

Gideons

by [Julia Spicher Kasdorf](#) in the [September 8, 2021](#) issue

On clear September days, white men in neckties  
and gold-buttoned, navy blazers with Palestinian lamps  
on their lapel pins appear on our campus, cardboard cartons  
on the walk beside dress shoes; tiny, green Testaments in hand.

From a distance, I spy them and turn, unable to accept,  
unable to refuse, unable to make conversation with men  
who seem to have stepped out of the '70s, when my dad  
belonged to the *Christian businessmen's organization*

named for a prophet who, with a band of 300 men—  
torches, horns, and clay jars—defeated the Midianites,  
*as thick as locusts, their camels without number*, later  
called Bedouins and founding members of OPEC.

Those nomads trampled fields Israelite settlers planted  
after they'd been *delivered out of the house of slavery* in Egypt.  
History on repeat, I can't stop looking at bodies in streets,  
arms raised, bodies beaten with nightsticks, pepper-sprayed

faces cleansed with gallons of cow's milk. The connection  
to Gideon? A band of brave ones, noise, smashing of jars,  
*A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!* The prophet demolished  
Baal's altar and called Israel back to the true God, all

they needed for a king. Then the story takes a turn better left  
in the Bible: Gideon's seventy sons from all those wives;  
a Shechemite concubine bore Abimelech whose name  
means *my father is king*. Our president, lips like Mussolini

who famously lied, *The truth is that men are tired of liberty*,  
turned the National Guard on his own. It's not the first time,  
and when has our nation changed without violence?

Gideon's men delivered the heads of two Midianite captains,

*What have we done in comparison to all you have done to us?*

Blasting a path through bodies with tear gas, our president posed with a Bible in front of a boarded-up church.

*He did not pray. He did not mention George Floyd, he did not*

mention the agony of people subjected . . . the bishop decried from a distance. Let me go back to Sunday afternoons when Dad filled the car with boxes of Bibles to complement '70s motel decor: bittersweet orange, burnt wood grain,

ecru lace, federal blue, avocado leather. We'd drive the Lincoln Highway or Route 70, stopping at motels with spiked Sputnik signs and parking lots backed onto boney dumps or fallow fields. I'd wait while

he talked with the manager. Success was his smile striding back to fetch boxes of Bibles for the tops of bedside stands, less if Testaments were shut up in drawers with the phone book. Hope was a weary traveler might find comfort in psalms

of praise or lamentation, guidance in the cryptic words of Jesus: *I did not come to bring peace but a sword. Blessed are the peacemakers.* Always curious, Dad never speculated about what might transpire in those rooms, nor did he wonder

aloud about what kind of stranger might take a Bible home in a suitcase. Such faith in words on a page, like me, perhaps he thought it enough to just leave books behind, driving highways between those run-down mill towns.