SPIRITUAL ANALOGIES IN CLIMBING
From TALL TIMBER RANCH; Leavenworth, WA

Rock Climbing, the Ropes Course, and Rock Wall are wonderful opportunities to convey spiritual lessons in a powerful physical way. Here are a few useful insights and parallels. I’m sure you will find more of your own.

The physical challenge of the ropes course/climb represents your life. Life is never easy. It is full of challenges. Physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual challenges will make up every day of your life. Each of us can think of several we face right now.

The belayer and anchor represent God and the security God can provide for the challenges of our life. God’s strength and love can guide and support and hold us.

The rope represents Christ – our link to God. We cannot reach the belayer on our own. Christ ties us to God and bridges the distance between us.

Going “on belay” – our act of putting on the harness, tying into the rope and trusting it - represents our choice to become a Christian. Unless we are tied into the rope, it will do us no good. It may be there the whole time, but if we ignore it, it cannot help us. Every person has to choose to go “on belay” for themselves. No one else can be tied in for you.

Do the harness and rope limit our freedom as we climb? Only in the sense that it limits us from getting off course. It will keep us headed in the direction towards the goal and a successful end to our adventure.

Now we are ready to climb. Do the rope and harness make the challenges go away? Of course not. They are still there, as hard as ever. But they will seem less frightening because the rope gives us confidence and security.

Falling represents sin and our failures. The potential to fall is always there. Being on belay does not mean you won’t fall. But now we have the security that if we fall, we will not die. The belay will catch us because we are tied into the rope. The rope is our forgiveness from the true consequences of the fall. Our first fall after tying into the rope is an important moment. We are so afraid to fall – we are not really sure it will catch us. We yell “falling”, admitting that we have lost control. And in that moment, the belayer catches us. We are forgiven and held until we can regain our way. The fall may be scary, it may hurt a bit, it may be hard to get back on the route again, but we can learn from it and do better next time. God will never untie us from the rope, no matter how many times we fall. Only we can choose to untie from the rope and harness and climb “solo”.

A “free solo” climber is one who climbs alone without a belayer or a rope. Only the best and strongest climbers dare attempt it. “Free solo” climbers represent the people we all know who appear so successful, strong, and powerful without God in their life. They don’t seem to need God, and their great life would seem to verify that. But what seems so obvious in the climber is not so apparent to them. One mistake, one fall risks serious injury or death, depending on how high they have made it. They cannot climb forever without a mistake. One loose rock under their foot, one handhold that gives way, one crack with a bee’s nest in it when they reach in, one ledge with a bird that suddenly flies in their face, one move that is just too hard at the end of the day, and all their strength and power and beauty and expensive gear will not save them. At that moment they become as vulnerable as the beginner who could not make it off the ground. The old saying “the higher they climb the harder they fall” takes on a very literal meaning.
The rules and protocols, which the leader requires represent God’s laws – the 10 commandments etc. The rules are not there to ruin our fun, but rather to keep us and others safe so we can all enjoy the experience more. Without agreeing on these rules, we would waste time, energy, have more conflict and risk injuring or even killing ourselves and others. This is also true of God’s laws. We find that the greatest joy for the most people comes from following the rules God gives us.

The leader/guide of the activity represents those who guide and teach us in our spiritual walk – pastors, youth leaders, parents, Sunday school teachers etc. Leaders are not perfect people – they are flawed humans just like the rest of us. But they have gained knowledge, wisdom and experience that enable them to help us learn how to succeed in this challenge. The leader’s role is to teach us how to use the equipment and follow the rules and help us make good choices about what we are ready to handle. Can a leader be wrong? Of course. If a climbing guide convinced you to ignore the rules, or “go without” the safety gear, they would be misleading you, and endangering your life. Just as a spiritual leader who convinces people to follow him or her instead of God’s Word is a false teacher. A good leader will teach and guide you to become knowledgeable and independent. A leader who insists on obedience without teaching or explaining why it is important can be dangerous to follow. It is very important in climbing, or any risky activity to follow a good leader. It is also important to judge carefully when someone is worthy of being followed and trusted.

As you climb and experience adventures in the wonders of God's creation, we hope you will grow in faith and trust in your Creator, this week and throughout your lives.

To learn more about TALL TIMBER RANCH, see www.talltimber.org