have success but if you hit the “vices” or “snakes” they could be your downfall. The goal of course being that you could somehow achieve some higher state simply by being a good person and doing good things.

So fast forward to 1943 and Milton Bradley comes out with a slightly less intense version of “Snakes and Ladders” called, “Chutes and Ladders”.

But here’s what’s interesting, even the modern game communicates these same types of ideas. If you look closely at a “Chutes and Ladders” game board you see:

Ladders:

* A boy mows his yard and then gets to go to the circus.
* A little girl sweeps up and then gets to go to the movies.
* A boy takes out the trash and then gets ice-cream.

Chutes:

* A boy pull the tail of a cat, slides all the way down the chute and ends up with a bandaid on his forehead.
* A boy is skating in front of a sign that says, “No skating” and then slides down the chute and ends up falling through the ice.
* A kid is playing in the rain and then slides down the chute and ends up sick.

Now listen, there is certainly a case to be made in Scripture for the pursuit of wisdom right?

Ephesians 5:15 (NIV) says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.”

Proverbs 16:16 (NIV) says, “How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!”

Proverbs 13:3 (NIV) says, “Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.”

There’s no doubt that you and I as Christ followers are called to live lives that are marked by wisdom. We are called to speak with wisdom, to act with wisdom, to treat others with wisdom, to make choices with wisdom.

But here’s my fear, some of us have strayed away from striving for Biblical wisdom and we’ve bought into this “chutes and ladders” philosophy of life that says it’s not really about wisdom or right choices it’s more about just doing good things.

If I do “good things” that will equal a “ladder” and if I do “bad things” that will equal a “chute”. So as a result we start living our lives not in the pursuit of Biblical, Godly wisdom but we start living our lives searching for the next “ladder” in an effort to get ahead and trying to avoid the closest “chute” in order to not tumble towards what we perceive as backwards motion.

Here’s my challenge to you as we begin to talk about this idea for the next several weeks. How are you defining a “ladder” and how are you defining a “chute” in your life? In other words, when something happens in your life how do you know whether or not you are experiencing a “ladder” or a “chute”?

I mean what is it that helps you decide that what just happened is good or what just happened is bad

Really what we’re talking about here comes down to running everything we experience, running every opportunity in life through the filter of *God’s purposes* for our lives.

So I may run into what everyone around me sees as a “ladder” but if I then hold that experience or that opportunity up to God’s purposes for my life, I may discover that in reality, that’s a “chute”.

I may experience something in life that my friends may lament and apologize for, *“Oh, I’m so sorry you have to deal with this.”* but in reality, if I hold that experience up to God’s purposes for my life, what I’m going through is actually a “ladder” from God’s perspective.

In reality this heartache is for my good. On the flip side, this “win” that everyone else sees as awesome is in reality a “chute”, the beginning of a long slide down towards something that breaks the heart of God.

My fear is that so many of us have bought into whatever the world says and however the world defines success and failure. Listen…

* Not making the team may be a ladder.
* Not getting the part may be a ladder.
* Not getting into the school of your dreams may be a ladder.
* Getting your heartbroken may be a ladder.
* Not getting the invite to that party may be a ladder.
* Sitting alone at lunch may be a ladder.

Just because the world says that what you’re dealing with should be a set back doesn’t mean that’s reality. Sometimes a *set back* is in reality a *set up* for God to move.

In Isaiah 55:8 God says (NIV), “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways…”

Listen, if you are a Christ follower then you are no longer who you once were. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV), “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

If you’re now a new creation then why are you taking your cues from people that are still their old selves?

* If you’re a new creation in Christ Jesus then you have new purposes.
* If you’re a new person in Jesus then what the world defines as a ladder may be a chute.
* If you’re a new person in Jesus then what the world defines as a chute may be a ladder.

If you’re a Christ follower then you don’t define things the way that everyone else defines things. This applies to all sorts of areas.

As a Christ follower you define differently things like…

* Purity
* Honesty
* Integrity
* Success
* Failure

Over the next few weeks we’re going to look more closely at some of the “chutes and ladders” of life but before we move down that road it’s crucial that you begin to define success and failure the way that God defines success and failure.

As we head into our connect groups tonight I want us to begin to process these ideas.

What have you always assumed was a chute that may in reality be a ladder?

What have you always assumed was a ladder that may in reality be a chute?

Who do you find yourself taking cues from on what success and failure looks like in your life?

Pray with me.