

## A Bible and a bouquet

Lynda Kirby

Make this white Bible ceremony as simple or elaborate as you wish. Decide in advance how much you will be able to invest in the service—in time, personnel, and money. Plan carefully.

This ceremony was designed to be used as a part of or as the entire evening worship service. It may, however, be adapted to a Wednesday evening service or be presented before a bridal shower given by members of the church.

Aside from a white Bible, you will need only materials for the bouquet or the nosegay. You may purchase a nosegay form from a local florist or make one with a broad, cone-shaped piece of stiff paper outlined with wide lace. The flowers for the bouquet do not have to be (as suggested in this service) yellow roses and white carnations. If you have access to a garden, use the beautiful gardenias, camellias, or magnolia blossoms you find there. Or, you may purchase artificial flowers. Artificial flowers will provide the bride-to-be a memento of her white Bible ceremony.

Should you not use the roses or carnations, the wording of the ceremony must be altered. Make the adaptations as needed.

To begin the ceremony, participants march down the aisle of the church to the music of "O Zion, Haste," "God of Our Fathers," or another majestic tune. If you prefer a softer effect, use "O Perfect Love."

At the end of the processional comes the bride-to-be. If the ceremony is part of a worship service and men are present, the honoree may be escorted by her fiancé. After participants have reached the front of the auditorium, the young man may seat the bride-to-be in the appropriate chair and quietly take a seat near the front of the auditorium.

A suggested script of the ceremony follows.

**Speaker 1:** Throughout history, betrothal and wedding ceremonies have become more complex and ritualistic. National and religious groups have developed customs that reflect their culture and religious

beliefs. The Hebrews, for instance, established early in their history a service which marked the engagement of a couple. Usually the parents of a 13-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl drew up a legal contract for the marriage. In our society, engagement is an informal agreement with no legal ramifications. The betrothal of the Hebrews, however, was legally binding and required two witnesses. At that time, it was customary for the boy to give the girl a small coin to legalize the contract and to symbolize the esteem in which marriage was held.

The Hebrew marriage ceremony usually took place at least a year after the betrothal. After the bridal procession, the father transferred the care of his daughter to the groom.

Like the Hebrews, the Greeks separated the engagement and marriage ceremonies by several months. Having a lower place in life than the Hebrew woman, the Greek girl was not consulted when the time came to make marital arrangements. Legally, the consent of neither the girl nor the boy was needed to make the marriage valid.

Customarily, the Greek girl's father supplied her with a dowry. At the wedding, the bride and groom wore white robes adorned with garlands. The father gave the bride to the groom. No vows were exchanged.

**Speaker 2:** In the centuries since the beginning of Christianity, betrothal and marriage ceremonies have changed somewhat. Because Christianity emphasized the dignity of the individual, the woman gained a more respected place in life. By his actions Jesus elevated the role of women. He mingled with women of all classes and treated them with kindness and understanding.

During the Middle Ages woman's role was again enhanced by the advent of chivalry. During that era marriage was sanctioned inside the church and became a sacrament; vows were repeated by the bride and groom.

For hundreds of years, these ceremonies have marked the beginning of a new life for two people. As a symbol of the betrothal contract, the Hebrew boy gave his intended a small gold coin. The shades of a dim past, however, hover over the origin of the custom of giving rings. We do know that the earliest rings were made of pure gold by Egyptians. But it was the romantic Romans who first connected the ring with betrothal and marriage.

The first ring, the engagement ring, served as a pledge that the betrothal contract would be fulfilled. As is the custom today, the Roman engagement ring was worn on the third finger of the left hand. It was believed that the vein from that finger led to the heart, where all love was stored. Although scientist have shown us that this idea is not completely valid, you, (bride), will wear your diamond on that hand for many years.

After the betrothal period, the wedding took place. It was the Hebrews who gave us the ceremonial bridal procession. Even today, every wedding guest eagerly anticipates the moment when the bride and her attendants walk to the front of the church. As in Hebrew and Greek bridal processions, the young women are arrayed in lovely gowns and carry beautiful flowers.

**Speaker 3:** The bride's bouquet is a special and symbolic part of her attire, for it is selected by the groom. People have always enjoyed the beauty of a floral bouquet.

**Speaker 4:** Men in love send roses on very special occasions. The rose represents love and beauty. The yellow rose has a beauty all its own, for it also represents sincerity. As we place the yellow rose in this bouquet, remember, (bride), that a young wife radiates sincere love for her husband. As a Christian wife, you should also radiate sincere love for all people. Regardless of the location of your Christian home, we pray that yours will be a home of sincerity and that it will draw others to do it.

**Speaker 5:** Both Joshua and Paul exhorted the people of God to be sincere. Joshua said, "Fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" (Josh. 24:14 KJV). Paul said to the Philippians, I pray...that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9-10 KJV). The reward of sincerity Paul expresses to the Ephesians as he says, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Eph. 6:2j4 KJV).

**Speaker 6:** The carnation has been used in bridal bouquets for many years. While the red carnation represents love and the pink represents nuptials, these white carnations represent purity. The bride who wears a white dress and carries white flowers embodies purity of heart. We have heard the hymn "Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God." Remember the words as you and (groom) share your Christian lives with each other. Pray together for purity of heart.

**Speaker 7:** How does one achieve purity of heart? “Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure just as Christ is pure” (1 John 3:3 TEV).\* As you and (groom) live your Christianity, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12 RSV). As you express your belief in God, remember that “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27 RSV).

**Speaker 8:** Usually the bridal bouquet contains greener and ribbons to complete its beauty. In this bouquet, the green of the foliage and ribbon represents Christian growth. It is our hope, (bride), that your life with (groom) will be one of Christian growth.

**Speaker 9:** “Speaking in truth and love,” says Paul to the Ephesians, “we are to grow up on every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15 RSV). Peter also urges Christians to “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:18 RSV). We pray also that your Christian lives will inspire growth in others.

**Speaker 10:** Here you see a bouquet of flowers much like a bridal bouquet, but one whose colors also represent Christian sincerity, purity, and growth.

Behind many bridal bouquets are white Bibles. Sometimes this sacred book is a gift of the groom, the bride’s family, or a close friend. As your close friends, we would like to present you this white Bible on behalf of the church. It is our hope, (bride), that you and (groom) will use this or a similar text as your guide through your married life.

**Speaker 11:** We hope you and (groom) will turn to this book regularly as you seek guidance for happy days, exciting days, sad days. We suggest that you take this Bible and use it or a similar one in times of family worship. It will help you face social, financial, physical, and mental anxieties. It will give you comfort and assurance.

This book has been your guide as a child and as a teenager. We hope that it will be meaningful to you as an adult. We encourage you to use God’s Word and seek His guidance. Whether you remain here at (name) Baptist Church or live thousands of miles away, we will pray for your continued growth.

**Speaker 1:** As the wife of (groom) you will doubtless attend many weddings. You will see many beautiful brides in white gowns, carrying many types of bouquets. In spring, a bride may carry daisies and hyacinths. In the summertime, bouquets may be fashioned of orchids, stephanotis, and roses. You may see chrysanthemums and white stock in the autumn brides' bouquet. And at Christmastime, brides may carry holly and red poinsettias.

Whatever the types of bouquets you observe as you attend weddings in the future, you will probably be reminded of the bouquet you carried in your own wedding. We hope that you will also remember this white Bible tucked neatly behind that bouquet.

While your bridal bouquet will be symbolic of (groom's) love for you, let the white Bible be symbolic of your mutual love for God in your Christian home. We anticipate that your home will be a place of warm, Christian love, a place where God's name is honored, a place of happiness.

(A recessional is played. The bride-to-be takes up the Bible and bouquet, and her fiancé helps her from her seat of honor up the aisle to the door of the church. The speakers follow them up the aisle. At this time, the service may be taken up by the pastor or the bridal shower may follow, depending upon the occasion.)

\* *Good News Bible*, Today's English Version (TEV): Used by permission, American Bible Society.