



THE COLLECTION

The First Bible

An 1863 New Testament, carried by a Union soldier, that my brother put in my hands at eighteen.

CHRIS VALLETTA

New Testament, American Bible Society
Printed 1863

ON MY EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, my brother John handed me something I have never gotten over. A small, worn New Testament, printed in 1863 by the American Bible Society, carried in the pocket of a Union soldier through the Civil War.

The moment it touched my hands, something in me changed. My faith was new then, only a few months old. I held this little book and I could see the man who carried it: young, chaos all around him, death close enough to touch, holding onto the one thing that steadied him. His faith, and the values that came out of it.

That is the whole picture of what we carry. The world throws its worst at us, and the only question that matters is what we hold onto when it does. For that soldier, and for me, it is this:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

PSALM 23:4

I did not set out to build a collection. This one Bible sent me on a search that has not stopped. There are more than two hundred of them now, carried by soldiers from the Revolutionary War through present day. Every one belonged to someone who served.

Here is what they have taught me, and why I build everything on it. Leadership is service. Not service as a technique you add on top of the job. Service as the job. The soldier who carried this Bible was not ranking anyone. He was holding a line for the men beside him, at the worst moment of his life, with his faith in his pocket. That is a rope-holder. That is a leader.



The New Testament, open to its 1863 title page.

This is where the collection starts, with the one my brother put in my hands. You lead by what you are willing to carry.



CHRIS VALLETTA