

Stairway to Heaven

Do you have an exercise machine – a treadmill, stair climber, or stationary bike? No, this isn't an article on physical fitness (and no judgement if your treadmill is currently serving as a clothes rack). I'd just like to observe that no matter how long you walk/climb/pedal one of these devices, you get nowhere... literally. You may be fitter, but you haven't moved an inch from where you started. Believe it or not, this relates to a story I heard of a man teaching his kids about God's grace.

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

This father had his three young children wait at the bottom of their home's staircase while he went to the top. From there, he promised them a trip for ice cream if they could find a way up without using the stair treads, walls, or railing. Not surprisingly, the kids were stumped. Sounds impossible, unless you can fly. Then the little girl's face lit. "Daddy, would you carry me?" she asked. The loving father smiled, nodded, and then in turn toted each of his precious children up the stairs, thus satisfying the requirement and being happily reunited with them at the top.

I've never heard a better illustration of God's grace. The kids hadn't worked their way up, step by step, or somehow earned the treat their father chose to give them. He did it all himself, because he loved them. It's the same for us. The vast chasm between our lowly situation and the lofty joys of heaven is very real, as is our total helplessness to cross it ourselves. All our striving gets us exactly nowhere. The good news? God himself has provided THE WAY in his son Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross satisfies God's righteous requirement and bridges the gap on our behalf.

But let's think about that story again. What would have happened if one of the children refused his father's help? What if, as kids often do, the child had shouted defiantly, "No, I want to do it myself!" Well, he would still be standing at the bottom of the stairs. Our Creator considers each one of us his beloved child, and he wants us to spend eternity with him in heaven. But how we respond to his invitation is up to us. If you choose the do-it-yourself option, you'll find you're on a StairMaster going nowhere, for no amount of good works, meditation, or rule-following can elevate your spiritual station one inch. Instead, choose to accept God the Father's offer of grace, and trust Jesus to carry you up to heaven.

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