

Gideons

by [Marjorie Maddox](#) in the [January 2024](#) issue

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All those small, green New Testaments  
or silver-inscribed blue Bibles—over

2 billion given away in 95+ languages—  
handed out to hesitant university students

("Thanks, I already have one," you once  
tried to explain) or gifted to prisoners,

ninety-year-olds in nursing homes,  
forty-somethings losing gallbladders,

or this free bestseller quietly placed  
and prayed over in bedside table drawers

in hotels, motels, seaside inns where  
the words on thin paper are ignored

or earnestly sought out, a life redirected here,  
a soul dedicated there, or the entire book

burned with one flick of a lighter,  
or a fireworks epiphany that the faux-

leather surface is A-OK for snorting cocaine  
or paddling prostitutes, the mass-produced

pages soliciting anger, rebellion,  
ecstasy, indifference, penitence, theft.

For volunteers, the rules are straightforward:  
commercial salesman, member in good standing

of an evangelical church; willingness  
to identify yourself with the Gideon

lapel button and speak your own journey.  
As God said to Gideon, "Go with the strength

that you already have," even when,  
like Moses, your mouth fills with pebbles,

even when you feel like just the neat version  
of a Jesus Freak or a less doorbell-ringing

clone of Jehovah's Witness, you know  
you must dig in deep for the courage

you don't have, a confidence that catches  
on Do Not Disturb signs. But it's easy

enough, really, isn't it, to open  
and close the drawer or drop off

the boxful of Good News and not really  
say anything? No martyrdom required,

maybe just a joke or two at your expense,  
but nothing Salem-style. So what if

someone tears page after page, or highlights  
what she doesn't like in orange, or sits for hours

reading Revelation backwards and forwards  
while soaking in a Historic Hotel USA tub

drinking gin, then tossing the holy  
book out the tenth-floor window? "Do not

cast your pearls before swine," you learned  
as a kid, but deep inside you know

even the squeaky-clean are snouted prodigals  
smelling of anything but free-sample hotel

mouthwash and lotion. How can you complain?

It's all part of the job description for eternity

and much easier than that Right-Hand Apostle Peter  
denying everything in front of an unruly rooster?

Even you must admit that your small actions  
seem necessary but almost-cowardly behind the scenes,

the closed doors, the monogrammed shower curtains  
you never pull back, never have to clean. Still,

each night you (inhale), open any hotel drawer (exhale)  
sigh relief that the book is there. The book is always there.