

The work of the Gideons

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, would you turn with me please to our reading this morning, which we find in Paul's second letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 3, and we can read there from verses 10 to 17.

2 Timothy 3, and reading at verse 10. You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings. What kind of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endured? Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Amen. May God richly bless to us the reading of his own precious and most holy word. Just before we look upon God's word and consider God's ministry of the Gideons International, let us just prayerfully sing that lovely praise song, Speak, O Lord, as we come to you. O Lord our God, that indeed is our earnest prayer, that you would speak, O Lord, and that we in turn would have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us. Lord, we ask now that it would be your words that we would hear this morning, not the one who stands here, and that indeed there is a message for each and every one of us. For your word reminds us that your word does not return to your void, but will accomplish that for which you sent it and the purposes which you desire. And Lord, we'll be ever mindful to give you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of the glory, the honour, and the praise. And we do that the only way we can, in the precious, peerless, powerless, powerful name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

If you would, if you've got your Bibles handy, just turn back to these verses that we read there. And I really want to, as I share with you this morning, something of our Gideon ministry, locally, nationally, and internationally, want us to have a focus, particularly on verses, say, 15, 16, and 17, where Paul says, and how from infancy, Timothy, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Because all Scripture is God-breathed, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. So here we pick up Paul's second letter to young Timothy, where he's encouraging Timothy. He's giving him words of wisdom.

[3 : 3 8] He's telling him about the Christian faith. He's saying, Timothy, this is a hard road. He says, you'll suffer. Look what I suffered in Iconium and Lystra and Derby. And he says, look what you go through. And that's the message for us too. We will, as Christians, be persecuted. That's the message for us down through the ages. But he says, Timothy, he says, persevere. Remember, remember the Holy Scriptures. Remember the words that you learned from your mother Eunice, from your grandmother Lois.

Remember me as I mentor you. But above all, remember the Word of God. He says, because Timothy, it's the Word of God that will make us wise to salvation. And he says, this is the God-breathed Word.

Penned by men, but it's the God-breathed Word. And it's useful for teaching, rebuking, and correcting, and training, and righteousness, so that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And notice the word all, all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is the God-inspired Word. And my friends, that is what the Gideon's ministry is about. Firmly grounded on the Word of God.

That's why we're members of it. That's why Sheena and I have been members of Gideon International for over 28 years now, is because it is founded on the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God.

[5 : 15] About four years or four or five years ago now, when we were over in Nashville and Tennessee, that's where our Gideon International headquarters are, we took advantage of having a tour around in one of these little coaches. And as we were passing the Gideon's headquarters, the driver said, oh, he says, that's the offices of the Gideons. You know the Gideons?

They're the Bible people. And I love that. We're the Bible people. We're the people who believe that the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God is the Word of life. Today, we operate now in 201 countries worldwide, with the Scriptures translated into 95 different languages. I guess the largest voluntary evangelical missionary organization in the world. Brothers and sisters, we do believe that through God's ministry of the Gideons International, he can change the world because it's firmly based on the Word of God and because every missionary is from within that country.

All of our members are from within their own country so that they are raised up in that country. The Bible is, as I say, the God-breathed Word. It is the book of life. It is the maker's instructions, the guide for life. And that's what we say in every one of our copies that we put out inside the page.

We say to people, the Bible, of which this New Testament Psalms is part, deals with every experience in the life of man. It gives advice and help, instruction and warning, comfort and hope, correction and direction, predictions and promises. That's what the Bible is. The New Testament is the foundation document of the Christian faith. In vivid terms, it presents the message of Jesus Christ and conveys the impact of his life and teachings upon those who first witnessed them. It's more than a book. And millions have found it to be an introduction to the person of Jesus. We hope that this book will help you to come to personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, give you hope for the future and an assurance of eternal life. We also hope that it will be a guide to you through life and help you to deal with life's problems. And of course, at the beginning of all Gideon Bibles and Testaments, there's that helps page. Where to find help when? Where to find help when? And at the end there too, we've got what we call a GPS. Something that shows you the way. It tells you what Jesus did. Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ glorified, and through his resurrection power he conquers sin and death for all time. When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you can have eternal life. And there's a bit here to sign for your commitment as you commit to the sinner's prayer. That's what it's about. My friends, there's estimated about 7.4 billion people in the world today. And at least two-thirds of them do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is our challenge as Christians, is to reach these people with the good news. Recent surveys have revealed that 52% of the population have no religion. Well, that's fine, because we don't want them to have a religion, but we want them to have a relation, a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 52] Through that they would be wise through the scriptures and have faith in Jesus Christ. I don't need to tell you this morning that the battle we're in is a spiritual battle.

And not against flesh and blood. It's a spiritual battle. It's never been fiercer. Paul tells us there in verses 12 and 13 what he's been through. But he also reminds us that all of us will be persecuted as Christians in these days. Persecution of Christians is worldwide.

There are many countries throughout the world, even in this short time when we meet here together, where many of our brothers and sisters will be persecuted. Indeed, some will be martyred for the cause of Christ. I could take you to Pakistan, to Nigeria, to Egypt, to Sierra Leone, Somalia, Syria, Eritrea, and many, many countries where brothers and sisters are persecuted.

We are not persecuted in the same way over here, but we are more and more coming under persecution through political correctness, through government legislation. Think of Asher's Bakers. Think of those individuals, whether they be a medic, whether they be a registrar and want to pray with people.

Think of legislation such as a named person legislation by our current Scottish executive. A couple of years ago, Stephen Fry, the atheist, said that if there was a God, he would challenge him thus.

[10 : 36] And I quote the words of Fry. How dare you create a world in which there is such misery? That is not our fault. It's not right.

It's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain? You see how fierce the battle is, the spiritual battle.

But friends, good news. We are on the victory side. Amen? Amen. We're on the victory side because in Christ Jesus, we have the victory through his resurrection power, sin and death have been conquered for all time, and his kingdom is coming and his will is being done. Amen? Amen. Throughout all the world. You know, over here, we are the exception in the British Isles because from our ministry, his kingdom is coming in many, many countries. I can take you to South America, to Nigeria, to the Philippines, to India, where there is a hunger for the word of God. We are the exception here.

We live in days of small things. We're not to despise the days of small things, but we are the exception. Last year, worldwide, through the Gideons International Ministry, God helped us to place 91.8 million copies of his word. 788,920 in the British Isles. All over the world, the word is going out.

We're aware that we need to now also not only put out the word, but we're aware that we need to have an app. So we have a Gideon app, and there's cards out there. You can go out whereby you can have an app on your smartphone so that you can just bang and have the Gideon app. Last year, of these 91.8 million, in Africa, we placed 20 million scriptures. Asia, 18 million. Central America, 7.9 million. Europe, 6.7 million. The Pacific Rim, 5.5 million. South America, we placed 21 million. In Brazil alone, 9.1 million. And in the United States, 11.4 million copies of the word of God. And we do that faithfully because the word of God says in Isaiah 55, 11, so is my word that goes forth my mouth, it will not return to me void, but will accomplish that for which I sent it in the purposes which I desire. So in these 211 countries now worldwide, there are only 15 countries that are self-supporting. So there's 186 countries that are not self-supporting. So we need to feed these countries, as it were, and send scriptures out to them. And we do go out and have what we call Bible blitzes, whereby we set aside, say, one or two weeks, and about 23 men would go out there from different nations and place scriptures in the highways and the byways of life. But my friends, these are difficult days.

[14 : 04] We have got a demand for scriptures like that, but the fight has to match it. It's like that. So we have to try and juggle that. Our international executive director has to try and work out how we place these scriptures. But at this moment in time, at the end of January there, our figures are that we have 5 million copies pending, that we camp it out until finance is available.

2.5 million for Peru, 913,000 for Kenya, 600,000 for Mexico, 400,000 for Haiti, 275,000 for Guatemala, 112,000 for South Sudan, 100,000 for Spain, 77,000 for Hungary. So we need the finance to match the demand for these scriptures. But God is good. Our God supplies our every need. And we thank you for folks like yourself who support us prayerfully and financially as well. But how thankful we are that we are encouraged by many, many testimonies we get worldwide of men and women and young folk coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ through the reading of his word. Let me just share with you very briefly a letter we received a few years ago from Rebecca. Rebecca says, I was a first year student at Edinburgh

University, staying in Pollock Halls of Residence. I was studying history of art and spent a lot of time with a friend with a friend from the course who was also on my corridor of halls. It became frustratingly apparent to me that there was something different about this girl and I wanted to know what it was. Coming from a non-Christian family, I was highly sceptical about Christianity and any notion of God. So my friend bore the brunt of my inquisition. She patiently answered my questions and invited me to various big question events. In my room was a Gideon Bible. At first it was just a reference book for my interrogation, but it quickly became more than that, especially the helps, where to find help when section.

It was at a Christian, a Christmas carol service that year that I felt that God was speaking directly to me, challenging my selfish, materialistic mindset.

And he was speaking to me and he was sharing with me his inescapable love. He extended his arms out to sinful me and I couldn't help but accept his incredible free gift of grace through Jesus' death and resurrection. The Gideon Bible then became a lifeline. It was my first Bible and I cherished it. Through it, I was able to learn more of God and experience him. It was a sad day when I left it behind, but I knew that it would be there for the next student in case God chose to reach them through it. Now, the Bible continues to be my anchor for myself and for my husband, where we shape our decisions in life and we're firmly rooted in God's love and wisdom. Rebecca.

[17 : 42] Life changed. Changed from darkness into glorious light. As I say, there's many more testimonies I could share with you. Many were, there's no human intervention. Perhaps somebody in the halls of residence, somebody in a hotel room, just reading the Word of God and the Holy Spirit anoints that they're convicted and converted. Reminded in Zechariah 4 and 6, the Word to Zerubbabel, not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord. And my friends, that's what we're involved in. We're involved in a spiritual ministry. How thankful we are, though, that we do not do this alone because we have friends of the Gideons. I'm aware that there are folks here at Western Hills who are friends of the Gideons. And we thank you sincerely for your prayers and for your financial support. If you're not a friend, then at the table out there, please give us your name and address.

Let's say you can sign up and you can support us in our ministry together. And you see, be assured that every penny you give to the Gideons International goes towards the purchase and distribution of God's Word locally, nationally, and internationally through 201 countries worldwide. If you're a friend, then you too are able to give out one of these New Testaments and Psalms, which you especially devised for friends of the Gideons. You know how you're in a situation, you need something, when you're witnessing to somebody, you could have that in your handbag or in your car or wherever.

Carry them around with you. You could have one of these. And also you could receive our Gideon news and our prayer letters. You know, we do these. We put these out now, the quarterly or so on. You get the Gideon news and the prayer letter. We also, through our friends, we have what we call money mites, where you can put your money into these. Sheen and I was involved in a project of designing this little money mite. And being true Scots, we say, it needs a big hole in the top that'll take a two-pound coin. Praise the Lord. They obeyed us. You just can put your money in there and every penny goes to the purchase and distribution of our scriptures. We've got what we call Bible gift cards for every occasion, for wedding anniversaries, for just to say, for birthdays, for sympathy cards, and so on. Again, we've got all of these out there on the table. And quite simply, you know, on an occasion, you can send one of these cards. And you can also send a donation to the Gideons International, and it'll be marked on the card there. And then we will send you a free one back. So for every card that you send, you've sent a donation in memory of that person, whether it be a birthday or whatever.

So that's our Bible gift card giving scheme. And also we have events, of course, where we update you and so on and give you encouragement for our prayers in this ministry. So I would encourage you, if you're not already a friend, to come and to join us in our ministry. Friends, we're often asked, you know how you're familiar with the Gideon ministry. I guess we place Bibles in all the main traffic lanes of life. Excuse me. In the hotels, prisons, nursing homes, hospitals, and so on. You might say, George, what is the best bit of your ministry? And I would say to you, every bit of it is, because it's a joy, it's a privilege to serve the Lord in this way. But if you press me very, very hard, and Alan or any of the rest of us here would say, well, the greatest joy I have is going in and giving one of these little red testaments to S1 students throughout the schools in our areas. To giving them one of these little red testaments, which will show them how to build their lives on Christ, the solid rock, knowing that all other ground is sinking sand.

My friends, a recent survey, again, reveals that over 50% of 7 to 11-year-olds have already decided that there is no God. Over 25% of 7 to 11-year-olds have not heard of the Christian faith. So by giving them the living, active, God-breathed word, this can encourage them in the days ahead how to build their life. Because we know that Christ and only Christ is the way to eternal life. And then the Holy Spirit will work in their lives. Now, yes, we do go into schools where we have refusals. Some schools are closed, yes. Again, we value your prayers to open them. Some of the students do decide, discard them. Yes, thankfully, not so much these days. But we have a faithful God, and his word does not return to him void. You know, there was on one occasion when a young boy, he didn't want to be so blatant as the rest of his peers and just throw his New Testament away. But on the way home, he looked for a convenient spot and he saw there was some long grass there and he just threw it into the long grass.

[24 : 05] A couple of hours later, an 80-year-old woman was out walking her dog. The dog was loving and foraging through the grass, and he sees this little red thing. So he picks it up, and being a good dog, he brings it back to his mistress. Oh, she puts it in her pocket. She goes home. She opens it up. She looks at the helps, and she reads through it. She's touched by the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord. She was converted.

His word does not return to him void, but he has a purpose greater than ours. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways and our thoughts are much higher. You see, I also want to extend an invitation to anyone here today who would join us in our ministry. I have to put on record that we are very, very grateful to Western Hills Baptist Church because we have five very loved, treasured, and valuable members from your church who are members of our local branch here in Edinburgh.

But hey, there could be more. If you're interested in joining our ministry, please speak to us. We'll be at the stand just after the service. But my friends, for all of us who are professing the name of Jesus Christ this morning, when we go out that door there, we go into the mission field. We go into a broken world, a world that's broken every way, socially, morally, spiritually, politically, financially.

Men and women and young people who are being deceived on a road to a lost eternity. There is no government is going to change that. They do not have the answers. But you know, we have the answer.

We have the answer. And the answer is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ himself says in John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. Acts 4 and 12. There's no other name under heaven by whom we must be saved than that of Jesus Christ. And that is the great commission for everyone who's professing the name of Christ. The question is, am I? Are you fit for purpose as an ambassador for the Lord of Lords and for the King of Kings? Well, Paul puts it to us here.

[26 : 47] He gives a charge to Timothy. I believe the charge is for me and for you as well. That we be men and women of the book. Because this book is the book. Because all scripture is God-breathed useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Then we're equipped to go and tell good news.

The good news, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. That text, note the word all. Small word, A-L-L, but it means all. All scripture is, is God-breathed.

No doubt about it. It's a living word, living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword. This is the supreme authority in the life of man. This is the guidebook for life, how we are to live our lives. So it's God-breathed. It's from our creators, from God himself. It teaches us. This is a book that will teach us. We need to read this book. The psalmist says, it's more precious than gold, yea, much fine gold, sweeter than honey, honey from the coal. We must love this book because it's a book that will teach us and instruct us in righteousness. That means being right with God.

It will also rebuke us as well. It will tell us where we're going wrong. We don't like being rebuked, but this rebukes us as well. But as it rebukes us, it corrects us and puts us back on the right path.

And it's the best training manual that we can have. It's the book that trains us. And it's an ongoing thing. It's ongoing. I've just recently retired as a pharmacist. And like many of you in your different professions, we had what we called CPD, Continuing Professional Development. And we had to present what we had done. And it was really about continuing to learn in what you're about.

[29 : 14] That's what we need to do. We're going to be ambassadors for Christ. We need to continue in our development by reading his word. So that we'll be thoroughly, thoroughly equipped for every, every good work. I want also just this morning to give a word for any of us here who as yet have not professed the name of Christ. For any who have not read this book and who are, as Paul says to Timothy, wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. You see, the reality, my friends, is that death is a certainty.

It is given unto man, but once to die, the writer of the Hebrews tells us, and then the judgment. The reality is that when we die, there's a heaven to be gained and there's a hell to be shunned.

The only inheritance we have when we come into this world is a place in hell. Romans 3.23, where all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But there's good news, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So that unless we repent of our sins, unless we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior, then he alone is the only way to eternal life.

So we need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm conscious of my time, but just as we come, bring this to a close, I want to share with you testimony.

testimony about a young man called John. And John, who we later come to know as a friend, John wrote a book. Let me give you the background. John was brought up in Paisley. Anybody from Paisley here today, I don't want to be disrespectful. John was brought up in a very rough area. As a teenager, his life spiraled out of control. And I just want to pick up and read you a short portion from his book. He says, A sense of regret began to overshadow me. My life seemed to be an endless story of wasted opportunities.

[31 : 54] I was caught in a web. The more I struggled to break free, the more entangled I became. I tried to break my drinking habits several times, but each time ended in failure. Hope was evasive, and thoughts of suicide flashed through my mind. After a bout of drinking, when I eventually sobered up, I would be left in a state of anxiety and depression for days. I'd moved back into my mum's home, and one day, just after lunchtime, while my mum was at work and my brother and sister were at school, I'd reached a stage where I knew I needed help. I realised I was not going to be able to sort things out of my own. I felt a strange desire to read a Bible. I'd evade recollection that we had a holy book which resembled that maybe a Bible somewhere in the house. Being Catholic, we had all sorts of religious paraphernalia in the house, but rather than being highly visible and on display, as they were at my grandparents' house, they were stashed away in a cupboard or a drawer. I went over to the storage unit in the back of the living room. I opened the cupboard and raked through countless useless items in search of a Bible. The cupboard was full of dead batteries, old keys, adapters for things that no longer worked. I knew that this was where the religious stuff was also kept.

As I raked through the cupboard, I found holy water, confirmation candles, crucifixes, and a prayer book, but no Bible. What I had thought was a Bible was simply a book on Catholic liturgy, and most of it was completely unintelligible to me. I gave up my search and resigned myself to the fact that there was no Bible in the house. A short while later, my sister came home from school. She would have been in first or second year at that time. Upon coming through the front door, the first words that came out of her mouth were, the Gideons were at the school today, and they gave me this Bible. A strange feeling came over me. It was like fear mingled with intrigue. Of course, I tried to play it cool. I wanted the Bible, but didn't want it to be known that I had any interest in it. So I made some sarcastic comments about all these Bible bashers and a very demissive tone of voice. And okay, show me the book anyway. What's this all about? So I sneered and I flicked through the pages. But as I opened the first few pages, I glanced at the words on the page and found myself trembling with fear. The words on the page grabbed my attention in a voice like grip.

Where to find help when in time of need? Desperate at your wit's end? Distressed or troubled? Tempted to commit suicide? Drink abuse? Drug abuse? What on earth is going on? I thought to myself, these are all the very issues that I'm facing. How can this book, which is thousands of years old, speak of these modern problems? What does the book have to say about these issues?

This is supposed to be a religious book. Up until now, I'd considered religion to be something that was completely irrelevant to everyday life. I had no idea that the book spoke right into the very questions and struggles of human existence. The Bible lacks the polished nature of a human religious ceremony. It is gritty because life is gritty. I'm not sure that my sister ever did get her Gideon Bible back. As I reflect on the situation, although I did not fully understand it at the time, I now understand that heaven's hand was upon my life. God's hand had always been upon my life. But now, eternity was beginning to break into the natural realm. The incident with the Bible did not cause me to drop to my knees and turn to God, but did create within me a sense of awe and fear. Later on, when I did turn to Christ, I would remember this incident and it would reinforce the fact that God was ordering my steps. At times, when I would feel really low, I would turn to the little red Gideon New Testament and Psalms. To be honest, most of the time, I had no idea what it was talking about. One day, I turned to the book of Revelation and I stumbled on the part which speaks about the final judgment. I very quickly understood the heart of this passage, which was a day to come when God would judge the entire world. The book spoke of people in white robes. I figured that those were

Christians. It spoke of the condemnation of the wicked. I immediately knew which category I now fell into. John Caldwell, who wrote this book, Christ the Cross in a concrete jungle, went on to study theology. John was an RME teacher, last up in Portree. John is now studying at ETS, Edna Theological Seminary, for the past rate in the Free Church of Scotland. He's gone on and written a second book called Radical Church, where he changes his views.

[37 : 26] You see, God takes folk from the guttermost and raises them to the uttermost. And he can do the same for each and every one of us here today. Friends, I'd love for you to come and to share with us after service where there's tea and coffee in the back, but we're out there. We'll be out there at the stand.

Come and we'll share with you some more testimonies. We'll show you some of the literature we have, share the ministry. Please, if you're not, sign up and be a friend with us as well.

I thank you to the leadership of the church here. Thank you all for inviting us and having us here to speak and to share with you the great things that God is doing through his ministry of the Gideons International.

Let's pray. Lord our God, we thank you for your word, your word that speaks truth to our hearts and to our minds. We thank you that it is your word. Lord, we earnestly pray that if there's anyone here this morning who as yet does not know you, Jesus, as Lord and Savior, may be this the day when they are convicted and converted and that they would come and share that with us. But Lord, we just pray for the church here, for Pastor Daniel, for Barry, for all the leadership here. Pray for those who worship here from week to week.

I pray for the vision that they would have for expanding their boundaries, that Lord, you would be in all that they do and all that they say, that you would continue to bless them. And as they are obedient to you, you would in turn add to their number daily those who are being saved. You are building your church, Lord, here and throughout the whole wide world and the gates of hell will not prevail against that. So Lord, we just thank you for our time together. We are ever mindful to give you all the glory, the honor and the praise for you are a marvelous God. So we ask, Lord, that you would in turn bless us and keep us in all that we do and all that we say. And we offer these prayers in the name that's above all other names, sweet and wonderful name of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[39 : 51] Amen.