

Face Your Fears—Even If Your Knees Are Knocking

I learned some important lessons about courage last weekend while I was dangling in midair.

I am not a daredevil. I have never bungee-jumped off a cliff, parachuted out of an airplane or spent any 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 on Saturday afternoon—I said to myself, *Bring on the challenge!* I thought it would be fun!

I was wrong.

“I knew the harness would hold me if I fell, but that information did not translate well from my brain to my knocking knees. Fear defies the facts.”

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 the Heartland camp near Marengo, Ohio, for a time of worship, teaching and

fellowship.

On

Friday night I shared a message about the life of Gideon from Judges 6. It was called "Swallow Your Fears," and 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. After that session, people gathered in groups, confessed their fears and prayed for each other.

The

next day, after another teaching session and some great group problem solving exercises, about 15 of us headed to the high ropes area in the back of the camp property. I didn't feel even a tinge of fear when we put on our helmets and harnesses. And I wasn't nervous when Tyler, the ropes instructor, assured us that the cables could easily hold 50,000 pounds.

I

was so sure of my agility (after all, I'm an Eagle Scout) 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 at the others, my knees turned into jelly. I was literally trembling.

My

friends on the ground were nervous too, especially Michael—who was responsible

for bringing me to this event. I looked across the expanse and mentally measured how far I had to walk (it was at least 60 feet) while holding on to 4-foot-long sections of rope that were hung 3 feet apart. I was wobbling from side to side, and the stress was making me sweat.

Fear has a paralyzing effect. For several minutes I just stayed in one spot. I have never wanted to quit something so badly. I wanted to turn around, 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 held on tighter to the harness straps. In fact, I was gripping the straps so tightly that I strained a tendon in my elbow. I knew the harness would hold me if I fell, but that information did not translate well from my brain to my knocking knees. Fear defies the facts.

Finally one of the instructors said I would feel steadier if I would hold 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 inched across the wire for what seemed like an eternity. I

finally faced my fears and swallowed them. I made it to the next telephone pole, sat down on the platform and felt my heart pumping extra hard. My emotions were mixed: I was glad it was over, exhilarated from the adrenaline rush, and embarrassed that I looked like such a goofy wimp in front of my friends (who never made any wisecracks about my performance). The lessons I learned about fear:



**Ready for the challenge: Lee Grady (left)
with Michael Cole from Christ for the Nations**

#1.

Leaders will be tested. Don't preach to others about courage unless you are willing to live your message. God will arrange your circumstances to challenge your fears.

#2.

Don't focus on your quivering 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 had been on that wire in the middle of the woods by myself. I needed my friends to spur me forward. Don't be a lone ranger. We need each other to conquer our fears.

#4.

Reach higher. 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 onto Him. He will steady you—and even if you fall He will catch you. Remember this promise from Jeremiah 17:7: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose trust is the Lord.”

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.

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