

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling," following which we shall hear from Elder Robert L. Backman, recently released as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy.

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## Elder Robert L. Backman

### An emeritus General Authority

Fourteen years ago I stood at this pulpit to accept my call to the Seventy. The years following have been the most challenging, rewarding, satisfying years of my life. I have enjoyed every choice experience I have had.

At this conference I am being made an emeritus General Authority. I pray that my productive life is not over. I look ahead and wonder what to do with the rest of my days. I don't feel old; my mind is still reasonably alert; my body still functions well. My father died at ninety-four. My mother still lives at ninety-five. I have a lot of mileage left in me. Barring an accident, I probably have at least another twenty-five years ahead of me.

I don't want to be like the retiree of whom it was said, "He died at seventy but waited to be buried until he was eighty-five."

What to do?

### An example for retired people

There is a single passage in all the New Testament which describes the Savior's life between the age of twelve and when he began his ministry. I have quoted that passage many times in speaking to the youth. I wonder if it doesn't have just as much application for the rest of us, particularly those who are retired. Luke wrote, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

In today's vernacular, these words translate into our Savior's growing physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. What a model to follow!

### Growing physically

Of course our bodies are wearing down. That is part of life. But I believe we have a duty to maintain our health the best we can through proper exercise, a healthy diet, daily care of our bodies. I hope to emulate Elder Joseph Anderson, who was still swimming at one hundred and walking daily until his death, or my uncle, Milt Backman, who is still playing racquetball at ninety-four.

### Growing mentally

We need to keep expanding our minds, for they require exercise as surely as do the muscles of our bodies. I want to follow the example of my good neighbor, Perris Jensen, who graduated from Brigham Young University at eighty-one, and Amelia McConkie, widow of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who, after her husband's death, took up painting.

I have already started piano lessons, and I mean to master the computer if I live long enough.

### Growing socially

We have so many opportunities to serve our fellowmen. Wherever we live, our fellow citizens are hungry for the wisdom and experience of those who

have lived long and well. Without the voluntarism which can be given by the retired, our cities are in danger of dying. As I look ahead, I think of the tremendous civic good deeds Lowell Bennion has extended throughout his life but more particularly since he retired. He has exemplified real Christian living, reaching out to "the least of these [our] brethren" (Matthew 25:40).

### Growing spiritually

One of the dangers I see in retiring is that we withdraw from the world. We turn inward as society seems to say, "We have no more use for you." With the aging of our society, more and more of us are going to retire. I hope the Church will continue to use us. We have been tried and tested throughout our lives. Society is not likely to experience any challenge we have not faced. We have learned what is important and what brings lasting happiness. Use our experience, our testimonies, our wisdom, and our understanding. We can still assist in building the kingdom of God. I believe he needs all the help he can get.

### Enduring to the end

There is no retirement from the service of the Lord. We believe in eternal progression. We should continually grow spiritually throughout our lives. The gospel challenges us to endure to the end.

The word *endure* has an interesting connotation. We seem to equate it with suffering. I was interested to discover that *endure* comes from the Latin word *indurare*, which means "to harden, to steel, make lasting." I like one of the definitions of the word *endure* found in the *Random House Dictionary*. It defines *endure* as "to have or gain continued or lasting acknowledgment or recognition, as of worth, merit, or greatness."

When I think of the supernal joy I have experienced during my ministry, I hope those rich spiritual adventures are not ended. I know they will not be if I accept the opportunities to serve that lie ahead.

### Retired couples as missionaries

Having been deeply involved in missionary work for the past several years, I see such glorious opportunities for older couples to continue to be useful in serving their fellowmen. How badly the Church needs us!

There are so many of you who have found fulfillment in serving missions, forgetting yourselves in that important work, staying youthful in the discipline and single-mindedness that come with being immersed in the gospel and sharing your testimonies with all those you meet. I hope I can do the same!

I think of Royce Flandro and his wife, who after retirement served a mission in Spain, performing valuable service. Upon returning home they missed that beautiful experience, so they came to the Missionary Department to ask where they could help the most. It was suggested to them that they might learn Hungarian, which they did. A few months later they were called to Hungary, once again serving with distinction. Now they are headed for Mongolia.

So many of us are afraid to leave our "comfort zones" and thus cheat ourselves of some of the greatest adventures of our lives.

Brother and Sister Harold Salway have served in Fiji, Ireland, South Africa, Israel, England, California, and are now preparing to go to Florida. They intend to continue to serve as long as their health permits. Who can measure the good they have done or the blessings they have received?

The staff in the Missionary Department recently received a letter from President Thomas R. Murray of

the Missouri Independence Mission concerning the missionary service of Elder and Sister Ronald Smith. He wrote:

"The Smiths left a legacy in Nebraska City, Nebraska. They baptized eighteen people, reactivated a large number in two wards, traveled many miles per month, contributed to the local newspaper, gave meaningful community service, motivated the Scouting program, strengthened the ward leadership, fellowshipped and friendshipped, and provided great public relations for the Church in the community."

Where could the Smiths have spent a more productive, profitable time or experienced more fulfilling service?

### **Couples can learn languages**

Some have an idea that as we get older we can't learn languages. That is not true. Again and again we see couples come to the Missionary Training Center without prior knowledge of a language and leave two months later able to communicate. Of course their skills increase as they love and serve in the mission field. Even when a new language is difficult, older couples perform a unique service in the missions simply by being there. Their experience, example, and faith serve as tremendous resources in building inexperienced members of the Church. They are absolutely indispensable to the growth of the kingdom across the world.

I remember meeting a wonderful couple who were missionaries among the southeast Asians of the California Oakland Mission. As I saw the bonding between the missionaries and these delightful new Latter-day Saints, I asked the sister missionary whether she could speak their language. She responded that she could not. I then asked her how they communicated with

the members. With tears in her eyes, she replied, "We just love them."

### **Looking forward to new opportunities**

I have rejoiced in the rich experiences of the past fourteen years, but I look forward to the challenges of the golden years ahead. I look forward to new experiences, new adventures, new horizons, new worlds to conquer. I look forward to new opportunities to grow physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. I pray that my life from this day forth will testify that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

I pray that you and I might wear ourselves out in the service of the Lord so that at the end of our useful, productive lives we can exult with Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

### **Instruments in the Lord's hands**

I conclude my public ministry by paraphrasing the words I spoke in 1978, words that have even deeper meaning for me after that choice experience.

President Benson declared that the highest honor we could have is to be members of God's Church, which I am; to know that Christ is our Savior, which, I testify to you, I know; to hold his holy priesthood, which I do; and to be part of an eternal family unit, which I am. I'm honored above all men. I'm blessed above all men. And I am so grateful for the holy calling which I have enjoyed. I rejoice in the opportunity that has been mine of consecrating my entire life to His service.

Every blessing I have in my life, everything I hold dear and precious in my heart, I can trace to my membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to my love of the Lord, to my testimony of his divine gospel, and to the responses I have made to the opportunities for service.

My beloved Brethren, my dear wife and I are still prepared to go wherever you want to send us and to do whatever you ask of us. We pray only that we might be instruments in the hands of the Lord to assist you in your awesome assignment to build the kingdom of God, to sanctify his people, and to prepare the way for Christ to come in his glory, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is the Savior of the world, which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. (See Conference Report, Apr. 1978, p. 109; or *Ensign*, May 1978, p. 72.)

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The chorus sang "Rejoice, the Lord Is King!"

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### President Hinckley

Elder Robert L. Backman of the Seventy has just addressed us, and the chorus has sung "Rejoice, the Lord Is King!"

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

## Elder L. Tom Perry

Thank you, Elder Backman, for those stirring remarks. How I've enjoyed these last seven years, being closely associated with you.

Brigham Young once counseled us to use the scriptures as follows:

"Do you read the Scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so, that you may be as familiar with the spirit and meaning of the written word of God as you are with your daily walk and conversation" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941], p. 128).

### Moroni's voice of warning

The Book of Mormon has many special accounts with lessons which can be applied to all ages. It is a book of great passion and feeling. Let us take Brigham Young's advice and imagine we are standing in the place where Moroni, the last of the great Nephite prophets, stood. The assignment his

father gave to him to complete the record, which was entrusted to his care, was very difficult. He must have been in a state of shock as he described the total destruction of his people.

He must have felt compelled to describe how his people had been hunted by the Lamanites until they were all destroyed. In his feeling of loneliness, he reports that his father was among those who were killed. We sense that the only thing Moroni is living for is to complete the record, as he writes, "Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and whither I go it mattereth not" (Mormon 8:4).

All he has is the faith that the Lord will preserve him long enough to complete the record and that someday it will be found by one chosen of the Lord. He realizes that the record will be a voice of warning to future generations of what occurs when nations like his own turn away from the teachings of the Lord. It is from the depths of his heart that Moroni cries out to those who will eventually receive the record. He wants to spare those who read his account the heartache and misery which come from disobedience.