

A Stairway to Heaven?

John 1:43-51

Cindy Fitzwater

August 16, 2026

I want to begin by telling you how I came to choose today's topic — because sometimes an idea comes to us in a very ordinary way, or we learn that God speaks to us in places we never expect. And, if we pay attention, we might discover that God has been nudging us all along.

This message started with a concert, a song, and my dear friend, Judy. I bet you can guess the name of the song!

Judy and I worked together for many years at the department of Social Services. I was a foster care case worker when she worked in adoption. That's how we met, and we've remained friends for over 35 years. We are both retired now, but make occasions to spend time together whenever possible.

In the spring of 2023, Judy asked me to go with her to see one of her favorite bands, Get the Led Out, a Led Zeppelin tribute band – at TAGS. I had never heard of them, but she had already seen them four times! Led Zeppelin was never one of my favorite bands, except for a song or two.

Judy explained that she badly wanted to meet the lead singer, Paul Sinclair, because he was adopted. Since adoption was such a meaningful part of her career, she always hoped to someday meet Paul and hear a little of his story.

I couldn't make it to their show that time, but I did try to help Judy from behind the scenes. I emailed the band, explaining Judy's wish, - I tried to connect her with Paul, but I never got a response.

The next summer, Judy asked again, and this time I went with her to see Get the LED Out. This show was in Fairport at a great outdoor amphitheater.

We were ill-prepared; we didn't know we had to bring our own chairs, so we ended up sitting on some concrete steps for part of the night. Despite being somewhat uncomfortable, I enjoyed the show more than I expected I would. We met some interesting people, including a couple who has seen this group 100 times!

After the show, we go to talk with two of the band members, but NOT Paul Sinclair. Judy was disappointed, but she was still happy we'd had a great night.

Later that year, I found out the band was going to be playing at The Villages – only a 30-minute drive from where we both winter in Florida. I got us tickets for third-row seats to see them the following March – 2025. It was the closest Judy had ever been to the stage during one of their shows.

To prepare for the show, we made posters and donned our Get the LED Out t-shirts. (Judy gave given me one of hers to wear.) We danced and waved our signs, hoping to catch Paul's eye, which we did! He noticed us and blew a kiss in our direction. We were thrilled!

After the show, we lingered by the stage and talked with a couple of band members – as long as we could - until security finally had to escort us to the door! But again, no Paul Sinclair.

Walking back to the car, I spotted the band's tour bus and decided *I was not giving up yet!* I went and stood by the back of that bus and waited and watched. Very soon after I got there, I saw Paul Hammond, the band's lead guitarist, (band co-founder and Paul Sinclair's best friend) walking toward the bus. I called out to him, "Hey Paul!" and explained that my friend was really hoping to meet "the other Paul." He looked at us, smiled, and said..."Come with me."

He led us backstage, up to the loading dock, and introduced Judy to Paul Sinclair. For the next forty-five minutes they talked, laughed, shared stories, and took pictures. I got to meet him, too. It was awesome! We told him we thought we were old enough to be his mothers, until he said he was 60! So we decided we would be his "social work sisters." It was a very special meeting.

When we were heading for home, Judy turned to me and said, "You made my dream come true. This was one of the best days of my life."

We were both so excited that Judy got to finally meet Paul we were like giddy teenagers in the car driving back home.

Did you notice how long that actually took? First, an email in 2023 that went nowhere. Then, a night in 2024 with no chairs and still no Paul Sinclair. Finally, in 2025, the meeting!

It would have been easy, after two tries, to decide this just was NOT going to happen. But we kept saying YES to the next opportunity, even after the ones before it hadn't worked.

Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Sometimes the step that matters isn't the first one. It's the one we take after we've already been disappointed.

That evening stayed with me — and it wasn't just the concert. It was witnessing a long-time dream come true for someone special. And it was the last song they played: Stairway to Heaven.

I had heard that song a hundred times since I was a teenager. But in the following days, I found myself wondering something new:

Does the Bible actually say anything about a stairway to heaven? The lyrics themselves aren't biblical, and there's plenty of debate about what they even mean. But that question sent me to Genesis chapter 28. As you heard in Bev's reading, Jacob was having one of the worst days of his life. He wasn't on vacation. He wasn't celebrating. He was running — running from the consequences of his own choices, from his brother Esau, into an uncertain future. That night, exhausted and alone, with a stone for a pillow, Jacob fell asleep. And THAT is where God met him.

That night he dreamed of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and down on it. And God spoke to Jacob.

What's remarkable is what God didn't say. He didn't list Jacob's failures. He didn't say, "Jacob, once you get your life together, we'll talk." Instead, God gave him His presence. His promise. His grace. Isn't that just like God? He meets us when we've run out of strength — when life hasn't gone the way we planned, when we're carrying regret, AND when we're wondering what comes next.

As I studied that passage, I kept thinking about Paul Hammond. Judy wanted to meet someone she couldn't reach on her own. She needed someone who knew the way, someone willing to say, "Come with me." That phrase reminded me of Someone else.

Jesus never stood at a distance and told us to figure it out on our own. He didn't hand us a map and wish us luck. He came to us. He walked among us. He took our sins upon Himself. And He invites each of us with SIMILAR AND SIMPLE words: "Follow Me."

Years after Jacob's dream, Jesus told His disciple Nathanael, in John 1:51, "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Jesus was saying to him: Jacob's stairway was pointing to Me. I am the connection between heaven and earth.

That is why Jesus could later say, as we heard in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Notice — He didn't say, "I'll show you the way." He said, "I am the way."

The world offers us plenty of its own stairways or ladders - to: money, success, popularity, achievement. Even religion can become a stairway, if we start trying to earn God's love by climbing it. People spend their whole lives climbing — for careers, status, the ladder of success — hoping that somewhere near the top, they'll finally be enough.

But every human ladder eventually ends. Only one reaches heaven. Jesus. The song talks about a woman who is so sure "all that glitters gold" and that she can use it to try and buy a stairway to heaven. That got me thinking: can we buy our way there? Of course not! Not with money, not with possessions, not with accomplishments.

Which brings me back to Paul Sinclair - because there's something in his story that fits here too. Paul was adopted as an infant; his parents paid \$160 for his adoption. Judy and I later made more posters - for the 3rd time she and I went to see them together [oh yes, I have now seen them five times, and Judy has seen them ten!]

One poster said, "\$160 question mark? You are worth a million dollars to us!" Because, what is a person actually worth? Not \$160. Not a million dollars. A person's worth was never something that could be priced. Every one of us is priceless in the eyes of God.

We can't buy heaven. But we can walk it, one step at a time. A step of faith. A step of kindness. A step of forgiveness. A step toward someone who is lonely, or who simply needs to know that they matter. Those steps aren't payments toward heaven. They are just what a life lived with God looks like.

That's part of what makes Psalm 121 so beautiful alongside Jacob's story. "I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?" The answer, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." Jacob saw the connection between earth and heaven, ----- he wasn't walking it alone, and neither are we.

God watches over our coming and our going, when we take a step forward and when we're not sure which step to take next.

And sometimes He puts another person right beside us to help us take it.

Maybe that step looks like calling someone who is lonely. Forgiving someone. Apologizing. Offering encouragement. Noticing the person everyone else overlooked. Choosing kindness when anger would be easier.

Taking someone's hand and saying, "Come with me," the way Paul Hammond said it to us that night. We never know where one small step will lead.

And sometimes we are not the one extending the hand. We are the one who needs it. That's all right too. God never asked us to climb alone. There will be people who help us, encourage us, walk beside us. And there will be times we're the ones God places in someone else's path.

Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Notice — it doesn't say our wishes. It says our needs. And our greatest need has never been wealth, or success, or popularity. It has always been forgiveness. Hope. Grace. A Savior. God has already supplied that, in Jesus Christ.

I've thought about Judy's words many times since that concert: "You made my dream come true."

What a beautiful memory. But there is AN EVEN greater moment still coming. One day, every believer will stand face to face with Jesus, not because we found the right path, not because we climbed high enough, but because Jesus came looking for us. He became our stairway to heaven. He became our Way.

The evangelist Billy Graham once said it simply: "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people." We don't get there by climbing hard enough. We get there because Someone already prepared the way, and prepared US for it. We get there by our faith, our belief in Jesus, by accepting eternal life as a gift from God, and by confessing our sins.

So, before you leave today, I want you to think about your own stairway. Where are you on it? Is there a step toward God you've been putting off? A step toward someone who needs you: someone to forgive, someone to call, someone to encourage? You don't have to reach the top today. Just take the next step, and trust the One who is walking with you.

And maybe, someday, looking back, we'll realize the stairway was never something we bought. It didn't glitter, and it wasn't gold, like the lady in the song said. She wasn't able to buy a stairway to Heaven. Rather it was something God placed in front of us. And every act of kindness, every hand we held, every person we encouraged, was another step on it.

Just ask Judy. She can tell you.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us enough not to leave us searching for our own way to heaven. Thank You for sending Jesus to become the Way we could never make for ourselves. Thank You for meeting us with grace, just as You met Jacob, and for inviting us to follow You. Help us stop trusting the stairways this world offers, and place our faith in Jesus Christ alone. When we don't know what step to take next, guide us. When someone beside us is struggling, give us the courage to reach out our hand. May we leave here today willing to take one more step toward You, and one more step toward one another. We don't know where every step will lead, but we know who walks beside us, and that is enough. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.