



Blue Ribbons

“For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.”

The Apostle Paul | Romans 11:36 (NLT)

I remember playing *Chutes and Ladders* as a kid—one of my favorites, and one of the most brutal. I’d be close to the finish, the blue ribbon of victory practically mine... just one more roll... one more move... and then—*oh no!* I’d hit a slide.

Down I’d go...

I’d take a deep breath and regroup. *I still have a chance*, I’d tell myself. *It’ll just take a few more turns*. The next move—safe. Then another, a ladder! Encouraged and eying the blue ribbon again, I’d spin. Then—boom... another slide! All the way back to the beginning. *Ugh. Why bother now?*

Amazing how a simple board game captures life so well.

Reflect: **When has life set me back?**

We strive. We plan. We push toward life's blue ribbons—success, fulfillment, meaning—only to find ourselves suddenly set back, sometimes all the way to ground zero. It's happened to me. How about you?

Our experience isn't new. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* lived it long before we did, and he documents his journey with unflinching honesty.

First, he chased pleasure.

"I said to myself, 'Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the good things in life.' But I found that this, too, was meaningless... What good does it do to seek pleasure?" (Ecclesiastes 2:1–2)

Then he experimented with laughter, indulgence, and escape—wine, distraction, foolishness dressed up as wisdom. He pursued the happiness blue ribbons most people strive for during their brief lives. They didn't deliver.

So he shifted strategies.

If pleasure didn't work, maybe achievement would.

He built homes. Planted vineyards. Designed gardens and parks. Accumulated wealth, power, influence, and admiration. He owned more than anyone before him. He denied himself nothing. By every external measure, he won the game—the blue ribbon.

And then he stopped to look around...

"But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere." (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

Another slide. Another reset.

His conclusion is blunt but liberating: **the world does not deliver.**

*Consider: **Blue Ribbons come from God—exclusively.***

Just when the blue ribbon seems within reach, the ladder gives way to a slide—and down you go. The writer stays clear-eyed throughout and concludes: *Don't waste your time. I've already tried it. It doesn't work.*

His wisdom should save us years of anxiety—but for some reason, we still feel compelled to test it ourselves. Our nature is stubborn that way.

Thankfully, he doesn't stop with what doesn't work. He tells us what does.

"So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?" (Ecclesiastes 2:24–25)

Enjoy. That's not a command to escape responsibility—it's an invitation to live rightly ordered lives.

Work matters. Contribution matters. Productivity matters. But notice he doesn't say, *Find the perfect job.* That's just another self-created blue ribbon. We expect it to carry weight it was never designed to bear.

It cannot deliver.

Instead, he says, *Find satisfaction in your work*—whatever it may be. Choose work that fits you, yes, but don't hang your hope on it. No job will complete you. Satisfaction is not something you extract from circumstances; it's something you receive from the hand of God—a **Blue Ribbon**.

Which leads to his central question: **Who can enjoy anything apart from him?**

The writer points us upstream—to seek God first. Only then does enjoyment come. Only then do satisfaction, meaning, and fruitfulness follow. Call this the pursuit of Intimacy—connection with the source of all Blue Ribbons.

Imagine: Intimacy outpouring countless Blue Ribbons.

Though far from a game, Intimacy must be pursued. All good relationships require participation by both parties—none deepen on autopilot. Intimacy emulates the relationship the triune God enjoys within himself and he draws us into it. Unbelievable! Pursue it as your top priority!

By nature, relationships must be kept fresh—the same old, same old won't sustain it. God knows this, so when they become stale (and they will) he prunes. He allows adversity or challenges us to take a step of faith. Welcome this—pruning outpours Blue Ribbons!

A stale relationship is like an old vine—alive, but barely fruitful. Jesus makes his disfavor unmistakably clear:

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me."

*"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."
Jesus Christ (John 15:1–5)*

He makes the priority of Intimacy clear—without it:

- you can do nothing
- you experience no true joy
- you find no lasting satisfaction
- you bear no lasting fruit
- you gain no...

Blue Ribbons!

Go off the grid and ask these questions:

Coach's Questions

- **Reflect:** "What worldly blue ribbon have I been striving for? Honestly, can it deliver?"
- **Ask:** "What can I do to pursue deeper Intimacy with the triune God?"
- **Act:** Start your pursuit.
- Don't know my Mission? [Start here!](#)

Spirit Talk

Post this where you will see it regularly.

Seek Intimacy, Gain Blue Ribbons

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

Jesus Christ | Matthew 6:33 (NLT)



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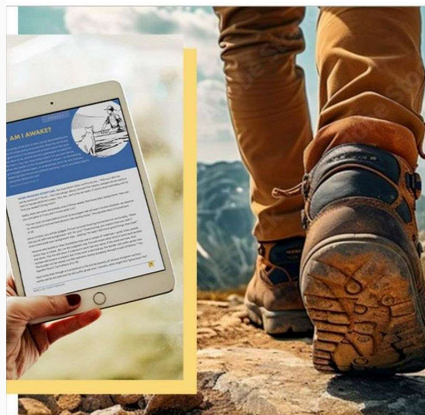
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