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Sermon Transcript: Watch Where You're Faithing

I just completed my first week of empty nesting. Last of the kids out of the household. I think we're doing pretty well, hon. I think we did pretty well. We joined a gym this week. Hold your applause, 'cause here's the kicker: then we actually went to the gym three times this week. You're welcome. Pretty proud of myself. Did that right.

Not only did I have a good week ahead, I had two different sets of friends invite me to the Cardinals game and I went. It's a heck of a week to be Pastor Rob. I was so excited. There were great things happening around here. Last night, there was a music bingo event to raise money for Brightpoint, which is our partner in Needs Among Us. That was great. That was a great thing that happened this week, too. And then on Wednesday, we had our Wednesday night children and youth ministry kickoff event. That was fantastic. It was a great week.

And in fact, on Tuesday I was just like already just feeling how good this week was going to be. And I was—I walked out into the commons and, you know, I knew that later that night I'd be going to the baseball game. Already had my jersey on, you know, I was ready middle of the day and I was walking out of the church in the commons and I looked around and of course, don't you know it's Tuesday and Rhonda, our director of Christian Discipleship, already had all the little game stations set up for Wednesday night. She's fantastic, working way ahead. And over in the corner up over by where the snacks are on Sunday morning, there was this giant version of Plinko—or Plunk. And I don't know if you remember this. It's a game where it looks like an hourglass and there's sticks in the middle and you pull the sticks out and if you pull too many out the balls fall down. And I was just looking at that and I was thinking to myself, "Man, this is great. This is just—I mean, like all this is happening in the life of the church and that just is going to be so much fun. Isn't that great?"

And then that's when it hit me. The post in Cornell Commons, it hit me. I literally walked into a post. Now, the only thing that would be more embarrassing than telling you about this would be if there were security cameras in Cornell Commons and this was actually recorded.

No, no, we don't need to show it again. We don't—we don't need it on a loop. I don't know. Did you see the moment where like my brain was trying to process what had happened? Like the concussion happened and then it was like, "What the—oh, I really did that. Okay. Now, there's another scenario where I'm acting irresponsibly running around doing some crazy stuff and then you run into a post, right? But like I was in the midst of celebrating the

success of the church. 'Isn't that lovely, look at that game over there, the kids are going to—'
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Even when things are going well, you have to really watch where you're going. I learned that the hard way. The very hard way. The—it's still a little sore kind of way.

Gideon's Golden Ephod

But in our passage today, Gideon is killing it. He freed the people. He got them past the Midianites. Things are going wonderful and he gets up in front of the people and—but the people start to slide into this like, "Now we want you to be our king, Gideon. Gideon, be our king." And oh my goodness, Gideon—he does such—he gives the good Sunday school answer to them. He goes, "No, I will not be your king, and my kids will not be your king. Only God will be your king." Gideon, nice job!

Very next verse, however: "How about we collect some gold and we'll put it in a big pile and we'll melt it down and we'll make this ephod thing out of it," which is sometimes—that's a word that's used to describe an adornment that a priest might wear that's used in rituals and ceremonies. But the quantity of gold that's collected suggests this is nothing that a human being is going to wear. This is likely some type of statue or—or creation that people would gather around.

So, those of you who know your Bible may remember an older story where back in Exodus where you have the people and they're a little uncertain, they just got set free from Egypt. What did they do? They collected the gold, they melted it down, and they made themselves an idol, a golden calf. And what did the people of Israel do when Gideon delivers them from the Midianites? They're like, "Let's run that play again. It worked so well last time." They basically fashioned themselves a little idol. And it uses a very particular word there. It says that the Israelites prostituted themselves to this thing, which conjures up all kinds of questionable images in your mind as I say that out loud, but just to say this is a word to—to clearly communicate to you that this was not healthy, good worship. This was making that object their god.

And it was so tied to Gideon and his family and the glory of Gideon that it became—it says it became a snare to Gideon and his family. A snare is like something that traps you. So it's like it trapped—it trapped him and his family. It got them caught in thinking a certain way, that they were so important, that they were the ones where the glory and attention should go towards. And this continues on and then he has a whole bunch of kids and he then ends up—one of the passages or the verses that we skipped over mentions how he has a son and he names the son Abimelech, which by the way, Abimelech means "my father is king." What happened to the Sunday school answer, Gideon? You were doing so well.

Parachutes vs. Lifelines

But isn't this true how like sometimes our very successes can take our eye off the direction that we should be headed? Sometimes our very successes cause us to wander.

Sometimes we use God a little bit more like a parachute than a lifeline. You know, a parachute, it's something you deploy only when you're falling, and then when everything seems fine, you just stuff it back in the bag and stick it in the closet.

Faith has this weird thing about how it acts on the other—the ends of the pendulum. When things are going great in our lives, how often do we hold on to a faithfulness, a devotion, a connection with God? And then when it goes the other direction and things are not going so well, we say, "Oh, now is not a time for me to try to work on my faith. Life is too chaotic. Life is too—it's too busy. There's too much going on. There's too many problems with this relationship or that relationship. It's, you know, when things settle down, that's when I'll get back into my faith and back into my regular connection with God in my life." And so what happens is things going great, don't think much about God. Things going terrible—well, when things settle down. And so it's waiting for some weird sweet spot in the middle where we'll make that time. And too often we don't.

One of the things that we'll be doing with the confirmation students—and I said earlier, 12 confirmation students this year, very excited about that—is we're going to be working specifically on building daily habits of faith, because what the research shows again and again is that you can pack in a whole lot of knowledge into this noggin of yours, but until your faith becomes a daily habitual action, then it doesn't really land. And that the most resilient of—of those who come out of their—their teenage years and then grow into their faith, those who become the most dedicated in their faith often can identify these types of daily habits that they build up when they're younger. And so we're—we're dedicating ourselves to emphasizing some of that. But working in that time sometimes is so hard when life is going great and when life is going not so great.

The Teeth-Brushing Standard of Faith

You know, I—I discovered something the other day amongst people that I am connected with in my little circle: not everybody brushes their teeth every day. Yeah. Now, I'm not talking about, you know, there's people who struggle to make ends meet and, you know, to—and so they end up skipping some of those habits like that because—I'm talking about people who fully could be brushing their teeth, but just choose not to every day. They make that choice. And I'm just like, "Huh, that's a thing you could do." Some of you are like, "Once a day? I can't believe there's people who don't do it twice a day or after every meal." Good

for you. Four out of five dentists love you. Do you ever wonder what that other fifth dentist is doing? It must be a horrible dentist. Never recommends anything.

But yeah, brushing our teeth for most of us—I'll just—I'm going to be very liberal with this. I'm going to believe that most of us find brushing our teeth every day a regular thing, a thing we wouldn't skip. There's never a point in our day where we go, "You know what, I'm having such a great day. I'm not going to brush today. It's a good day." We also don't say, "You know what, having a rough day, really stressed out, a lot of things going on at work. I just, you know, maybe when things settle down, I'll brush my teeth, but not today." Somehow you manage to well up the awareness and energy and dedication for dental hygiene every day.

And I guess what I'm suggesting is that instead of us being victims of the pendulum of faith—not quite being enacted when things are great and when things are not so great—what if we tended to our connection with God as well as we tended to our teeth? What if God could make teeth-brushing status in your life? The idea that there's no way you're going to go a day without giving some attention to that connection you have with your God. The one who has shown up for us again and again, even when we were little spoiled brats of God.

And one of the great things that the book of Judges does is it just shows you how much we mess up again and again. And spoiler alert: your whole dang Bible is like this. Everybody who seems to do great at one moment and give their Sunday school answers comes around usually a couple of verses later with a real winger like our Gideon did today. Knowing that we have a God who puts up with this faithfulness that's pretty sketchy on our side, knowing that we are connected with a God who sees our suffering and responds even before we repent—because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, not waiting for us to get better and act right and even say we're sorry. This God shows up—showed up for the people of Israel again and again as told in the scriptures.

And then they didn't even make it to the next generation after Gideon. As soon as Gideon dies, as we heard in our Bible verse, they're right back to worshiping other gods. Now, here's the thing: I haven't lost many church members to the worship of Baal. Most of us are not chasing after Mesopotamian gods of—or—or of old times, but we have our own modern gods that we chase after—the things that take our attention, the things that will get our daily attention, whether things are great or not so great. But we have to be careful that we keep our eyes on where we're really going, because even in the best moments of our life, we can get distracted by what's happening over here. And at some point, it's going to hit you. It's going to hit you that in the best moments of your life and in the most challenging moments of your life, you need to tend to that connection with God. You need to give it

some daily attention. It's got to rise to the level of teeth brushing. It's certainly worth it. It's certainly important enough.

And when you hit that moment in your life when you really need to lean on that relationship, when you need to pull the cord on that parachute and have it open up, it's sure going to open up a whole lot easier if you've been tending to that relationship day after day. And don't get sucked into the other gods that take your time and your attention, the other worries and the other successes. Give God the courtesy of your time and see what this beautiful, loving God does with that relationship in your heart.

I guarantee it'll be just as good, if not better, than brushing your teeth.

To God be the glory.

Hallelujah. And amen.