

Fears of the First Half of Life

Genesis 12:1–4a & Matthew 6:25–34

In the series “Fearless: Overcoming Fear with Faith”

There’s a movie I want you to think about for a second.

It’s called *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* from 2013. It’s a reimagined version of the James Thurber short story by the same name. I remember reading this story in high school and again in college English.

In the 2013 movie, actor Ben Stiller plays Walter Mitty, an ordinary guy who works for *Life* magazine. Walter is an ordinary guy. He works a quiet job, keeps his head down, and does what’s expected.

But inside? Inside, his mind is alive with daydreams. In his imagination he’s brave. He’s bold. He takes risks.

But in real life... He hesitates. He overthinks. He plays it safe.

There’s this painful gap between the life he imagines and the life he’s actually living.

And I have a feeling a lot of us know that gap.

We might not have words for it. We might not even recognize it’s happening. But that somewhere underneath the surface, we feel it — that quiet ache between the life we could be living and the life we’re actually in.

Let me ask you to do something.

Think back to a moment — it doesn’t have to be dramatic — when you did something that took courage.

Maybe it was recent. Maybe you have to go back a few years. But there’s something there. A hard conversation you finally had. A first day somewhere new. Asking for help when you didn’t want to admit you needed it. Saying yes to something you weren’t sure you were ready for. Saying no when everyone expected yes.

Just find that moment. Hold it.

Now — what did it feel like right before you did it?

Almost every time, the answer is the same. It felt like fear.

Your heart was going a little faster. You were second-guessing yourself. Part of you was looking for a way out.

And you did it anyway.

Here's what I want you to notice: you didn't do that thing because the fear went away. You did it because something mattered more than the fear.

That's the territory we're in today.

Because most of us are living with fears that haven't had that moment yet — fears we haven't moved through. And they're shaping more of our lives than we probably realize.

Failure. What if I try and it doesn't work?

Rejection. What if people think less of me?

Not being enough. What if I get in there and discover I'm in over my head?

Missing out. What if I make the wrong call and lose what I already have?

These are what I'd call the fears of the first half of life.

Not survival fears. Not the kind that come from real, immediate danger. These are identity fears. Quieter. Slower. But in a lot of ways, far more powerful. Because they don't just stop us from doing things — they shape how we see ourselves.

Here's the thing about these fears — they're so common that most of us don't even recognize them as fear anymore. They just show up as hesitation. Overthinking. Staying comfortable even when we sense something more is possible.

We delay decisions. We carefully manage how people see us. We compare ourselves to everyone else. We try to control outcomes. And before we know it, we've started organizing our lives around avoiding fear rather than moving toward anything.

Walter Mitty didn't lack dreams. He lacked action.

He could imagine the life he wanted — vividly. He just never stepped into it.

And if we're honest... some of us do the same thing. We think about it. We talk about it. We plan it. But we don't move.

And here's what I want you to hear this morning: this is not a character flaw. This is a human reality. These fears are as old as humanity itself. And the Scriptures we're going to look at today speak right into them.

There's a story near the beginning of the Bible that speaks directly into this moment. It's in the book of Genesis.

It's the story of Abram. And before anything dramatic happens, Abram already has a life. He has a home. Relationships. History. He knows who he is, because he knows where he belongs. His life is settled and comfortable.

And then, God shows up.

And the message is simple. But it is not easy.

“Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

— *Genesis 12:1–2*

No map. No timeline. No risk assessment. Just a direction... and a promise.

Can you imagine the conversation at home that night?

“Hi, Sarai honey, I’m home. And I’ve got some big news. God said we should pack up and go, and so I think we should do that.”

Now, what do you think his wife Sarai said that night? **What would your spouse or your family’s reaction be? What would they say?**

“Uhh ... WHAT!?! What do you mean, we’re leaving? Where exactly are we going? How long will this take? What’s our backup plan?”

And maybe the deeper question — what would you need before you said yes to something like that? Clarity? A safety net? At least a rough outline of what comes next?

Because Abram is being asked to leave everything that gives him identity and stability. His country. His people. His father’s household. The things that tell him who he is.

I have to imagine the fears felt very familiar:

What if we fail? What if we lose everything we have? What if I’m not enough for whatever is ahead?

And then there’s this quiet, remarkable line:

“So Abram went.” — Genesis 12:4

That’s it. No long explanation. No moment of perfect clarity. He just... went.

Now, don’t misread this. This is not a story about someone who had no fear. If you follow the story of Abram and Sarai, you find plenty of examples of fearful moments along the way.

No, this is a story about someone who didn’t let fear make the decision.

Faith here looks like forward motion before certainty — not after it.

Now, let's just ahead in time some 2,000 years to Jesus, talking to ordinary people who are trying to make a living, raise families, keep things together.

He says something that, at first, sounds almost unrealistic:

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”
— *Matthew 6:25*

Jesus isn't ignoring real struggles. He actually names them — food, clothing, tomorrow. These are concrete concerns. But he reframes where we're looking. He points to birds. He points to wildflowers. And he says: look at how creation is cared for.

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”
— *Matthew 6:26*

You are cared for. You are not forgotten. You are not alone in this.

And then Jesus says something that cuts right to the heart of it:

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
— *Matthew 6:34*

In other words: you don't need your entire future figured out before you can take your next step today.

So much of our anxiety is rooted in this belief: If I can just control everything, I'll be okay. But what Jesus is saying is — you were never meant to carry that much. Worry doesn't add a single hour to your life. It just steals the hours you already have.

There's one more voice I want us to hear.

Paul, a missionary for Jesus, is writing from prison — not exactly a situation of comfort or control. And he writes this:

*“Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God.
And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds.”*
— *Philippians 4:6–7*

Notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say “stop being afraid.” He says: when anxiety shows up — and it will — bring it somewhere. Turn it into a conversation with God.

So that's what we're going to do right now. Together.

Fear has a way of taking over our thoughts. But God invites us to interrupt it — not with willpower, not with positive thinking, but with prayer.

Sit comfortably. Take a slow breath in... and out. Let your shoulders drop.

You don't have to carry everything right now.

One. Name the Fear *“Do not be anxious about anything...”*

Be honest. What fear has been sitting with you lately? What's the thing that surfaces when it gets quiet — when you can't distract yourself anymore?

You don't have to filter it. You don't have to make it sound acceptable. Just say it to God:

“God, here's what I'm afraid of...”
“This is what's been keeping me up at night...”

No pretending. Just honesty. *(Pause)*

Two. Release the Fear *“...but in everything, by prayer...”*

Now, instead of holding onto that fear — hand it over.

Imagine placing it into God's hands. Or laying it down at the foot of the cross. Whatever image helps you let go.

"God, I give this to you..."

You don't have to have it resolved to release it. You just have to be willing to stop gripping it so tightly. *(Pause)*

Three. Ask for What You Need *"...present your requests to God."*

Fear shrinks when we name what we actually need. So be specific.

"God, I need your help with..."

"Give me courage to..."

"Give me wisdom for..."

Don't be vague. God can handle the specifics. *(Pause)*

Four. Practice Gratitude — Even Here *"...with thanksgiving..."*

Even in the middle of fear, there is still something to be grateful for. This isn't denial — it's perspective. It's choosing to see the whole picture.

"God, thank you that you are with me in this..."

"Thank you that I am not facing this alone..."

This is the turning point. Fear loosens when gratitude enters. Not because the situation changes — but because we do. *(Pause)*

Five. Receive God's Peace *"The peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds."*

Now breathe again. Slowly.

God doesn't always remove the situation. But God promises to surround you with peace in it. To stand guard between you and what you fear.

Let that in for a moment. *(Allow a few seconds of silence)*

Six. Step Forward in Trust

Fear says: What if everything goes wrong?

Faith says: What if God is already with me?

As we come back, hold one more thing:

“Today, I will trust God with...”

“My next step of courage is...”

You may not control what happens next. But you are not facing it alone.

And that’s where fearless living begins. *(Pause)*

In the movie, this is where Walter Mitty turns a corner. He stops imagining. He stops talking himself out of it. He simply does the next thing.

He gets on the plane. He steps into the unknown.

Is he still afraid? I think so. But he moves anyway.

That’s the difference — not the absence of fear, but what you do next.

Let’s bring this all the way back down to earth and real life.

Here are five practical handles for this week — not someday, this week.

1. Say the fear out loud.

Fear grows in silence. It gets bigger and more overwhelming the longer we keep it inside. This week, tell one person you trust: “Here’s what I’m afraid of right now.”

That’s it. Just name it out loud. You’ll be surprised what that does.

2. Take one concrete step.

Not five steps. Not the whole plan. Just one.

Send the email. Make the phone call. Start the conversation. Register for the thing. You’ll know you actually did it because it happened — not because you thought about it.

3. Keep using the prayer pattern.

You just practiced it together. Don't let it stay here. When your mind starts to spiral this week — and it will — come back to it. Name the fear. Release it. Ask for what you need. Give thanks. Receive peace. Step forward.

That's not a one-time exercise. That's a way of living.

4. Take a break from comparison.

For three days this week, step away from whatever makes you feel behind. Social media. That person whose life looks perfectly curated. That benchmark you keep measuring yourself against.

Replace that time with something grounding — some quiet, a prayer, a few lines of Scripture. Give yourself room to breathe.

5. Do one thing imperfectly on purpose.

Try something you might not get right. Speak up in a meeting. Say the thing you've been holding. Take the first step on the project you've been planning forever.

The goal isn't perfection. The goal is movement. Because movement builds courage in a way that planning never can.

Walter Mitty didn't transform overnight. He just took the next step. And then another. And his life didn't get easier — but it got fuller. More present. More real.

At the beginning of the movie, Walter is alive. But he's not really living.

By the end, he's present. He's courageous. He's engaged with actual life instead of the one in his head.

And I think that's the invitation in front of all of us this morning.

Not to eliminate fear — that's not the goal, and honestly, it's not possible. But to stop letting fear make our decisions.

Abram didn't have a map. He had a voice and a promise. So he went.
Walter didn't feel ready. He just got on the plane.

And you may not feel ready either.

But the life you've been imagining — the one that keeps surfacing when you're quiet enough to notice it — may be waiting on the other side of a step you've been afraid to take.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to God,
and God will make your paths straight.”
— Proverbs 3:5–6*

Don't just imagine the life you want.

Take one step.

Let's pray. God who calls us, walks with us, and meets us in what we fear,

You know the fears we carry and the questions we're not sure how to ask.

Give us courage to take the next step — not because everything is certain, but because you are with us. Help us trust you more than we trust our fear. And meet us in the middle of whatever comes next as we move forward.

Amen.