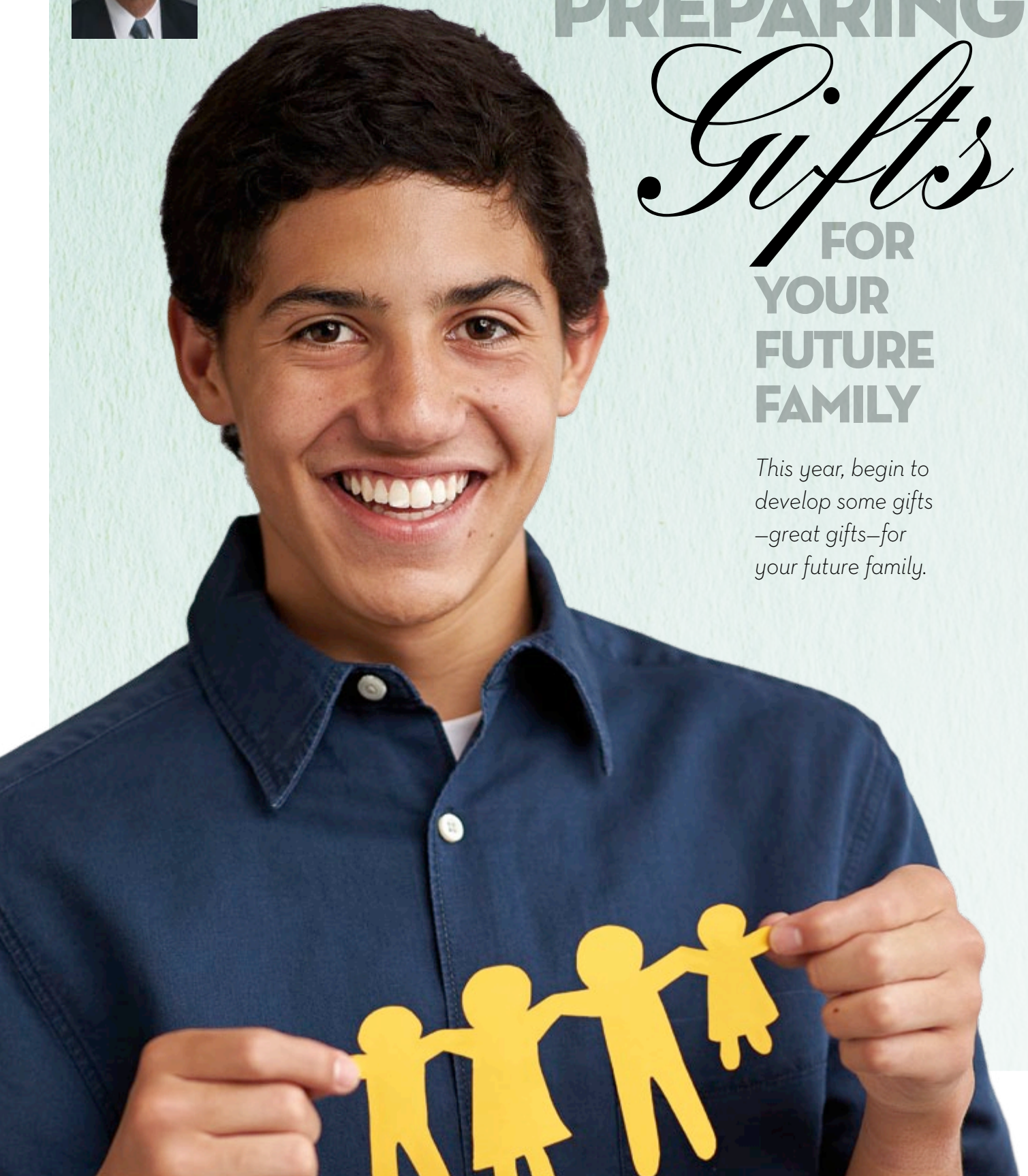




**By President
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First Counselor in
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PREPARING *Gifts* FOR YOUR FUTURE FAMILY

*This year, begin to
develop some gifts
—great gifts—for
your future family.*



I've always daydreamed of being a great gift giver. I picture people opening my gifts and showing with tears of joy and a smile that the giving, not just the gift, has touched their hearts. You might have that daydream too. Many of you are probably already experts in gift giving.

There is something you could do this year to start becoming a better gift giver yourself. In fact, as students, you have some special chances. You could begin to put some gifts—great gifts—on layaway for your future family. Let me tell you about them.

Writing Papers for School

You could start in your room today. Is there an unfinished school paper somewhere in the stacks? (I assume there are stacks there; I think I know your room.) Perhaps it is typed and apparently ready to turn in. Why bother more with it? I learned why during a religion class I taught once at Ricks College (now Brigham Young University-Idaho). I was teaching from section 25 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In that section Emma

Smith is told that she should give her time to “writing, and to learning much” (verse 8). About three rows back sat a blonde girl whose brow wrinkled as I urged the class to be diligent in developing writing skills. She raised her hand and said, “That doesn’t seem reasonable to me. All I’ll ever write are letters to my children.” That brought laughter all around the class. Just looking at her I could imagine a full quiver of children around her, and I could even see the letters she would write. Maybe writing powerfully wouldn’t matter to her.

Then a young man stood up near the back. He had said little during the term; I’m not sure he had ever spoken before. He was older than the other students, and he was shy. He asked if he could speak. He told in a quiet voice of having been a soldier in Vietnam. One day, in what he thought would be a lull, he had left his rifle and walked across his fortified compound to mail call. Just as he got a letter in his hand, he heard a bugle blowing and shouts and mortar and

rifle fire coming ahead of the swarming enemy. He fought his way back to his rifle, using his hands as weapons. With the men who survived, he drove the enemy out. Then he sat down among the living, and some of the dead, and he opened his letter. It was from his mother. She wrote that she’d had a spiritual experience that assured her that he would live to come home if he were righteous. In my class, the boy said quietly, “That letter was scripture to me. I kept it.” And he sat down.

You may have a child someday, perhaps a son. Can you see his face? Can you see him somewhere, sometime, in mortal danger? Can you feel the fear in his heart? Does it touch you? Would you like to give freely? What sacrifice will it take to write the letter your heart will want to send? Start the practice this afternoon. Go back to your room and write and read and rewrite that paper again and again. It won’t seem like sacrifice if you picture that boy, feel his heart, and think of the letters he’ll need someday.

My dearest son,
Every morning as I wake up, and every
before I go to sleep, and every moment in
I think of you. I used to worry about
safety, pouring my heart out to Heaven
to protect you. Hoping it would be
The worry never consumed me, and
was always done out in prayer.
My prayers have never stopped; they
has. My fears have been replaced
You see, the most distinct impression
revelation. It became
you will be protected
safe if you remain righteous.



Solving Math Problems

Now, some of you may not have a paper waiting for you. It may be a textbook with a math problem hidden in it. Let me tell you about a day in your future. You'll have a teenage son or daughter who'll say, "I hate school." After some careful listening, you'll find it is not school or even mathematics he or she hates—it's the feeling of failure.

You'll correctly discern those feelings, and you'll be touched; you'll want to freely give. So you'll open the text and say, "Let's look at one of the problems together." Think of the shock you will feel when you see that the same rowboat is still going downstream in two hours and back in five hours, and the questions are still how fast the current is and how far the boat traveled. You might think, "Well, I'll make my children feel better by showing them that I can't do math either." Let me give you some advice: they will see that as a poor gift.

There is a better gift, but it will take effort now. My dad, when he was a boy, must have tackled the rowboat

problem and lots of others. That was part of the equipment he needed to become a scientist who would make a difference to chemistry. But he also made a difference to me. Our family room didn't look as elegant as some. It had one kind of furniture—chairs—and one wall decoration—a green chalkboard. I came to the age your boy or girl will reach. I didn't wonder if I could work the math problems; I'd proved to my satisfaction that I couldn't. And some of my teachers were satisfied that that was true too.

But Dad wasn't satisfied. He thought I could do it. So we took turns at that chalkboard. I can't remember the gifts my dad wrapped and gave to me. But I remember the chalkboard and his quiet voice. His teaching took more than knowing what I needed and caring. It took more than being willing to give his time then, precious as it was. It took time he had spent earlier when he had the chances you have now. Because he had spent time then, he and I could have that time at the chalkboard and he could help me.

And because he gave me that, I've got a boy who let me sit down with him one year. We rowed that same boat up and down. And his teacher wrote "much improved" on his report card. But I'll tell you what improved most: the feelings of a fine boy about himself. Nothing I will put under a Christmas tree for Stuart has half the chance of becoming a family heirloom that his pride of accomplishment does.

Learning Art and Music

Perhaps there are some art (or are they music?) students smiling. They're thinking, "He surely can't convince me there's a gift hidden in *my* unfinished assignments." Let me try. Last week I went to an event honoring a young man. There was a slide show. The lights went down, and I recognized two voices. One was a famous singer in the background, and the other, the narrator, was the father of the young man.

His dad must have spent hours preparing slides, writing words that soared, and then somehow getting music and words coordinated for the right volume and timing. You'll have a boy someday who will be



honored at such an event, with all his cousins and aunts and uncles looking on. And with your whole heart, you'll want to tell him what he is and what he can be. Whether you can give that gift then depends on whether you feel his heart now and are touched and start building the creative skills you'll need. And it will mean more than you now can dream, I promise you.

Repenting Now

There is yet another gift some of you may want to give that takes starting early. I saw it started once when I was a bishop. A young man sat across my desk from me. He talked about mistakes he had made. And he talked about how much he wanted the children he might have someday to have a dad who could use his

priesthood and to whom they could be sealed forever. He said he knew that the price and pain of repentance might be great. And then he said something I will not forget: "Bishop, I am coming back. I will do whatever it takes. I am coming back." He felt sorrow. And he had faith in Christ. And still it took months of painful effort.

And so somewhere there is a family with a righteous priesthood bearer at its head. They have eternal hopes and peace on earth. He'll probably give his family all sorts of gifts wrapped brightly, but nothing will matter quite so much as the one he started a long time ago in my office and has never stopped giving. He felt then the needs of children he had only dreamed of, and he gave early and freely. He sacrificed his pride and

sloth and numbed feelings. I am sure it doesn't seem like sacrifice now.

He could give that gift because of another one given long ago. God the Father gave His Son, and Jesus Christ gave us the Atonement, the greatest of all gifts and all giving. The Savior somehow felt all the pain and sorrow of sin that would fall on all of us and everyone else who would ever live (see Hebrews 4:14–16).

I bear you my testimony that Jesus gave the gift freely, willingly, to us all. And I bear you testimony that as you accept that gift, given through infinite sacrifice, it brings joy to the giver (see Luke 15:7).

"Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). I pray that we will freely give. I pray that we will be touched by the feelings of others, that we will give without feelings of compulsion or expectation of gain, and that we will know that sacrifice is made sweet to us when we treasure the joy it brings to another heart. ■

From a devotional address, "Gifts of Love," delivered at Brigham Young University on December 16, 1980. For the full text in English, go to speeches.byu.edu.

