

Paralyzed by Fear a Mile from the Promised Land

Numbers 13; Joshua 1:6-9

There's a movie called *We Bought a Zoo*.

It's based on a true story.

A man named Benjamin Mee has just lost his wife.

And everything in his life feels... heavy.

Uncertain.

Off.

He's trying to hold things together for his kids,
but the ground beneath him just doesn't feel solid anymore.

So he does something completely unexpected.

He buys a zoo.

Not a small project.

Not a hobby.

A broken-down, barely-functioning, financially risky zoo.

And everyone around him is thinking the same thing:

"This is a terrible idea."

It's too expensive.

Too complicated.

Too uncertain.

And honestly... they're not wrong.

But there's this moment in the film where his son is struggling —
afraid to take a risk, afraid of being rejected,

afraid of what might happen if things don't go the way he hopes.

And Benjamin says something that just cuts right through all of it.

He says:

*“You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage.
Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery...
and I promise you, something great will come of it.”*

I love that.

He doesn't say, “Wait until you feel confident.”

He doesn't say, “Wait until you're sure it will work.”

He says: Take the step anyway.

And here's what I've noticed in my own life — and maybe you have too:

It's usually not the big, dramatic moments that define us.

It's the small ones.

The conversation we almost had... but didn't.

The opportunity we almost stepped into... but hesitated.

The change we knew we needed to make... but kept putting off.

And in those moments, it's not that we don't know what to do.

It's that fear gets there first.

And it starts talking.

“What if this goes badly?”

“What if you’re not enough?”

“What if you fail?”

And before we know it...

We’re standing still.

So let me ask you something.

You don’t have to answer out loud.

Where in your life right now... are you stuck in that moment?

Right on the edge of something.

But you haven’t taken the step.

I want us to take just a moment together.

Think of one thing in your life right now —

a decision you’ve been putting off,

a conversation you know you need to have,

a step forward you keep almost taking.

Just hold that in your mind.

And now... notice what comes with it.

The tension.

The questions.

The hesitation.

That feeling? That’s exactly what we’re talking about today.

Because that moment — that hesitation —

that's not just your story.

It's all of ours.

We live in a world that runs on fear.

Turn on the news: economic uncertainty, political division, global instability.
Scroll social media: fear and outrage spread faster than almost anything else.

And then there's the personal side —
fear of failing, fear of not being enough,
fear of change, fear of what comes next.

And over time, something subtle happens.
We start telling ourselves stories:

"I'm not ready."

"I don't have what it takes."

"It's too risky."

"It probably won't work anyway."

And before long...

We start living smaller than we were meant to live.

Now here's something worth knowing:
Researchers estimate that nearly 40 million American adults
struggle with anxiety disorders in a given year.

And even beyond that, almost everyone experiences fear regularly.
In one study, only about 1% of people said they almost never feel fear or
anxiety.

So look around for a second.

Almost nobody here is fearless.

Fear is not unusual.

Fear is human.

It's actually built into us.

It's part of how we survive.

It's that internal alarm system that says,

"Pay attention — something might be wrong."

But the same system that protects us...

...can also paralyze us.

It can cause us to freeze.

To run.

Or to stay stuck.

And that's because fear doesn't just affect how we feel;

It changes how we see.

That's why we're doing this series.

Because fear is one of the most powerful forces shaping how we live.

In fact, fear is natural, but faith is choosing what to do next.

So over the next few weeks, we're going to come back

to a simple framework for responding to fear.

It's built around the word FEAR:

F — Face your fears with faith.

E — Examine your assumptions in light of the facts.

A — Attack your anxieties with action.

R — Release your cares to God.

And today, we're especially anchoring into this one:

A — Attack your anxieties with action.

Because one of the most common things fear does...

...is stop us in our tracks.

And that's exactly what we see in the story we're about to look at.

Let me take you into the story.

Scene 1: The Promise.

It starts generations earlier.

God makes a promise to his people:

"I'm going to give you a future. A land. A new beginning."

Scene 2: Slavery and Rescue.

But the people end up enslaved in Egypt.

Until one day, God steps in.

Through Moses, he leads them out —

plagues, the Red Sea opens, they walk through on dry ground.

They have seen God move.

Scene 3: The Wilderness.

Then comes the wilderness. Uncertain. Uncomfortable.

But God provides: food, direction, his presence.

Every single day.

Scene 4: The Edge of Promise.

Finally... they arrive.
Right at the edge of the future God promised.

So Moses sends 12 spies into the land to scout it out.
They come back and say:

“The land is amazing. It’s everything God said it would be.”

But then...

*“The people there are strong. The cities are fortified.
We felt like grasshoppers compared to them.”*

Here’s the key thing to understand:

**The problem wasn’t what they saw.
The problem was how they interpreted it.**

They didn’t just observe reality.
They filtered it through fear.

They didn’t examine the facts clearly.
They let fear decide the story.

Scene 5: Two Voices.

Ten spies say: “We can’t do this.”
Caleb says: “Let’s go now.”

Same facts.
Same situation.

Different perspective.

And guess which voice spreads?

The fearful one.

Because fear is contagious.

Fear spreads faster than hope almost every time.

Scene 6: The Tragedy.

So they stay.

Right there.

Just a mile from the promise.

And instead of stepping into a new future...

they wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Let that sink in.

They weren't far away.

They were right there.

Right at the edge.

But fear kept them from taking the step.**Scene 7: A New Generation.**

Years later, a new generation stands in that same place.

And God says to Joshua:

"Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged.

For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Notice what God doesn't say.

He doesn't say, "Don't worry, there's nothing to be afraid of."

He doesn't say, "It'll be easy."

He says:

“Be courageous. Because I am with you.”

Courage isn't about personality.
It's not about having the right temperament.

Courage is about trust.

It's choosing to move forward
because you believe you are not going alone.

So when we come back to your life —
that thing you held in your mind a few minutes ago —

What if the goal isn't to eliminate fear?

What if the goal is to respond to it differently?

F — Face your fears with faith.

This doesn't mean pretending everything will be fine.
It means choosing a different starting point.

Instead of automatically assuming the worst,
you begin asking:

“What if something good could come from this?”

Start with that question. Just that.

E — Examine your assumptions in light of the facts.

Ask yourself honestly:

Is this actually true?
Or is this fear talking?

Because fear almost always exaggerates the threat.
It makes the obstacle bigger than it really is.
It makes you smaller than you really are.

A — Attack your anxieties with action.

This is where most people get stuck.

Fear says: “Wait.”

Fear says: “Not yet.”

Fear says: “You’re not ready.”

Faith says: Take the next step.

Not everything at once.

Not the whole path laid out in front of you.

Just one thing. Just the next step.

Because action breaks paralysis.

Movement creates momentum.

And sometimes it really is just...

twenty seconds of courage.

R — Release your cares to God.

At some point, you come to the edge of what you can control.

And that’s exactly where trust begins.

Not certainty.

Trust.

1 Peter 5:7 says:

“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”

He doesn't just tolerate your fears.

He cares for you.

I want you to turn to someone sitting next to you —
and just finish this sentence out loud:

“One step I need to take this week is...”

[Give 30–45 seconds. Then bring it back.]

So over these next few weeks,
we're going to keep coming back to this.

**Not how to eliminate fear —
but how to move forward with faith anyway.**

The Israelites stood just a mile from the life God had for them.

And they missed it.

Not because it wasn't real.
Not because God had changed his mind.

But because they couldn't take the step.

I don't want that to be our story.

You don't have to be fearless.

You just have to take the next step.

So this week —
when fear shows up —
and it will —

remember this:

Fear is natural.

Faith is choosing what you do next.

And the life you've been hoping for...

...may be just one step of courage away.

Let's pray.

God,

You know the fears we carry
and the places where we feel stuck.

Give us courage to face our fears with faith.

Help us trust that you are with us
and take the next step forward.

And where we cannot control what happens,
teach us to rest in your grace.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.