

4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 66, 68; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 49, 50.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 99; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1966, 1137.
6. In the late 1830s, after the Saints had abandoned Kirtland, the Lord called a man named Oliver Granger to go back and try to settle some unfinished matters for the First Presidency. In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said:

“Therefore, let [Oliver Granger] contend earnestly for the redemption of the First Presidency of my Church, saith the Lord; and when he falls he shall rise again, *for his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord.* . . . Therefore let no man despise my servant Oliver Granger, but let the blessings of my people be on him forever and ever” (D&C 117:13, 15; italics added).

Elder Marcus B. Nash

Fishing experience as a young man

When I was a deacon like many of you young men, my father and I hiked to a mountain stream to fish for trout. As my dad attached the bait to the hook on the end of my fishing line, he told me that I would need to set the hook in the fish’s mouth when it tried to take the bait, or it would get away. I did not understand what it meant to set the hook, so he explained to me that the hook needed to be embedded in the fish’s mouth when it struck at the bait so it could not shake the hook loose and that the hook would be set if I quickly pulled back on the pole when the fish tried to take the bait.

Now, I really wanted to catch a fish, so I stood on the bank of that mountain stream like a coiled spring, every muscle taut, waiting for the telltale movement at the end of my pole which would signal that the fish was trying to take the bait. After a few minutes I noticed movement at the end of my pole, and in that instant I jerked back on the pole with all of my strength, expecting a big fight with the fish. To my surprise, I watched as that poor trout—with the hook now set very firmly in his mouth—was launched from the water into the air over my head and landed on the ground flopping behind me.

I have two observations from that experience: First, a fish out of water is miserable. Although its gills, fins, and tail

work very well in water, they are all but useless on land. Second, the unfortunate fish I caught that day perished because it was deceived into treating something very dangerous—even fatal—as worthwhile or at least as sufficiently intriguing to warrant a closer look and perhaps a nibble.

To be truly happy, we need the gospel

My dear brethren of the Aaronic Priesthood, there are a couple of lessons to be learned from this: First, a basic purpose of your life, as Lehi taught, is to “have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). In order to have joy, you need to understand that, as a child of your Heavenly Father, you inherited divine traits and spiritual needs—and just like a fish needs water, you need the gospel and the companionship of the Holy Ghost to be truly, deeply happy. Because you are the offspring of God (see Acts 17:28), it is incompatible with your eternal nature to do wrong and feel right. It cannot be done. It is part of your spiritual DNA, as it were, that peace, joy, and happiness will be yours only to the degree you live the gospel.

In contrast, to the degree that you choose not to live the gospel, you will be as miserable as a fish out of water (see Mosiah 4:30). As Alma stated to his son Corianton:

“Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.

“And now, my son, all men that are . . . in a carnal state . . . are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:10–11).

Note that to be without God in the world—in other words, to refuse to live His gospel and therefore lack the companionship of the Spirit—is to be in a state contrary to the nature of happiness. The gospel of Jesus Christ is, in fact, *the*—note that this is singular, meaning it is *the only*—“great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). If you opt for any other way of life or try to live only the parts of the gospel that seem convenient, such a choice will cheat you of the full, resplendent joy and happiness for which you were designed by our loving Father in Heaven and His Son.

Avoiding unclean and evil things

Now to the second lesson from my fishing experience: just as a fish in a mountain stream must be careful of the lures placed in its path to avoid being pulled away from the water, so must you and I be wise in order to avoid being pulled away from a happy, gospel-centered life. Remember that, as Lehi observed, the devil “seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” and obtains “power to captivate” (2 Nephi 2:27, 29) us when we involve ourselves in unclean and evil things. Thus, do not be deceived into even nibbling at unworthy things, for Satan stands ready to set the hook. It was the very real risk of the hook being set subtly or suddenly that led the ancient prophet Moroni—who actually saw our day (see Mormon 8:35)—to pointedly warn you and me to “*touch* not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30; italics added).

There is much that is evil and unclean in music, the Internet, movies, magazines, and in alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. As to any evil and unclean thing, my young

friends, do not even touch it! Disguised in such things is a hook that sets subtly and much more suddenly than you dare think—and it can be an excruciatingly painful process to extract the hook. Alma described that for him the process of repentance was “nigh unto death” (Mosiah 27:28); indeed, he stated that “nothing [could be] so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains” (Alma 36:21).

Making changes through repentance

There may be some of you who have been involved with that which is evil or unclean. Take hope in the doctrinal and historical fact that Alma’s faith in the Lord led him to repent, and as a direct result of his repentance he experienced such happiness through the power of the Atonement of Christ that, in his words, “there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy” (Alma 36:21). Such will be your experience as you seek the Lord through repentance.

Each of us needs to repent to some degree or another. To repent means to make the real changes in your life the Savior desires you to make for your happiness. Repentance is the great enabling principle of the gospel: when your faith in the Lord causes personal change, such action on your part, as Helaman states, “bringeth [you] unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of [your] souls” (Helaman 5:11). As you seek to change, remember that our loving Savior, as Alma states, has “all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15). This is powerful, liberating, hope-filled doctrine!

The Prophet Joseph Smith learned from firsthand experience that the Lord expects us to avoid misery by living His gospel and wants us to understand that we can repent. When he lost the 116 pages of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon translation by giving in to the persuasions

of men, Joseph was miserable. The Lord told him, “You should have been faithful; and [God] would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble” (D&C 3:8). Such is the case for each of you young men: be faithful, and you will be supported by the hand of God. The Prophet was then reminded that—as with each of us—he would be forgiven if he repented. Imagine what joy he felt when he heard the Lord state, “But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen” (D&C 3:10).

An invitation to live the gospel

My invitation to each of you tonight is to live the gospel to be truly happy, avoid evil and the misery it brings, and if you

have become involved with the evil or unclean thing, make the changes the Lord desires of you for your own happiness—and I witness that He will enable you to succeed through His matchless power.

As you accept this invitation, you will reap lasting happiness and build the foundation of your life upon “the rock of our Redeemer,” such that when the shafts of the evil one and the storms of the world assail you, they will, as Helaman taught, have “no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, *a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall*” (Helaman 5:12; italics added). Of the Lord Jesus Christ I bear my ardent witness: He is the Rock, the one sure foundation for happiness and healing. He lives, has all power in heaven and earth, knows your name, and He loves you. In the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Stanley G. Ellis

Power of attorney

Several years ago Sister Ellis and I were called to preside over the Brazil São Paulo North Mission. The call meant that we would be away for three years. Given our family and business situation, we were impressed to keep our home and business in Houston rather than sell them.

As we began to make the necessary arrangements, it became clear we would need to have our lawyer prepare a power of attorney. That is a legal document that gives someone else the authority to do anything in our name. The person with this document could sell our home or other assets, borrow money in our name, spend our money, or even sell our business. The thought of giving someone that much power and authority over our affairs was scary.

We decided to give our power of attorney to a person we trusted, a good friend and partner, who exercised that power and authority very well. He did what we would have done if we were there.

The priesthood is a sacred trust

Brethren, think of what the Lord has given us—His power and authority! The power and authority to act for Him in all things pertaining to His work!

With this priesthood power and, when necessary, the authorization of those with appropriate keys, we can perform the ordinances of salvation in His name: baptize for the remission of sins, confirm and confer the Holy Ghost, confer the priesthood and ordain others to priesthood offices, and perform temple ordinances. In His name we can administer His Church. In