
HEARTSONG PRESENTS

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

THE BASICS: The main element of a **Heartsong Presents** inspirational romance is the sweet love story. A very close second is the inspirational theme and content. All manuscripts in the **Heartsong Presents** inspirational line should present a conservative, evangelical Christian worldview. Manuscripts that do not reflect this position will be returned to the author(s).

SPECIFICS: **Heartsong Presents** will consider:

- Manuscripts between **45,000** and **50,000 words**.
- Must be **romance-focused**.
- Must have a strong **inspirational theme**.
- **Historical** manuscripts—prior to and during World War II.
- **Contemporary** manuscripts—present time, but not specifically dated.
- We **do not accept** any futuristic, fantasy, time travel, or paranormal stories.
- We are **currently seeking**:
 - Stories with **strong geographical flavor**—elements of the setting within a particular U.S. state should be woven throughout the story
 - Stories with **ethnic flavor**—includes stories about any race or culture.
 - Stories that can be developed into series.
 - Stories with **creative elements**—settings, occupations, and plot events.
 - Stories with a **purist point-of-view (POV)**, limited to the hero and heroine and preferably separated by space or chapter breaks.

THINGS TO CONSIDER: Our readers are primarily women who consider themselves born-again Christians. From surveys and correspondence we know they choose **Heartsong Presents** titles over other reading material because our books affirm their values and beliefs. As a writer, you must take this into consideration.

The underlying theme in all of our romances is the belief that a true and honest faith in God is the foundation for any romantic relationship. Although we are not looking for “sermons in novel form,” the importance and need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ should be apparent.

ROMANCE—The love between a man and a woman is the key ingredient of every **Heartsong Presents** inspirational romance. It should be obvious why the hero and heroine love each other, and they should be the kind of people the reader would like to know. By the end of the story, their love should be realistically developed with God as the center of their lives. Also, other events/conflicts/subplots of the story should not detract from or overshadow the romance between the hero and heroine. Stories should end with a wedding or bridal scene.

BELIEVABLE CONTENT—Whatever the conflicts and situations an author chooses to include in his or her book, the story should be believable and, oftentimes, relatable. Events should happen in a timely manner. Issues should be appropriate for the time setting. The

geographic setting should relate well with the plot (i.e., a major snowstorm would not fit in Florida, a shipping business would not be located in Montana, and a heroine who is terrified of water would probably not be living on a beach).

“Believable” also includes characters who are labeled as Christians. It is not enough to mention that main characters are Christians. Their faith must be evident in their daily lives, the choices they make, the thoughts they have, the words they say, and the way they deal with situations. It is also good when an author mentions the times a hero/heroine spends in prayer, Bible reading, Christian fellowship (church), and ministry/witnessing (i.e., teaching Sunday school, volunteering for church projects, befriending a troubled child or youth, etc.). We like to see our characters interacting with other believers.

Main characters must be Christians (or Christians by the end of the book), and while they need not be “saints,” their actions must be consistent with Christian teaching. Conversion of a character within a book must also be done in a believable manner. There needs to be a logical amount of time and influence for a non-Christian character to have a change of heart. It is good when an author shows the character researching, questioning, and wrestling with the decision to become a Christian. We need to avoid those last-minute, last-page conversions of the hero/heroine. We run the danger of giving young Christians false hopes for their relationships with non-Christians.

STATE-BASED THEMES: We are currently working with authors to create three-book series that are focused on one state location. These state locations will be assigned by the publisher as proposals are presented that fit our current needs. When submitting to Heartsong, the author should give us an idea of how they might create a three-book series based on the regional location of their proposal. Stories will need to show a flavor of the location, but not read like a tourist brochure. Stories can be generational, deal with characters in separate locations who do not know each other, show friends or siblings in separate romances, or even be set in different time periods for historicals.

THINGS TO AVOID: Avoid the truly controversial. Although conflict is important for any storyline, certain matters should be avoided at all costs.

LANGUAGE—Stay away from any language that could be considered foul. Avoid euphemistic words and phrases like heck, darn, golly, gosh, good heavens, good grief, for Pete’s or heaven’s sake, and so on. To many of our readers these words are substitutes for curses, and in their minds as bad, or worse.

DIVORCE—We don’t want to see our heroes or heroines divorced, no matter what the circumstances. Divorce can be acceptable for secondary and non-Christian characters if handled with care.

DOCTRINE—Avoid denominations and their doctrinal issues. We will not list all these (there are too many). Keep in mind that we are appealing to a broad range of Christian evangelical readers. For example, church-sponsored activities should be proper. In a **Heartsong Presents** title, activities like dancing (including square dancing) and betting (including bingo) should not take place on church property or with the support of respected church leaders. See also the “Sticky Topics” area.

LIFESTYLES AND ACTIVITIES—The following activities are unacceptable for heroes and heroines in **Heartsong Presents**. However, for non-Christian characters, these conflicts can be explored, so long as the consequences for such actions are given in a realistic manner:

- **Alcohol/Drug/Tobacco Use**
- **Dancing**—this is generally acceptable in Historicals, but should be appropriate to the time period. Dancing in Contemporary novels is generally unacceptable and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.
- **Immodest Dress**—characters should never appear outside their bedrooms in nightgowns. They should **never** appear in underwear or other private garments. Scenes within a private room, like a bedroom or bathroom, should be handled with care, keeping our guidelines in mind.

PASSION—Physical tension between characters should not be overdone. Do not be overly descriptive when describing how characters feel in a particular romantic moment, for example, kissing, embracing, and so on. It has been our belief from day one that we *can* tell a great love story without going into excessive physical detail. People can easily imagine the desires and tensions between a couple who are blossoming into love. Kisses are fine (no tongues or heights of arousal, please). There will be no sex between the hero and heroine in a **Heartsong Presents** romance, and any details of the hero and/or heroine's past sexual experience should be handled very delicately.

Telling a story about a married couple doesn't give the author license to tell too many details of their intimacy. An author can easily leave these details to the reader's imagination with a simple whisper, glance, blush, or closed door. Sometimes what is alluded to is more romantic than details.

Avid readers of inspirational romance believe that true passion goes beyond the basic desire for sexual pleasure and touches a person in the depths of the soul. When the triangle (man, woman, and God) is complete, there can be true satisfaction and lasting love in a relationship.

STICKY TOPICS

CONTROVERSIAL ITEMS TO STEER CLEAR OF:

1. Spirit baptism
2. Water baptism (meaning of)
3. Time of Spirit baptism (at conversion vs. second experience of grace)
4. Time of water baptism (children or adults)
5. Gifts of the Spirit (e.g., are tongues still around?)
6. End times (setting dates and other specifics)
7. Lord's Supper (ordinance vs. sacrament)
8. Women's ordination
9. Christian perfection
10. Transferring qualities of Jesus—or passages in the Bible that refer to Jesus—to heroes in books. This also applies to Mary, Jesus' earthly mother.

SUMMARY: One particular biblical message should be threaded throughout if possible. This can be presented from many different characters, through symbols, and so on. The main element of books is the **romance**, and to that end characters must be perceived as appealing and capable of finding each other attractive. Conflict within the relationship will draw hero and heroine closer and involve the readers more personally.

Every story deserves a happy ending. Readers want to finish the last page with a sense that “all is well.” Even in the rare case when a sequel is guaranteed to follow, each book should be complete and be able to stand alone. All stories should end with a wedding or bridal scene. The exception to this would be a marriage of convenience story or “married” romance where a husband and wife are rekindling their relationship (although a renewal of vows would probably be expected in this situation).

Remember, **Heartsong Presents** readers are conservative Christians who want a good love story. They want to read about characters they can relate to, who face similar situations and deal with similar emotions. And they want to be reminded that God is good, He is still in control, and that the Bible still holds true today.

TO SUBMIT: We are currently only taking electronic submissions. We no longer accept submissions by regular mail. If you have an inspirational romance that would fit **Heartsong Presents** guidelines, please send a cover letter (including the **date** and your **E-mail address**), a detailed chapter synopsis, and the first three chapters to:

fictionsubmit@barbourbooks.com

to the attention of:

Heartsong Presents
JoAnne Simmons, Acquisitions Editor

Do not send full manuscripts unless requested.

*Few would doubt the breathless appeal of a love story. But a **Christian** love story combines the elements of enchantment and inspiration to produce a tale that is unforgettable.*