

Love's gifts

Carolyn Weatherford

For an engaged friend plan a gift Bible ceremony, a beautiful way not only to show your love and interest but also to help her commit her marriage to God.

A gift Bible service may be a part of a regular organizational or church meeting like midweek prayer service; or, it may be combined with a social occasion like a tea or a shower.

Read the service through carefully to determine what items need to be secured (the Bible) or prepared (decorations, gift packages, music, copies of the responsive reading).

Introduction: In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. Step by step He brought into being the earth, the sea, the day, and the night. With care He fashioned stars, flowers, and trees. In the middle of this beauty God placed animals, each one adapted for life on the ground, in the air, or in the water.

Then, as James Weldon Johnson expressed it in *God's Trombones*, "God walked around and God looked around." Even with all the things He had made, He said, "I'm lonely still." He thought, *I'll make me a man!*

God created man "in his own image." Then, for the first time, He saw something that was not good. He saw that man, too, was lonely. The man He had made needed company, someone to share his life.

Read Genesis 2:21-24.

From the beginning of time, since the creation of man and woman, the beautiful relationship of marriage has been in God's planning.

Early in civilization the custom of giving gifts became associated with marriage. Who knows when the first young man in love stole through the night to leave a gift for his beloved? Perhaps it was a string of bear's claws or a curious shell from the sea. We cannot know the time of the first gift, but we can be reasonably certain that gift-making began when love began.

When Abraham sought a wife for Isaac, he sent golden earrings and two bracelets to be given to the chosen young woman. Jacob gave an intangible gift, himself-14 years of work for his father-in-law-to-be, in order to prove his love for Rachel. Iphidamas, in ancient Greece, gave a gift of 100 heifers and 1,000 goats to prove his love.

On the little island of Guernsey, a sort of "gift of friends and relatives" is made. Called "flouncing," this custom takes place when friends and relatives of the couple come together. The groom-to-be is taken by the bride-to-be's father from person to person and introduced to the friends and relatives of his beloved. At the same time, his father is taking the bride-to-be among the friends and relatives of the groom's family. After these introductions are made, the couple exchange betrothal rings. The flouncing is considered as binding as the actual marriage.

All of these ideas demonstrate the universal desire of people to express love, interest, and good wishes to the couple about to be married. Friends, relatives, and gifts are shared by two people in love who soon will join their lives in marriage.

Tonight, your friends come with gifts for you.

(Several friends escort the bride-to-be to the front and remain standing by her side.)

Presentation of gifts: In Java, when a woman is about to be married, she calls all of her girl friends to her home. She gathers the childish trinkets from her room. Dolls, toys, souvenirs - all the things that have been important to her as a single girl-are carried outside. A fire is built, and the bride-to-be and friends watch as the trinkets are burned. This act indicates the young woman's willingness to put away childish things, to take upon herself the responsibility of a wife. When the fire has died down the friends make gifts of beauty and usefulness to replace the childish possessions.

So, tonight, we friends gather around you. We cannot witness the "putting away of childish things" that you will do. In our society, these will be mostly intangibles. Your planning now is we-centered, rather than I-centered. Your interests are being changed. As you put away childish things, we bring symbolic gifts to replace them. We cannot give you these gifts; we can only remind you that they are essential in the building of a Christian home. Together, you and (groom) will bring them into your home.

(One friend brings large wrapped package.)

This gift is the foundation of your home. Because you and (groom) love each other, you wish to establish a home. Love will make possible the impossible, ease the difficult. Because the two of you love each other, it should be easier for you to love other people. So many people in today's world need love; may the home you build be a home of love that will be shared by people who need love and understanding.

(Another friend brings second package.)

Joy has been the result of your decision to marry. You are happy. Friends are happy. This joy will permeate the early days of your marriage. Our wish for you is continuing joy. May you and (groom) come to know the joy of shared plans. As you firmly establish your home, may this joy be a testimony to others of the blessings of a home where Christ is honored.

(Next box is brought.)

The gift of growth is significant. We pray that your family will grow, that God will bless your marriage with children. We pray that individuals in your family will grow. We pray that your love for each other will grow. We pray, with the Bible writer, that you may continue to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"

(Next box is brought.)

We also give you the gift of purity, thinking of the definition of purity as "unmixed with any hurtful material." We pray that your home will be uncluttered with false standards, selfish ambitions, and meaningless activity. May your home be a strong influence for good where you love.

(Next box is brought.)

Rings, exchanged by married couples for centuries, symbolize many things. The gold itself is representative of sincerity. May perfect sincerity be a shining characteristic of the home life that you build. As you love others, help others, and bear testimony to Christ, your home can be bright with happiness for others. This witness will be felt in

your financial dealings, in your civic activity, and in your neighborly contacts.

Presentation of Bible: All this-the building of a Christian family, assuming the responsibilities of a Christian wife-is not simple. God, who established families, provides guidance and help in His Word, the Bible. Your friends are ready now to give an important gift, on that is tangible.

(Bible is presented.)

In this book you will find direction for the needs of the Christian family. Read the Bible together daily.

As we give you this Bible, we would point to particular passages, given to you as special gifts.

(All present participate in this responsive reading. The audience reads the responses.)

Leader: In the beginning of your wedded life may you and (groom) take time to read from this book and remember that it says:

Response: "Trust the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know. Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way."*

Leader: As you begin your Christian home, whether it is centered in a small apartment or in a spacious house, may you establish family worship, knowing that this practice will be a strong bond and will help to answer the prayer:

Response: "Teach [us] to live according to your truth, for you are [our] God, who saves [us]."

Leader: If God blesses your marriage with children, may the Bible be your source of help as you guide them to become the best that God intends for them. May you remember:

Response: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Leader: As you travel life's road with (groom), may you recognize this secret for serenity in daily living:

Response: "Come back and quietly trust in me. Then you will be strong and secure."

Leader: To wish for you only days of sunshine would be unrealistic. On days when frustrations or trouble or uncertainty come, may you know:

Response: "God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."

Leader: Lest your family vision tend to become limited, should you become family-or community-bound, we would urge you to remember that the world needs Christ, and that we have Jesus' commission:

Response: "But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Leader: Then, as we can see you and (groom) in later life, with years of memories behind you, we pray that you will be able to say with certainty:

Response: "We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose."

Leader: And now, our prayer for you is found in the words of a hymn. Let us bow in meditation.

Prayer Hymn: "O Perfect Love" (*Baptist Hymnal*, 1956 edition).

*Scripture references are Proverbs 3:5-6 (TEV); Psalm 25:5 (TEV); Proverbs 22:6 (KJV); Isaiah 30:15 (TEV); Psalm 46:1 (TEV); Acts 1:8 (TEV); Romans 8:28 (TEV). Verses from *Good News Bible*, Today's English Version (TEV): Used by permission, American Bible Society.