

Creating a Keepsake

Prayerfully personalizing a Bible for your children gives them a treasure to live by

By Austine Keller

Recently, my mother gave me her prized strand of beautiful, hand-crafted silver beads that she purchased on a trip to Mexico years ago. She always wore these beads against a solid black dress or sweater, creating the most dramatic affect.

My father once gave me a memoir he wrote about his military service. Whenever I read it, I'm filled with love and pride. I will treasure these keepsakes from my parents always.

Because of this, in recent years it's become increasingly important to me to find meaningful keepsakes to give to my own children. I don't have special jewelry, and I can't think of anything in my house that anyone would want. But I remember seeing a Bible at my friend Peggie's house that she said she was reading "for a grandchild." I flipped through its pages and noticed handwritten notes in the margins. Peggie's love for that grandchild was written all over that Bible. Peggie said that while her friends were making quilts and creating needle-point mementos for their grandchildren, she couldn't think of anything comparable that she was capable of doing.

"I wasn't good at any of those things," Peggie said, "but I love to read God's Word, and that's when I got the idea to read a Bible for my children and grandchildren."

And read she did. I received an e-mail from her that says: "I finished reading for my four grandchildren and my four children (two sons and their wives)." She read eight Bibles.

Following Peggie's example, I purchased a new Bible and read it in the course of a

year, praying for my daughter Lauren and writing love notes to her in the margins. For me this was a precious time in God's presence and also time to focus on my eldest child. I presented it to her on her 21st birthday. I hope that when she reads this Bible she will know how much I love her. Now, I have begun reading a Bible for Lindsey, her sister.

If you'd like to pass on this special treasure to your children, you might want to keep a few things in mind:

1. Choose wisely. Wide margins are the most important factor in choosing a Bible for this purpose. You need room to write comments or personal prayers. For readability, I like one with large print.

2. Personalize your Bible. Most Christian bookstores will imprint your loved one's name on the cover, either free or for a nominal charge.

3. Seek God's guidance. Ask God to bless your reading and to show you how to pray for your loved one.

4. Think through a reading plan. When I started reading for my eldest daughter, I began in the most logical place, the beginning—Genesis. It might be fine for most people to read the Bible from front to back, but I soon realized—somewhere in the Old Testament genealogies, I think—that I needed a different strategy. I found that it worked better for me to skip around a bit. At one sitting, I might read a chapter each from the Old and New Testaments, and then I might read a

Proverb and a Psalm. Another time, I might read a book in the New Testament in its entirety. I keep track of what I've read by marking the table of contents.

5. Write from the heart. While the Bible is God's love letter to us, I write my own love notes in the margins or at the end of the chapter—whispers from a mother to her child. "Today I prayed that you would have the courage of Queen Esther—that you would allow God to work in your life in a mighty way." Or, "Please, Lord, give Lindsey a passion for your Word and a heart for your people."

You can also write as Peggie did: "I wrote what I felt I had learned from a particular passage." She adds, "I was honest at the end of some of the books, telling them that I was reading with the Holy Spirit's leading, but even with his leading there remained much in that specific book of the Bible that I didn't understand." Whatever you choose to write in your margins, write with integrity and write from your heart.

I GUESS I could give my daughters engraved jewelry, crystal, or a scrapbook made with love—something precious that would remind them of me long after I'm gone. But I can't think of a greater gift to give my children than God's Word—his gift of hope, love, and faith. And when they read my little notes and prayers in the margins, they will remember that I love them too.

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