A Bloody Mess and God’s Grace
From Calvin Landrus, SRCFC Executive Director
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May I continue to share anecdotes surrounding the medical journey (http://www.srcfc.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=875) that I have been on?

When I climb, I like to try hard...sometimes too hard. In my enthusiasm, my body parts often come in contact with the rock. One day, a climbing partner affectionately called me his “bleeder.” All that has accumulated in me adopting the byline of: “If I’m not bleeding, I’m not climbing.”

One of the risks of having a cardiac stent is restenosis which is the refilling of the vessel by the “healing” processes of the body in that traumatized area. To mitigate that possibility, I’m on long-term antiplatelet therapy which in laymen terms means that I’m taking two blood thinners. They aren’t the super-serious thinners that can cause internal bleeding from a simple bruise, but from the minor scrapes I have had, I knew my byline would probably shift into hyper-drive when I climbed.

Last spring, I agreed to partner with SRCFC board member, Jason Graves, and attempt the Steck–Salathe route on Sentinel Rock. Having a very serious reputation, the route has slowly been up-graded over the years from 5.9 to 5.10b - still within our ability range. Mark and Janelle Smalley produced a video (https://youtu.be/TJYUOmm72w) of the climb during the 50 Classics Project. Watching that and reading online comments like, “On the SS some of the 5.7 is 5.9, the 5.8 is 5.9, and the 5.9 might be 5.10, but is still 5.9 - what a great 5.9 route!” added both to the excitement and to the apprehension.

The date we had set last spring was eight weeks after my procedure and as that day drew closer, it seemed more and more reasonable for me to attempt the route. So at the crack of dawn on September 14th, Jason and I made our way up the hour and half approach and gave the route a go.

Much of the rock we encountered was not the smooth compact granite that Yosemite is known for but the grainy and abrasive type that is found in the alpine environment. So the bleeding began. As normal, I got so lost in the moment, especially while leading, that I had little precision when throwing my hands to the cracks. Soon, my hands were a bloody mess...but I was so grateful to be bleeding. Why? Because it showed my body had life.

In light of that, Hebrews 9:22, “For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness,” makes more sense. From the very beginning, the only acceptable atonement for our sins in God’s plan was the life of another being. That all come to a culmination in what Jesus did for us. Earlier in that chapter, the author states, “For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.” (Hebrews 9:14)

I’m so grateful that God’s grace has allowed my temporary life to be extended at an accustomed level. But I’m even more grateful to know that my eternal life is secure through what Christ has done for me. I pray that you have received that same life-changing grace that will one day bring you into God’s presence. If you have not, the alternative will be awful. Please take a moment to invite God into your life!
Did the bleeding stop with my hands? No! My elbows, shins and knees took a beating. But luckily superficial bleeding only looks really bad for a few minutes. Although my clotting action is slower than normal, the bleeding did stop as I belayed. So, Jason and I continued up.

Did we top out? I preface the rest of the story by sharing a comment from someone I told in advance about the climb: “I’m speechless beyond words that you’re attempting Steck-Salathe just two months post heart surgery: a little bit crazy, but mostly inspirational :) ...keep your cool in the offwidth/chimney pitch! Will pray for strength and good judgement.”

There is a fine line between smart pushing and being crazy/foolish. After the fact, I felt that we did push smartly. I knew going into it that we had a huge objective. Knowing Jason’s and my abilities, I knew we had a small window to climb a tough Grade V in a day. We had agreed beforehand that we needed to be at the top of pitch seven by noon. Although we made reasonable progress, we reached that point at 2 pm.

It was decision time. If we pushed on, it was highly likely that we would be caught by darkness and need to bivi on the route. A concern for me in not getting off until the next day was getting too dehydrated which is not good for my heart at this point. Also, this was the hardest climb Jason had attempted and he was feeling not quite prepared for the effort. So we decided to go down. (Don’t ask about how the rappelling went as that is quite a lengthy story too.)

That all said, I was very pleased with how my heart felt and my post-procedure climbing. Feeling really blessed by God for that. I’m doing much better than I deserve. Thanks for your prayers and for being part of the family of Solid Rock – Climbers for Christ. The Good News of God’s grace is going out to climbers through your presence.