

How Great Will Be Your Joy

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I now invite you to take your know-how, coupled with your time-honored testimonies, and go on a mission.

My dear brothers and sisters, my thoughts today are on the gathering of Israel, what President Russell M. Nelson calls “the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty.”¹

The gathering is the ultimate recognition that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.”² It is as simple as that. We are gathering God’s children in these last days that they might have “blessings poured out upon their heads”³ and the promises of “the riches of eternity.”⁴ It follows that to gather Israel we need missionaries—many more than are serving.⁵ Today I am speaking to the many seasoned seniors in the Church who could serve as missionaries. The Lord needs you. We need you in New York and Chicago, Australia and Africa, Thailand and Mexico, and everywhere in between.

Let me take you back to the year 2015. I was a newly called member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. One of the wonderful responsibilities we carry as Apostles is to assign missionaries to their fields of labor. I had participated as a Seventy in the process,⁶ but now as an Apostle, I felt the full weight of the assignment. I began with prayerfully placing a great number of young elders and sisters, one by one, in missions around the world. Then I turned to the senior couples. There were 10 on the list. Not very many. Surprised, I asked my associate from the Missionary Department, “How many do we need this week to fill the requests?”

He responded, “300.”

That sobering moment has stayed with me: 10 couples to fill 300 requests.

President Russell M. Nelson has encouraged couples to “get on their knees and ask Heavenly Father if the time is right for them to serve a mission.”⁷ Of all the qualifications, he said, “a *desire* to serve may be the most important.”⁸

As the scripture says, “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work.”⁹ That work is all about the law of the harvest. We read in John, “Both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”¹⁰

I have seen the law of the harvest fulfilled in my own family.

Some years ago I was visiting family, when the bishop asked me to conclude the sacrament service.¹¹ As I was coming down from the stand, a woman approached me with her seven children and introduced herself as Sister Rebecca Guzman.

She asked, “Elder Rasband, do you know Rulon and Verda Rasband?”

I beamed and replied, “They are my parents.”

You can see where this is going. With Rebecca’s permission, who is here with family in the Conference Center, I share her family’s story.¹²

My parents, Elder Rulon and Sister Verda Rasband, were serving as a senior couple in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission.¹³ They were proselyting and by divine guidance knocked on the door of Rebecca’s home. She was just a teenager and loved listening to the music of the Osmonds, in particular our friend Donny—who is here with us today.¹⁴ She had listened to their media interviews and learned they were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She felt there was something different about them, and thinking it might be their religion, Rebecca spent two years researching the Church’s beliefs in the school library. So, when a kindly-looking couple knocked on her family’s door and introduced themselves as Latter-day Saint missionaries, she was taken back.

“My mother told me to get rid of them,” Rebecca later wrote, “but my heart said, ‘No.’ I looked into their faces, and I felt so much warmth and love. The memory still brings tears to my eyes and deep emotion to my heart.”¹⁵

Rebecca invited them in, and my missionary parents shared a message with her, her two younger sisters, and, despite her objections, her mother.

Rebecca described to me: “Both your parents were wonderful in explaining any questions we had. I can still see their faces as if there was light surrounding them. We always hugged your mother when she left, and she always made a point of helping my mother feel comfortable and respected. Your father always had a sparkle in his eyes as he was teaching us about Jesus Christ. He tried to include my father in discussions and eventually won him over. My father was a chef at a local country club and started cooking dinners for your parents, including making your father’s favorite, key lime pie.”¹⁶

When Elder and Sister Rasband asked Rebecca and her family to read the Book of Mormon, Rebecca did so in five days. She wanted to be baptized immediately, but the other members of her family were not ready. After four months, Rebecca insisted she be baptized and join the true Church. She recalled, “Every fiber of my soul knew it was true.”¹⁷ On April 5, 1979, missionaries baptized 19-year-old Rebecca, her mother, and two sisters. My father was a witness at the baptism.

When I met Rebecca and her family at church, we took a photograph of her family with me. I took it home to my elderly mother, and she held it close to her heart. Then she said to me, “Ronnie, this is one of the happiest days of my life.”

My mother’s response begs the question for our seniors: “What are you doing at this stage of your life?” There are so many ways senior missionaries can do what no one else can. You are a

remarkable force for good, seasoned in the Church, and poised to encourage and rescue God's children.

Some of you might be thinking: "But what about leaving the grandchildren? We would miss family milestones, birthdays, friends, and even our pets." If I had asked my mother why she and Dad went on a mission, I know she would have said this: "I have grandchildren. I want them to know that your father and I served in the mission field, we wanted to set an example for our posterity, and we were blessed, so blessed."

As I have visited missions around the world, I have seen the remarkable service of our legion of senior missionaries. It is clear they are happy doing "the will of the Lord" and being about "the Lord's business."¹⁸

For some, and we hope thousands of you, full-time missionary service in another corner of the world will be just the right place.¹⁹ For others, serving a Church-service mission at home might be preferable. Because of health issues and other circumstances, there are those who are unable to serve. We understand those situations, and it would be my hope you might find ways to support those who are serving. Follow the prophet's counsel and pray to know what the Lord would have you do.

Mission fields around the world are pleading for your help. President Nelson has said of our senior missionaries, "They are young in spirit, wise, and willing to work."²⁰

Out in the field, you have a smorgasbord of opportunities: you may serve in mission offices or temples, strengthen young missionaries, bolster small branches, work in FamilySearch centers or at historic sites, teach institute, provide humanitarian service, work with young adults, help in employment centers or on Church farms. The particulars of ways to serve, what best suits you, where you are needed, and how you can get ready to go are addressed on the website "Senior Missionary."²¹ You can also talk with your bishop or branch president.

I have called many couples to serve and watched as the Light of Christ has filled their countenances.²² At their return, they have described growing closer to the Lord and closer to one another, feeling the Spirit of the Lord pour down upon them, and knowing they are making a difference.²³ Who would not want that?

A mission might be the greatest chapter in a couple's life. A good title might be "My Lord Will Have Need of Me."²⁴ You may be on unfamiliar ground; however, the power of the Spirit will make you feel right at home.

My parents and tens of thousands of returned missionary couples have borne testimony of the joy they found in missionary work. The Lord has said in latter-day scripture, "And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!"²⁵

Isaiah gave us a poetic description of what it means to serve in the mission "field." Scripture tells us "the field is the world."²⁶ This great ancient prophet wrote, "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."²⁷ The mountains, hills, fields, and trees can be likened to mission presidents, bishops, district leaders, members, and those who seek the

truth but “they know not where to find it.”²⁸ They will testify that the senior missionaries change the very landscape with their testimony of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I ask you to serve as a missionary in the gathering of Israel and perhaps even serve again. We need you—we need you. We are grateful to you seniors for the lives you have led and the examples you have been in your homes, wards, and stakes. I now invite you to take your know-how, coupled with your time-honored testimonies, and go on a mission. I pray that the next time I sit down to assign senior couples, there will be hundreds of you waiting anxiously for your call.

I also promise that as you serve, you will feel the love of the Lord in your life, you will know Him, He will know you, and “how great shall be your joy.”²⁹ Your dedicated service to Jesus Christ will inspire and bless your family, your grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. “Peace, and love [will] be multiplied”³⁰ in their lives for years to come. I promise. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (worldwide youth devotional, June 3, 2018), Gospel Library.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.
3. 3 Nephi 10:18.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 78:18.
5. The Church has 71,000 full-time missionaries in 414 missions across the world, from North and South America to Europe and Africa, Asia, and Australia/Oceania. There are 34,000 senior Church-service missionaries. (Missionary Department data, Sept. 2023.)
6. See Ronald A. Rasband, “The Divine Call of a Missionary,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2010, 52–53.
7. Russell M. Nelson, “Senior Missionary Moments,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2016, 67; *Liahona*, Apr. 2016, 27.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “Senior Missionaries and the Gospel,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 81.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 4:3.
10. John 4:36.
11. I was in New York, USA, attending the baptism of granddaughter Brooklyn and the blessing of granddaughter Ella, April 2006.
12. Letter from Rebecca Guzman to Elder Ronald A. Rasband, Sept. 8, 2009.
13. My parents served in the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission in 1979.

14. The Osmond family was a popular American music group known for their pop songs. The group reached the height of fame in the mid-1970s, performing on television variety shows. Donny and Marie continued with television with stage careers, while the brothers performed for decades as country artists in Branson, Missouri.
15. Letter from Rebecca Guzman, Sept. 8, 2009.
16. Letter from Rebecca Guzman, Sept. 8, 2009.
17. Letter from Rebecca Guzman, Sept. 8, 2009.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 64:29.
19. Senior missionary opportunities take many forms, and couples or senior sisters may list preferences as well as a full-time or Church-service assignment. Ultimately, the prophet of the Church issues the call for full-time service. Stake presidents issue Church-service assignments. Service can range from 6 months to 23 months, and senior missionaries have more flexibility and less strenuous activity than young missionaries. See seniormissionary.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
20. Russell M. Nelson, "Senior Missionaries and the Gospel," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2004, 79.
21. See seniormissionary.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
22. See Alma 5:14. "Countenance" can be described as reflecting an individual's spiritual attitude and state of mind.
23. See Jude 1:22; Mosiah 4:20.
24. See "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," *Hymns*, no. 270.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 18:15.
26. The Lord explained, "The field is the world; ... the harvest is the end of the world" (Matthew 13:38–39).
27. Isaiah 55:12.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 123:12.
29. Doctrine and Covenants 18:15.
30. Jude 1:2.