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Carrying Faith to the Extreme

He wasn't the first to piggyback on a friend's fame, but Harry Colcord did it in dramatic style.

The story begins with Jean-François Gravellet, a 35-year-old Frenchman who once worked as an acrobat for master showman P.T. Barnum using the stage name Blondin. In the summer of 1859, excited crowds watched Blondin do a series of high-wire stunts over Niagara Falls. He not only crossed the gorge, he laid down on the rope, walked backwards, did headstands and even back flips.


Then Blondin announced a crowning achievement, saying he would carry a man across the gorge. His friend and manager, Harry Colcord, thought it was a great idea and advertised a princely sum for anyone willing to cross the wire on Blondin's back. Several men applied but each one backed out after seeing the thundering falls close up.

Turning to Harry, Blondin said, "I can carry *you*. Be a good fellow and come along." Petrified and initially speechless, Colcord finally stammered a halting consent. On August 17th, while a three-inch braided rope swayed in the wind, Blondin walked across the racing Niagara River from the U.S. to Canada, 190 feet in the air.

On the Canadian side, a nonchalant Blondin led his terror-stricken friend to the brink. In front of 100,000 people filled with hope and fear, Colcord climbed on Blondin's back, grabbed his neck and put his feet in special stirrups. The aerialist walked onto the wire and Colcord almost strangled Blondin with his hanging-on-for-dear-life hold.

"Harry," Blondin croaked above the roar of water and wind, "you are not longer Colcord; you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be a





*You can
take it with you.
But only in **this** life!
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part of me — mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself." As Colcord recalled later: "Blondin was now running just as a boy runs in order to better keep his balance when walking on a railroad track... I was sucking in some air when suddenly the rope was jerked from beneath Blondin's feet."

But the aerialist somehow managed to keep his balance. As the sweat-soaked Blondin reached solid ground, hundreds reached out their hands. The band was too emotional to hold a tune. During a frenzied celebration, the president of the New York railroad gave Colcord a \$1,000 cheque. With a smile, he offered another \$1,000 if Harry would promise not to cross again. Harry eagerly accepted.

Obviously, Colcord had more than an intellectual belief in his friend's strength and ability. He was willing to put his faith to the test, just as Jesus requires each of us to do. Spiritual life may be *precarious* but it can't be *vicarious*. Christianity is not for spectators but for those of us willing to step out in faith, hold onto Jesus, and let him carry us through this life to what awaits on the other side.

It's risky and not for the faint. Despite what many think, making ourselves completely vulnerable and giving up all control isn't for the weak. It's a gut-wrenching heart-pounding ride that puts to the test our true faith and trust in Jesus. Letting him carry us across chaos, doubt and uncertainty goes against every instinct and we either believe he's able to get us through, or we don't. Many don't and they back off when all they see is the thundering swirl of things they can't control, whether it's a crisis of faith, health, finances or relationships.

"I can carry you," Jesus says. "Come along." It's a choice. But once we climb on, there's no turning back and we have to stay in sync with him the whole way. "You are not longer you; you are me," he calls above the crisis. "Be a part of me — mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself." To find that kind of commitment, we must learn to love him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (Mark 12:28). Whether that process begins out of devotion or pure desperation, it must begin nonetheless.

All the while, many in the church will call out their encouragement and reach out their hands as we make our journey. And when others see the strength, power and ability of our Friend, he'll get the glory and we'll receive the reward. It's time to put your faith on the line.