

Elder Ronald A. Rasband

GIFTED LEADER,
DEVOTED FATHER

By Elder M. Russell Ballard

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Ron Rasband never doubted that he would serve a full-time mission. The only question the 19-year-old had while opening his mission call was *where* he would serve.

“My dad went on a mission to Germany. My older brother went on a mission to Germany. My future brother-in-law went on a mission to Germany,” he recalls. “I thought I was going to Germany.”

But the Lord had other plans. Ron had been called, instead, to the Eastern States Mission, headquartered in New York City, USA. Disappointed, he took his call to his bedroom, knelt by his bed, said a prayer, randomly opened his scriptures, and began reading:

“Behold, and lo, I have much people in this place, in the regions round about; and an effectual door shall be opened in the regions round about in this *eastern land*.”

“Therefore, I, the Lord, have suffered you to come unto this place; for thus it was expedient in me for the salvation of souls” (D&C 100:3–4; emphasis added).

Immediately, the Holy Ghost confirmed to Ron that his call to the Eastern States Mission was no mistake.

“I went from being disappointed to having my first of many scriptural impressions that



this is where the Lord wanted me to go,” he recalls. “That was a pivotal spiritual experience for me.”

His mission to the eastern states was the first of several Church callings that would take him places he never expected to go. And with each calling—as a teacher, bishop, high councilor, mission president, member of the Seventy, Senior President of the Seventy, and Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ—Elder Ronald A. Rasband has accepted the Lord’s will and continued to rely on His Spirit as he has served God’s children.

Above right: Elder Ronald A. Rasband as a mission president in New York City in 1998.

Far right: Elder Rasband with his sister, Nancy Schindler; mother; and brothers, Russell and Neil.

Right: With his parents as a seven-year-old boy.



Ron was generally a good boy, but he admits that he had a mischievous side. “More than a few times, my [Primary] teachers went to my mother, the stake Primary president, and said, “That Ronnie Rasband is a tough little kid,” he says. “But they never gave up on me. They showed me

great love and always invited me back into class.”²

Born of Goodly Parents

In his first address as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, Elder Rasband expressed heartfelt gratitude for his ancestry. “I was born of goodly parents in the gospel,” he said, “and they of goodly parents back six generations.”¹

His mother, Verda Anderson Rasband, was a loving leader who nurtured young Ron’s love of the scriptures. His father, Rulon Hawkins Rasband, was a faithful priesthood holder who exemplified the virtues of hard work.

Born on February 6, 1951, in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, Ronald A. (Anderson) Rasband was the only child of his parents’ union. Both had been married and divorced, and Ron grew up under the added care of two older brothers and an older sister.

“He was a combination of our parents, so we all loved him,” says his sister, Nancy Schindler. “Ron never allowed Mom and Dad to stand by each other or sit together without him being in the middle of them.”



Ron’s childhood centered on the Church—ward meetings, ward parties, ward dinners, and ward sports teams. When he wasn’t busy at the Cottonwood First Ward meetinghouse, he was working odd jobs, doing Scouting activities, and spending time with friends. At home, family time centered on the scriptures, games, and chores.

“My father taught me what work is by his example,” he says. “My mother taught me about work by having me do it.”

Ron’s father drove a bread delivery truck, arising daily by 4:00 a.m. and returning home late each night. His mother stayed home to raise the children, supplementing the family income by making and selling porcelain lace dolls.

Ron’s innate ability to lead, delegate, and get things done—which would serve him well in his professional and ecclesiastical responsibilities—proved useful early on.

“Ron was assigned to mow the



lawn,” his sister recalls. But Ron, like Mark Twain’s Tom Sawyer, had a way of persuading his friends to help.

“I would look outside, and there would be his best friend mowing the lawn for him,” Nancy says. “The next week another of his friends was mowing. He just sat on the front porch and laughed and joked with them as they did his work.”

Ron’s parents struggled financially, but the family had the gospel. “We never had a lot of money,” Ron recalls, “but it never affected my happiness.”

Trusted Friends and Leaders

Growing up, Ron was blessed with good friends and trusted priesthood leaders, including his boyhood stake president of 14 years—James E. Faust (1920–2007), who subsequently served in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and in the First Presidency. Ron’s family enjoyed a close relationship with President Faust and his family. “He always referred to me as one of his Cottonwood boys because he helped raise me,” he says.

Ron had no time for school sports once he reached high school because he always had a job, but he made time for loyal friendships that have lasted a lifetime.

“I’ve always admired Ron for who he is, but he wasn’t perfect,” says childhood friend

Kraig McCleary. With a smile, he adds, “I’ve told him that if he gets to heaven, I’ll get there too because we did the same things growing up.”

Ron left on his mission in early 1970, but Kraig was thinking about postponing missionary service until after that fall’s hunting season. That’s when Ron called him from his mission.

“I don’t know how he got permission to call, but he chastised me for not being more excited about getting right out on my mission,” Brother McCleary says. “Of course, I didn’t postpone it.”

Ron calls his mission a “fantastic” experience. “The Lord blessed me with many miraculous, faith-promoting experiences,” he says. “My mission was huge for my spiritual life.”

Ron spent part of his mission in the Bermuda islands. His mission president, Harold Nephi Wilkinson, sent only “straight-arrow missionaries” there because he could visit them only occasionally.

“We were totally on our own, but the president didn’t have to worry about us,” Ron recalls. “We got the job done.”

From the beginning of their marriage, Elder and Sister Rasband have put the Lord first. Married on September 4, 1973 (below), they were eventually blessed with four daughters and a son (above). Opposite page: Jon Huntsman Sr., Elder Rasband’s former business partner and mentor, calls Elder Rasband a “gifted leader of intense loyalty.”



The “Dream Girl” of Delta Phi

After completing his mission in 1972, Ron found a job, enrolled at the University of Utah that fall, and joined Delta Phi Kappa, a fraternity for returned missionaries. At the fraternity’s social activities, he couldn’t help but notice an attractive young woman named Melanie Twitchell. Melanie was one of Delta Phi’s elected “dream girls,” who helped with the fraternity’s service activities.

Like Ron, Melanie came from an active Latter-day Saint family. Her father, a career military officer, and her mother never let the family’s frequent moves become an excuse for missing church.

Melanie was impressed by Ron’s kindness, courtesy, and gospel knowledge. “I said to myself, ‘He is such an amazing man that it doesn’t matter if I never get to date him. I just want to be his best friend.’”

As their relationship grew, the Spirit confirmed her impressions of Ron and of his commitment to the Lord. Soon their friendship blossomed into what Melanie calls a “storybook, fairy-tale romance.”

Elder Rasband says she was a perfect match. “Melanie was every bit my equal in gospel devotion and heritage. We became best friends, and that’s when I asked her to marry me.”

They married on September 4, 1973, in the Salt Lake Temple. Since then, he says, his “selfless eternal companion . . . has helped mold me like potter’s clay into a more polished disciple of Jesus Christ. Her love and support, and that of our 5 children, their spouses, and our 24 grandchildren, sustain me.”³

“Let’s Go”

While serving as the elders quorum president of his married student ward, Ron became acquainted with Jon Huntsman Sr., the ward’s high council adviser. Jon was immediately impressed with the way Ron ran the quorum.

“He had incredible leadership and organizational skills,” recalls Elder Huntsman, who served as an Area Seventy from 1996 to 2011. “I thought it unusual that a

young man who was still in college could run a quorum in such a way.”

For several months, Jon watched Ron turn ideas into action as he completed priesthood duties. When a senior marketing position opened at Jon’s company—which would become Huntsman Chemical Corporation—he concluded that Ron had the skills he wanted and offered him the job. The position started the following week in Ohio, USA.

“I told Melanie, ‘I’m not going to drop out of school and move,’” Ron recalls. “I’ve worked my whole life to graduate from college, and I’m finally close to my goal.”

Melanie reminded Ron that finding a good job was why he was in school.

“What are you worried about?” she asked. “I know how to pack and move. I’ve been doing it my whole life. I’ll let you call your mother every night. Let’s go.”

Jon’s confidence in Ron proved well placed. Under Jon’s mentorship, Ron advanced quickly in the growing company,

becoming its president and chief operating officer in 1986. He traveled extensively for the company—both domestically and internationally. Despite his busy schedule, Ron tried to be home on weekends. And when he traveled, he would occasionally take family members with him.

“When he was home, he really made the children feel special and loved,” Melanie says. He attended their activities and sporting events whenever possible. Jenessa MacPherson, one of the couple’s four daughters, says her father’s Sunday ecclesiastical duties often kept him from sitting with the family during Church meetings.

“We would fight over who got to sit by him at church because it was such a novel thing to have him there,” she





says. “I remember putting my hand in his hand and thinking to myself, ‘If I could just learn to be like him, I’ll be on the right track and will be becoming more like the Savior.’ He was always my hero.”

The couple’s son, Christian, recalls fond memories of “father-son time.” Friends came and went because of the family’s frequent moves, he says, “but my father was always my best friend”—albeit a competitive one.

Whether shooting a basketball with Christian, playing a board game with his daughters, or fishing with family and friends, Ron loved to win.

“While we were growing up, he would never *let* anyone win,” Christian says. “We had to earn it, but it made us better. And the tradition continues with his loving grandchildren.”

Over the years, Ron’s family could not help but notice how ministering in Church leadership magnified his ability to show love and compassion, to express feelings of the Spirit, and to inspire others to do their best. After the birth of Ron and Melanie’s grandson Paxton, the family relied heavily on Ron’s spiritual strength and support.

Paxton, born with a rare genetic disorder, suffered from myriad health problems that tested the family physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Elder Rasband has called

the journey that followed Paxton’s birth “a crucible for learning special lessons tied to the eternities.”⁴

During Paxton’s short three years on earth—when questions were many and answers were few—Elder Rasband stood as a spiritual pillar, leading his family in drawing upon the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

With the announcement of his new calling, several family members and friends were not surprised. “Those of us who know him best,” Christian says, “raised our hands the highest when he was sustained as an Apostle.”

“I’ll Go Serve”

In 1996, at age 45, Ron was in the middle of a successful career when the call came to serve as mission president of the New York New York North Mission. Like the Apostles of old, he “straightway left [his] nets” (Matthew 4:20).

“Accepting the call took only a micro-second,” Elder Rasband says. He said to the Lord, “You want me to go serve; I’ll go serve.”

Ron took along a great lesson he had learned from his professional experience: “People are more important than anything



Top left: Elder and Sister Rasband with Church members in New Delhi, India, in November 2015. Above: Elder and Sister Rasband during his service as mission president in New York City, 1996–99; with their grandson Paxton, who helped the family learn “special lessons tied to the eternities”; and at the cornerstone ceremony of the Sacramento California Temple.

else.”⁵ With that knowledge and his honed leadership skills, he was ready to begin full-time service in the Lord’s kingdom.

Ron and Melanie found missionary work in New York City both challenging and invigorating. Ron was quick to delegate responsibility to the missionaries—inspiring their loyalty, and teaching, building, and lifting them in the process.

In 2000, a short eight months after Ron and Melanie had completed their mission, Ron was called to the Seventy, where his preparation, experience, and many talents have blessed the Church. As a member of the Seventy, he served as a counselor in the Europe Central Area Presidency, helping to oversee the work in 39 nations. Though he left college more than 40 years ago, he remains a serious student, welcoming ongoing mentoring from his senior Brethren as he supervised the North America West, Northwest, and three Utah Areas; served as Executive Director of the Temple Department; and served in the Presidency of the Seventy, working closely with the Twelve.

Recently, Elder Rasband observed, “What a great honor and privilege it is for me to be the least among the Twelve and to learn from them in every way and in every occasion.”⁶

“What They Knew, I Know”

Two paintings adorn the walls of Elder Rasband’s office. One is of Mormon missionaries teaching a family in Denmark in the 1850s. The second is of early missionary Dan Jones preaching from the perch of a well in the British Isles. The paintings (above right) remind Elder Rasband of his own ancestry.

“These early pioneers gave their all to the gospel of Jesus Christ and leave a legacy for their posterity to follow,” he has testified.⁷ What pushed Elder Rasband’s ancestors forward amidst adversity and persecution is what most qualifies him for his new calling: a knowledge and a sure witness of the Lord and His work.



“I have so very much to learn in my new calling,” he has said. “I feel very humble about that. But there’s one aspect of my calling I can do. I can bear testimony ‘of the name of Christ in all the world’ (D&C 107:23). He lives!”⁸

As a great-grandson of pioneers, he adds: “What they felt, I feel. What they knew, I know.”⁹

And what they hoped for in their posterity is embodied in the life, teachings, and service of Elder Ronald A. Rasband, who is following their example and honoring their legacy as he goes forward as one of the Lord’s special witnesses. ■

NOTES

1. Ronald A. Rasband, “I Stand All Amazed,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 89.
2. Ronald A. Rasband, “Friend to Friend: Golden Nuggets,” *Friend*, Oct. 2002, 8.
3. Ronald A. Rasband, “I Stand All Amazed,” 89.
4. Ronald A. Rasband, “Special Lessons,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 80.
5. Ronald A. Rasband, press conference, Oct. 3, 2015.
6. Ronald A. Rasband, testimony, Priesthood and Family Department devotional, Dec. 1, 2015.
7. Ronald A. Rasband, “I Stand All Amazed,” 89.
8. Ronald A. Rasband, testimony.
9. Ronald A. Rasband, Pioneer Day address, Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, July 24, 2007.