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In life as in faith, trust your equipment

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This past weekend I went climbing with a friend at City of Rocks National Reserve in Southern Idaho. The National Park Service promotes it saying, "There's inspirational scenery, exceptional opportunities for geologic study, and remnants of the Old West awaiting your discovery." But of course, while it is along the original California Trail, most people go there for the climbing.

After a cool night of camping we went out to climb a few routes. The second route we did was a multi-pitch route. This meant that we would climb ½ way up, tie off, and then do the second part of the climb. Between the strong winds and cold temperatures, I found this to be one of the more challenging climbs that I had done.

The most difficult part of this climb was the midway point that required you to tie off into the chains in order to belay the climber on the second part. Doing this on some multi-pitch climbs is not much different than a regular climb having ample footing to belay. But here, there was only a small ledge on which to place your feet on as you belayed. That meant that you needed to tie off with your safety equipment, lean back over the 50' drop and belay the climber as they climbed up, often out of your sight line.

Before ascending, my friend encouraged me with the climber's axiom, "Trust your equipment." A climber must put their confidence in an anchor point, ropes, and knots, with the anchor being the most important. As one climbing guide said, "Since rappelling puts your well-being entirely at the mercy of the technical system that you have established, if any point of the system fails you are likely going to be injured (or worse)." It is easy to trust your equipment when it is not being used and safely stored on your harness, but it's another matter when your safety and the safety of another are dependent on it.

I needed to trust my equipment; I needed to lean back on the daisy chain tied to the anchor point so my hands were free to hold the ropes to belay my friend and keep him safe. In considering what it meant for me to place trust in the equipment I realized that it offered an apt illustration for life. For on this precipice, my temptation was to hold onto the anchor points rather than lean back – but to do this would make it impossible to hold onto the rope that guaranteed my friend's safety.

What is our anchor point in life? On what are we depending? There are many possible answers. Maybe we are trusting in our strength, self-determination or wisdom. If so, while it is likely that these have served us well, we're also aware of their limitations. As I stood on that ledge belaying my friend, cold and distracted by the wind, I needed to stay alert and trust in my equipment to hold me.

Proverbs 3 tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." (Proverbs 3:5-6) What does this look like in our lives? In whose words am I placing my hope in? Mine or the Lord's? My only secure anchor is the Lord for, unlike my limited strength and wisdom, the Lord has no limits. It is as the old hymn says, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

By default, we may place our trust in our own understanding and yet, though familiar, it is not very reliable. Instead I must trust in the only anchor point that is secure – Christ and His Word. Because it is secure, I am able to lean back and trust that He will hold me rather than grabbing onto my safety lines of my own reasoning.

To what is your faith anchored? Your church? Your leaders? Your own righteousness? When anchored to Christ and His righteousness, while everything else may fail us, His love never fails and His power never waivers. As another hymn says, "Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms." Christ is the only anchor in which we can lean on. If you find yourself on a precipice, holding on for dear life, then look to Christ and anchor yourself to him. When you do, you can lean back and be ready for whatever comes.

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