

Life on the Ropes

No one has ever called me a daredevil. I've never bungee-jumped off a cliff, parachuted from an airplane or spent time in a shark cage. But when my friend Michael Cole from  Christ for the Nations Institute (CFNI) asked me to speak at a leadership retreat in Ohio—and he informed me that we would be participating in a high ropes course—I said to myself, *Bring on the challenge!* I thought it would be fun!

I was wrong! Before I describe the terror I faced when I stood on a thin metal cable 25 feet above the ground, let me give some backstory. The night before this aeronautical challenge, I spoke to a group of leaders from Tabernacle of Praise, a church Michael pastored for several years before moving to CFNI in Dallas. We had gathered at a camp for a time of worship, teaching and fellowship.

On Friday night I shared a message from the life of Gideon. I pointed out how Gideon received supernatural courage from God so he could tear down the pagan altar in his father's house and lead a small army into battle (see Judg. 6:11-7:25). After the session, people gathered in groups, confessed their fears and prayed for one another.

The next day about 15 of us headed to the high ropes area. I didn't feel even a tinge of fear when we put on our helmets and harnesses, and I wasn't nervous when the instructor assured us that the cables could easily hold 50,000 pounds.

I was so sure of my agility that I volunteered to climb the telephone pole first. I didn't expect to feel any fear of heights since I'm a frequent flyer. But when I finished snapping my clamps to the guide wire, stepped on the cable and looked down, my knees turned into jelly. I was trembling.

I looked across the expanse and mentally measured how far I had to walk—at least 60 feet—while holding sections of rope

hung three feet apart. I was wobbling erratically, and the stress was making me sweat. Fear paralyzed me. For several minutes I just stayed in one spot. I have never wanted to quit so badly. I wanted to climb down the pole and get out of there. I even yelled to Michael: "Why did I do this, bro?"

I took a step and almost fell, so I gripped the harness so tightly I strained a tendon in my elbow. I knew the straps would hold me if I fell, but that fact didn't translate from my brain to my knocking knees. Fear defies the facts.

Finally the instructor said I would feel steadier if I held on to the dangling ropes from the very highest point. So I scooted a few inches forward, grabbed the next rope at the top and held on. He was right. I wasn't quivering as much.

I swallowed hard and inched across the wire for what seemed like an eternity. I made it to the next telephone pole and sat down on the platform. My emotions were mixed: I was exhilarated from the adrenaline rush but embarrassed that I looked like a wimp. Yet I learned these lessons about fear:

- 1. Leaders will be tested.** Don't preach to others about courage unless you're willing to live your message.
- 2. Don't focus on your emotions.** Like Peter when he stepped out of the boat into the sea, we all are tempted to sink when we look at stormy circumstances. Let faith transcend your feelings.
- 3. Listen to voices of encouragement.** I would never have made it across the tightrope if I'd been in the woods by myself. I needed my friends to spur me forward.
- 4. Reach up.** The higher I held the guide ropes, the steadier I became. The same applies to you in whatever trial you are facing. Reach up to God and hold on to Him. He will steady you—and even if you fall He will catch you.

We are in a scary season, and many people are fainting. Don't let fear paralyze you. Don't get stuck, and don't turn back. God will give you the courage to advance.

J. lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years. He now serves as contributing editor while devoting more time to ministry. You can find him on the Web at [http://www.jlee.org](#). His newest book is *10 Lies Men Believe* (Charisma House).