

Gideons

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

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.