

Gideon Speaker Steve Lovvern

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Preacher: Steve Lovvern

[0 : 00] Good morning. I have been in several churches over my life. I don't think I've ever seen an usher take up an offering with a baby on his shoulder.

! I've got a little pressure on me today.

You know how when a, what do they call the committee that goes and looks at a new pastor? A search committee, I think. Well, I've got a committee of Gideons here today. I think they're going back to report on me whether or not I get to do this anymore.

So y'all pray for them to have a soft heart. I have a rule. I don't go anywhere that I can't have fun.

And I believe that's what God intends for us to do, to have fun with him and his work.

When I decided to become a Gideon, I think it's around 16, 17 years ago, I went to a meeting where they told us about the Gideons.

[1 : 22] Several of us were there. We've got one of those coming up the third Thursday of July. If you have any interest in being a Gideon, we'd love to invite you to come to that.

If you'll see me or one of the Gideons that are here with me today after the service, we'll tell you more about it. But it's an organization that witnesses for the Lord and hands out Bibles.

And I'm going to tell you, there's nothing better than handing one of these little red testaments to a fifth grader in our school system. It touches your heart. When I decided to become a Gideon, I went home and told my wife and daughters.

I have three daughters. Some of you know them. They're involved in different areas of God's ministry and teaching here in Bedford County. But when I went home and told them I had decided to be a Gideon, I don't remember which one, probably all three, but they laughed and said, Dad, you can't be a Gideon.

And it kind of took me back for just a minute. I said, well, why in the world can't I be a Gideon? I want to. And one of them said, well, two things. You're not old enough and you're not boring enough.

[2 : 29] And I took that to be a compliment. I don't know if it's true, but they were definitely wrong about the old enough. Because if you're an adult, you're old enough. And if you're still breathing, you're able to do it.

And we encourage you to do that. Now, my girls were teasing me. But, you know, a lot of times when we go to church, we want to hear Brother Billy Joe speak or whoever your pastor is. He is here, but wherever I'm at. I would rather hear your pastor than me also. But I ask you to not listen to Steve Lover. Listen to what the Lord has to say.

Because I'm here to give a message about him. There was a captain on a battleship back in, this was several years ago, before we have the communication things that we have today.

But he's out in the ocean and he's sailing along late at night. He's up on top of the brig, I think they call it. No, that's not right. Whatever the top, what bridge?

[3 : 26] I heard it somewhere. He's up on the bridge, got his other sailors there with him. Their communication skills in those days were flashing lights to communicate through Morse code.

Well, he's up there on the bridge and they see a light way off in the distance flashing at them. He asked the sailor that's in charge of that, what is the light? What's it saying? The soldier told him, he said, it's a light telling us we need to turn 10 degrees and go to the north.

Captain thought about it a minute. He didn't like that. I set the course for this ship. You send that light a note. It must be a ship coming toward us. You tell him to turn 10 degrees and go to the south. So they sent the message. The message came back to them. No, you need to immediately turn 10 degrees to the right. The captain got a little angry then.

He said, you send him a message and tell him I'm the captain of a warship in the United States Navy and we don't turn aside for nobody. So they sent the message.

[4 : 33] The light flashed back. I'm a sailor, a private, on an island in a lighthouse and you're fixing to crash into the rocks. You need to turn 10 degrees to the north.

Folks, that's where lost people are at. They are heading for the rocks and if we don't change their direction, they're going to crash into those rocks and suffer eternity in a place they don't want to be. Now, I'm a little different than a lot of Gideons and bear with me when I ask you this question. Don't immediately think, oh, wow, what is he talking about? How many of you would like to take your fist, double it up and punch the devil in the nose?

Be honest. I see several nodding. You're kind of wondering, now, what's he talking about? First, Gideons are nonviolent. So I'm not advocating we go out and punch anything in the nose.

But I'm going to tell you how to punch the devil in the nose without physically hitting anybody as I go through what I'm here to tell you about. There was a gentleman named Mike Kersey.

[5 : 38] Mike rode a motorcycle. I rode one when I was younger. Some of y'all may be riding them now. It's a great experience. But he got into the culture pretty deeply. He joined a biker gang out in the Midwest.

And he started doing things that were not pleasing to anyone. A life of crime, just rough riding over everybody, picking fights, doing drugs, alcohol, all those bad things.

As a member of this gang, he decided he wanted to move up in the ranks and become more important. So he did things that he thought would make him look good in the eyes of those people. And it just didn't work. He never got promoted. He never got to do anything more than just be a member. One day he's sitting in a motel out in Missouri.

And he is plotting how he can move up by killing a rival member in his own gang. Somebody's got a position he wants. He thinks I'll take care of him.

[6 : 39] Then I'll move into his place. So he starts thinking about it. And he starts having a pity party. Anybody in here ever had a pity party? We all have. We all have.

In his pity party, he starts thinking, You know, I've been a biker for a while. Not real good at it. He got married and had kids. I forgot to mention that. He got to thinking, I've been a poor husband. I've been a poor father. I'm just not very successful in anything I do. He had a gun that he had there to kill the other man. And he just decided in his pity party, Instead of killing him, I'm going to kill myself.

He picked the gun up. He stared out across the room, Getting ready to put it up to his head and pull the trigger. And he saw something on the table in that hotel room. He couldn't tell what it was, but it caught his attention.

He walked over and found one of these. Curse, he laid the gun down, picked the Bible up, started reading it, Gave his heart to Jesus. Didn't kill anybody.

[7 : 44] He stayed in the game, but he stayed in the game to witness to them. He and his wife, his wife and kids got saved because of his testimony to them. And they served as ministry leaders in that biker gang for several years.

Psalms 119, 105. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. That's what God's word can do for us. Change our direction. Get us off the rocks.

Get us out of the bad situations we're in and into one where we need to be. Now, I see a lot of folks in here I know. I know you from softball. I probably refereed you or your kids, sometimes your grandkids, basketball games.

Lots of different things here. One of the places I refereed basketball is Perry County, pretty far from here, about 95 miles from here. In Perry County, there was a Gideon camp, and there was a gentleman named David Autry.

He was one of the Gideons there. They did a prison ministry down there. I've had the pleasure of going to our local jail as part of one of those before. It's pretty cool. But David and his team went to this prison, and they're witnessing to the inmates.

[8 : 56] They're brought into a room maybe the size of this one. They get to get out of their cells. Some of them come just to get out of their cells. Others come because they want to hear what's being said. Well, there was a group in there.

They went through the plan of salvation with them. They witnessed to them. And at the end, they offered them a chance to, if you want to know more or you want to be saved, come down front, and

we'll pray with you and talk to you.

They were just about to do that with three or four people that came forward when they heard a voice in the back of the room. It was a man. He said, I'm a Muslim. Can I be saved?

Folks, anybody can be saved. All you've got to do is open your heart up and let Jesus into it. That day, that Muslim and the other guys that came forward were given the plan of salvation, and we trust that he was saved that day also.

Who are the Gideons? Born-again Christians. We're members of churches. I have actually attended church with some of the folks that are in here before at previous churches we were both at. But that's what we are.

[9 : 58] We're members. We're business and professional men. Our ladies are part of the auxiliary. We go to churches, schools, anywhere we need to. But we're just like the people sitting in this congregation today.

We just happen to be lucky enough to join the Gideons, and we encourage you, if you're interested, as I said earlier, to do the same thing. Philippians 4, 13. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

That's how I'm able to stand in front of you. Y'all can't hear it. If y'all hear a little rattling noise, that's probably my knees knocking. If you're not a little nervous when you're speaking to church or a group, then something's wrong with you.

We give out Bibles and we witness. We go to schools. We went to Bedford County fifth graders this year and gave out somewhere around 800 New Testaments to fifth graders in Bedford County.

We went to the high schools just a few months ago. It wasn't even a full month, was it? And gave out almost 600 Bibles to graduating seniors that will take them with them.

[11 : 01] Some of you may have a Gideon story to tell about where you got a Bible years ago. We go to anywhere Bibles are needed. We go to police stations, fire stations, nursing homes, jails, hotels.

I told you about putting hotel Bibles out. One of the places we do that, I said, was colleges. We go to college campuses and hand them out. In Madison, Wisconsin, one of the biggest universities in the country, University of Wisconsin, we had a Bible blitz there.

But prior to that blitz, there was two boys, age 16. Their names were Kevin and Keith. They were born, raised in a church, Christian family, grew up hearing all about Jesus, knowing what they should know.

But sometimes we fall in with the wrong crowd. Kevin and Keith did that too. They got involved with a group that were claiming to be atheists. Atheists, those boys left what they had been taught all their life and decided they were going to be atheists.

They went to classes where they learned to argue with Christians, to learn to argue with their parents. They learned to shout down anybody that said anything that they didn't agree with.

[12 : 13] We see too much of that in the world today, don't we? Well, they did that for about two years. I can guarantee you in the Lovern household that if I had told my mom and dad I was going to be an atheist, I don't know that I would have lived two years.

But they loved their kids, and they tried their best to witness to them and change them. But the boys got college age, and they decided they wanted to go to college, and their best choice was right there in their own hometown to go to the University of Wisconsin.

So they did. They enrolled, and they'd go to class. They'd get up every morning, they'd get on a public transportation bus and ride the bus over to the college and get off and go to their classes. One morning, Kevin went to class first.

He had the early class. Keith had the later class. Kevin went, got on the bus, got off at the campus, started walking down the sidewalk going toward his class, and he ran into a guy dressed like me, coat, tie, a little Gideon emblem on, handing out something he couldn't tell what it was, but it was these little green college testaments.

And he saw the people handing them out. He didn't know what it was until he got to the Gideon. And when the Gideon told him what it was, he gave him the business, what he'd been training for two years.

[13 : 30] Cussed him out, told him that's a book of lies. I don't need what you got. You're all wrong. He went on about his way. As I said, that's a big campus.

Every time he came to an intersection where he had to turn, go into his class, he encountered another guy handing out these. Second one got the same business.

Just terrible to him. After the second one, he looked up, and as he looked across the campus, he could see Gideons all over that campus. He thought, man, I don't want to waste time with these people.

So I'm going to take the next one they offer me, and I'm going to get them off my case, and then I'll get rid of that thing later when I'm out of sight from them. That was his plan, but that wasn't God's plan.

He decided also that if I put that in my backpack, they're not going to see it. They're just going to keep asking me to take one. So I'll fool. I'll open it up and start reading.

[14:30] Guess what? God's word is so powerful. It got into him. He got to reading. I don't advocate skipping class, but he skipped class that day and gave his life to Jesus.

Now, that's a pretty good story. How many of you? I know several of you are my age, so you remember Paul Harvey? Paul Harvey used to have a segment that he had called The Rest of the Story.

He'd tell a story, and then he had something else that went with it. We got something else that goes with this one now. Kevin, who's just been saved, has got a brother who's been doing the same thing he had been doing, and now he's got to go home and face that brother, twin brother, and let him know that, brother, we were wrong, and I found the truth.

You got something you got to do. You kind of dread it. Well, that's the way he was. He didn't want to face his brother. He didn't want to get cussed out for being a Christian, but he knew he needed to do it.

So every step he took toward home, his feet got heavier. They share an upstairs bedroom. He went up the stairs, feet just barely trudging. He got to the door.

[15:40] He took a deep breath. He thought, okay, here I go. He opened the door, found his brother in the floor reading one of these. Both of them got saved that day.

Kevin went on to become a minister to preach the word of God. God's word is so powerful he can do things like that, change you right dead in your tracks, whatever you're doing or have been doing, and take you a different path.

Where do we do what we do? We do it all over the world. We do it heavily in the United States, but we go to other countries too. There's about 270,000 Gideons in the world today.

Now 270,000 sounds like a lot to you compare it to how many people there are in the world. We would love to have more in the Gideons, but just like the story of Gideon in the Bible, God's going to take whatever we got and make it work.

But we would love to have more, so if you're interested, please do. We're in about 200 of 230 countries. Bibles are printed in about 110 different languages where we can give them Bibles in their own language.

[16:46] In the United States, most of us were raised on the King James. I like the King James, but we use the New English Standard too because if you weren't raised on the King James, that could be pretty tough reading.

But I've got an official Bible with me. It's a King James. It's a black King James. It's not official if it's not black. That's a joke. Some of y'all caught that. There are some people who get too bent out of shape.

We want them to read God's Word. We want them to be able to understand God's Word. The first billion Bibles we gave took us about 114 years to give them out.

The second billion, I said that wrong, 109 years. The second billion only took 14 years. We are working on our third billion now. We're right at 2.6 billion Bibles been distributed all over the world since the Gideon started over 100 years ago.

We give out over 770 million annually in the United States. We have camps all over the world. There are 36 Gideon camps in Serbia, which is a heavily Muslim country.

[17:55] There are 58 in Pakistan, which is a Hindu country. So God's Word is out there in places you wouldn't think that it's at. We were able to get Bibles out in China for a few years, and I'll tell you today that they're still being given out in China, just not officially.

It's illegal in China, but Christians are doing what they should be all over the world. There was a gentleman named Rabi. He was from India. He was a member of that Hindu faith.

He was born into a family that as he got older, he would become a leader in the Hindu church. Well, Rabi went through all the studies he needed to be to be a good Hindu leader, but he also was given a testament one day.

He was given a brown worker's testament. I've got one here somewhere. He read it, but he didn't understand it. He found a lady in India that had been a Christian, and he went to her and said, Hey, help me to understand this.

Does that sound like the story of the eunuch in the Bible, where God sent a prophet to witness to him to help him understand it? That's the way this gentleman was.

[19:09] This lady helped him understand it. He became a Christian. His family, most of them converted to Christianity, and he was pretty well hated in his country by the rest of them that didn't understand Christianity.

But he continues to witness there. Why do we do what we do? It's very simple. Isaiah 55, 11 says, So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.

It shall not return void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Where did the Lord send us his word? It's in the Bible.

He tells us it will not return void. So if we give it out to people, it's going to show results. Maybe not immediately. I may never hear a story of a guy that I gave a Bible, or a kid I gave a Bible, that got saved, until I get to heaven.

But I fully expect we will there. We're seed planters. Our job is simply to give them the word, help them to understand the word, and then hopefully the Lord will enter their hearts.

[20:17] Jesus is all that matters. Time is short. I think you see things all the day, all the time that people are talking about, well, Jesus has got to be coming back soon. Look at what's going on in our world.

Sure it is. If you read Revelation, we see about diverse weather. We see about wars, rumors of wars. All the things are there, but none of us know when that is.

But until he comes back, our job as Christians is to reach lost people with the good news of Jesus Christ. I told you, we got to give out to fifth graders these little red testaments.

I want to tell you a story about a young kid named Russell. He was in the fifth grade where he went to school. The Gideons there could not go in the schools, like we're blessed to get into the schools. Y'all keep praying that we'll continue to be able to do that. But at his school, they couldn't do it. They had to stand out on the sidewalk and hope that the kids would come by them to get one.

[21:13] Well, Russell was one of the kids at that school that came by and got one of the little red testaments. About three weeks after he got it, Russell ran out of school one day, wasn't paying attention, and ran in front of a school bus, was run over and killed.

At his funeral, his parents shared with the minister during the funeral that they had found Russell's testament. And in the back of that testament, he had written, I love Jesus, and signed his name. That gave his parents a great sense of relief, knowing that Russell was in the arms of Jesus. When we get to the age of accountability, we need to have our heart with Jesus.

Never know when our time will come. How can you help? Any money you give us, and I appreciate this church. Y'all have us in your budget. You give us a generous donation every year.

I appreciate when we get to the offering. If you give any, that's great. It costs \$1.60 to put one of these in the hands of a kid. We used to be able to say \$1.25, but you know how inflation is.

[22:17] It's got us all. It costs us about \$6.50 to put one of these in a hotel. It was five just a few years ago. A case of the Hotel Bibles would be \$650.

A case of the little ones would be \$160. I don't want anybody in here to take money away from your family. I want you to take care of your family.

That's part of what God tells us to do too. I don't want anybody to give us money that should be going to your church. I hope you're giving your tithes and offerings on a regular basis here. I want you to give if you're blessed to give.

I don't like the saying, give till it hurts. I say give till it feels good. I don't want any of the money from the church. I want any of the money from the family. I want some of you golf money.

I want some of you softball money. Hit myself. I still play softball. I want some of you bass pro. I want some of you walmart. I want some of that money that you don't really have to spend where you're spending it.

[23 : 19] But I want you to put Bibles in the hands of people. And that's what we ask you to do. If you're hard to buy for and my family tells me I am, we have a Gideon card program.

I'm sure y'all, I know y'all have one at this church. I'm not sure where it's at. But there are cards that you can get and send to people. And in that card, you're telling them I'm donating this many Bibles in your name.

Now, if you're hard to buy for and you get something like that, it tickles your heart. You didn't need another tie or a shirt or anything like that. Knowing that you're helping spread God's word is a great thing to do.

So that card rack's back there for expressions of sympathy, love, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, any gift that you can think of like that.

The occasions come around a lot in us. We also have a life book. And I've buried, no, there they are. We have a life book. It's God's word. It's in an interactive form.

[24 : 18] We give these out to churches free of charge. You can order up to 1,500 of these if you want them. The youth pastors or the leaders of the church, the idea is you give this to your kids.

They take it to school and they hand these out to their friends. One's a book of Mark. One's a book of John. It just helps them to have scriptural answers to teen issues that they go through.

It's an opportunity for them to trust Jesus in that book. It's free from the Gideons. You don't pay a thing for it. Who can get these life books? Anybody affiliated with your church can order them.

Your pastor, your senior director, whatever they are. We like to give them out. We just ask the church leaders to make sure you don't order them and stick them on a shelf in a back room somewhere.

We want these in the hands of kids all over this country. We want them all given out. Give them all out then we'll get you some more when you need them. Remember I asked you earlier how many of you would like to punch the devil?

[25 : 20] I'm to that point now. You don't know how you punch the devil in the nose. Pray for your pastor. You already have this morning. I'm glad he's getting some time off to relax and I don't know where they went but I'm sure it's somewhere they're going to enjoy.

But when you pray for your pastor it's just like hitting the devil in the nose. Pray for each other. It's easy for us to pray for each other when we're friends and family but you pray for the ones you don't love.

You pray for the ones that hate us as Americans. That they would get saved because God can save them. You love as Christ loves us. We do those kind of things it's just like popping him in the nose. When we pop him in the nose then we've got a chance of getting somebody away from him that he's grabbed them and trying to hold on to them. Punch him in the nose by witnessing to your world.

I don't know if you still work or you go to school or what your world is but I guarantee you there's somebody where your world is that needs to hear about Jesus. So I encourage you witness to your world.

[26 : 28] Volunteer. Volunteer in your church. I loved hearing those kids earlier. I know they've gone to their own classes now but I guarantee you your church needs help in their young people program, their youth program, all those.

Volunteering to change diapers in the nursery on a Sunday morning is a very vital thing for a church. Donate time at the soup kitchen, crisis pregnancy center.

Donate blood. That helps people. Help out at schools. They take volunteers there. Help the Gideons. Become a friend of Gideons. If you don't want to be an actual Gideon, you can be a friend of Gideons.

We can tell you about that too. Join the ministry. If you have any notion to be a Gideon, we'd love to have you. You don't have to speak in churches. Those of us that do that, we do it because we enjoy doing it and want to do it.

But join us because we need help handing out Bibles at all those places we do that. Got one more little testimony for you. Story about a Gideon that attended a Bible study and in that Bible study, it was a community Bible study where several churches come together.

[27 : 40] We have two or three of those in Bedford County right now. But this Gideon would go to those services and he would study the Word and he got to noticing the people, meeting a few people.

But he noticed one gentleman that was there all the time and then all of a sudden he noticed one time he wasn't there. Well, he thought about him and wondered where he was at. Next week he went again and the guy still wasn't there.

So he went to the guy leading the Bible study and said, hey, I've been coming for some time. The guy that used to sit over there by me, I hadn't seen him in a few weeks.

Do you know where he's at? And the leader told him, he said, well, he's now in assisted living. It doesn't look like he has much more time to live. Well, the guy wanted to go visit him so he went to the assisted living facility, sought him out.

He asked the gentleman, how and when were you saved? The guy told him, well, I was born into a Christian family. Folks, that won't save you. He said, well, I was baptized when I was eight.

[28 : 43] Just being baptized won't save you unless you've been baptized for the right reason. He said, well, I joined a church when I was 12. Joining a church won't save you. The only way to be saved is ask Jesus to come into your heart.

And when he asked that man had he done that, the man said, well, I've never done that. So he led him to the Lord that day. He went back to visit with him the next week and the man had died. But not until he was saved.

Never know when you're going to go. I got a story I want to tell you. It's not a testimony. Long time ago, over 100 years ago, there was a boxer named Gentleman Jim Corbett.

Anybody ever heard of him? Pretty famous in the history books. He had a poem or a statement. I don't know what you want to call it. But this is what he said. Fight one more round.

When your feet are so tired, you have to shuffle back to the center of the ring. Fight one more round. When your arms are so tired, you can't hardly lift your hands. Come on guard and fight one more round.

[29 : 48] When your nose is bleeding and your eyes are black and you're so tired, you wish your opponent would crack you on the jaw and knock you out, fight one more round. Remember that the man who fights one more round is never whipped.

We serve the all-time undisputed, undefeated champion of love. They beat him. They crucified him. They buried him. But they could not stop him from rising forever to be our savior.

He's asked us to fight for the souls of lost people one more round. Let's do that so we make sure none of our friends, none of our relatives, none of the people we don't even know wind up spending eternity in hell.

Heaven is promised to those of us that are saved. We need to reach out with that good news to other people. In closing, punch that devil every chance you get by doing some of the things I've told you about today.

Next last verse in the Bible says, it's Revelation 22, verse 20, He which testifies these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

[30 : 58] Thank you again for giving me this opportunity. I'm going to turn it back over to who? Caleb or who? I guess it's Caleb.

But I do appreciate being here today and I appreciate you letting me speak for the Lord. Thank you.

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