

Ep 216. Agency



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 216, Agency.

This podcast is for people who know that living an extraordinary life is not easy or comfortable. It's so much better than that. This is *Better Than Happy*, and I'm your host, Jody Moore.

Hey, everybody. Welcome to episode 216. I am looking forward to talking to you about agency today. I want to start out by mentioning that if you have a request for a podcast topic, I would love to hear it.

So, I was wrapping my head around how do I gather these requests, what's going to be the best way? And what I decided was that if you could go to Instagram and direct message me, that will be awesome. And I or my staff will go and gather them and add them to the list.

I have a really long list I keep in the notes section of my phone because sometimes a random conversation or something triggers an idea for me and I capture it in my phone. And I went way to the bottom of the list and found agency on there. And I thought, "I don't know why I haven't made that podcast yet." And that's how I chose today's episode. But I really want to hear about the topics that you guys are interested in, that you want help with, and I will get busy making some more podcasts.

So anyway, we're going to talk about agency and I want to begin by having us think about what agency even is. So, in the Mormon church – I mean the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – in our religion, we talk about agency quite a bit because we believe that it is something that Heavenly Father gave us when he sent us here to Earth, which is just the ability to make decisions, to make our own choices.

It's the ability to choose how we're going to behave and how we're going to think and how we're going to feel and basically which models we're going to be operating from at any given time. And he gave that to us as a gift and it was a really necessary essential part of our journey here on Earth because agency means that we are the creator of our life experience.

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Now, I grew up in the church and so I grew up being taught about agency and I understood what it was and I remember thinking, “Duh, that’s a pretty basic idea. I don’t know why we keep reviewing it.” And so it wasn’t until I got a little older that I understood some of the power of agency and I still have so much to learn.

But I had an experience many years ago when I was a newer coach. I was doing one on one coaching at the time. It was probably four years ago, or so. And I was coaching a client who is not a member of the church but is a practicing Christian. She’s very strong in her own Christian faith, but a slightly different belief system than I had.

And we were talking about her mother, who had a pretty challenging life, her mother who was addicted to a lot of substances and had not been what probably most of us would consider to be a stellar mother most of her life and was at a point now where she was somewhat suicidal even. And so my client was struggling and she said to me, “I just don’t understand why my prayer isn’t being answered. My mother has been my longest prayer.”

And I asked her, what is it that you pray for when you pray for your mother? And she said, “I pray that she will stop drinking, that she’ll stop taking drugs, that she’ll be able to get the help she needs, that she’ll be mentally stronger, that she will get better.”

And I asked her, well do you believe in agency? And she was like, “Huh?” Not that she hadn’t heard the word before, but it wasn’t like a regular part of her vocabulary, I could tell. And I explained to her what I understood agency was and that it was something I believed in, and she agreed that yes, it sounded right, that God gave all of us the ability to choose for ourselves here on this Earth how we’re going to act and who we’re going to be.

And so when I pointed out to her that some of what she’s praying for is to take away her mother’s agency and maybe she’s praying for the wrong thing. Maybe she should be praying that she should be who she wants to

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be and she can make her choices and she can feel at peace and she can be healthy, but maybe we can't pray away her mother's agency.

And that was when it really struck me that a lot of people aren't taught about agency like we are and they don't understand and they don't think about it, at least to the same extent. Kind of fascinating. So it helped me be a little bit more grateful that I have been taught that and that I do understand it.

Now, I want to mention that I think agency is beyond freedom. So sometimes, I think about freedom in a similar way. Like, we in this country are free. We have the freedom to choose what religion we want to practice, we have all kinds of freedoms that are protected by the Constitution and we consider ourselves to be free people, right?

But agency is even more powerful than that. It goes beyond that. It's a law of god. It's a universal law that basically says people can do whatever they want, even outside of the laws of our country, even in other countries where we would say people are not free, they still have agency. No one can take away our agency.

So agency doesn't mean people can do whatever they want and there are no consequences. There are, of course, consequences. Sometimes, there are consequences that are imposed upon us by our governments or by our parents or by our spouses or by other people in our lives. But there are also probably universal consequences and there are certainly consequences eternally and spiritually to certain decisions that we make.

So please don't confuse that. I'm not suggesting that when I say – and by the way, I use this term a lot when I'm coaching you guys, right? That of course they can do whatever they want and of course they're supposed to make whatever choices they want. And where the brain wants to go to is, "Oh, so then it's okay and we don't punish anyone and it's okay and there are no consequences and no one feels bad?"

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No, of course that's not the case. That's not what agency means. Agency says we can do and that the Lord wants us to choose for ourselves what we will do and who we will be. But that doesn't remove the consequences, both positive and negative for the choices that we make.

So when we think about agency, what I love so much about the concept of agency is that agency means responsibility and accountability. The more agency we have, the more responsibility and accountability we have for the outcome of things.

Let's use an example. Let's think about homework because it is back to school time, y'all. I love back to school time. I love the weather changing and the school supplies and new shoes and back to a routine. It's one of my favorite times of year.

But at any rate, let's imagine that you're in school and you get a homework assignment. Some teachers, or with some assignments, it will be very, very detailed. It might be that you need to write a paper, it needs to be three pages long, you need to use 12-point single spaced font on that paper, you need to include at least one reference showing that you did some research, you need to have a thesis statement and two supporting points to back up your thesis, and a conclusion.

Okay, so if it's very, very specific like that, then somebody who writes a great paper, we might still say that's a great paper, but think about the person who doesn't get that level of instruction. And they're able to figure out and assess on their own the length and the number of resources and how many supporting points and that there should be a thesis paragraph and a conclusion.

Whose paper is more impressive? The one that figured it out on their own, right, that put that together based on their own critical thinking and their own decisions and their own agency, rather than the one that just did what they were told.

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So, I'm not saying it's wrong to sometimes give specific instructions like that in a homework assignment, but if you think about our homework assignment of coming to this Earth and then taking all the classes that we get as we go through trials and have experiences, the fact that we have agency makes it a much richer experience. It also makes it a much harder experience in some ways.

Have you ever felt like this, like just tell me what to do and I'll do it? And when someone can't or doesn't tell you what to do, it's frustrating because you have to figure it out and you have to wrestle with it and you have to make mistakes along the way. And yet, that's where the more rich experience comes; from the figuring it out and the making of the mistakes and then what happens after you make the mistakes, which is getting up and starting again and trying it another way. All of those things are what really grow us and really develop us, which is, of course, the whole point of why we're here on Earth.

So, let's talk for just a minute about this bittersweet concept that other people in our lives have agency. Gosh, why do my kids have to have agency? They should just do what I tell them and they should listen to me and they should follow my advice and then their life would be so much easier and happier and we would save everybody so much struggle if they didn't all have agency.

This is the underlying message I hear over and over again as I coach you, all of you who are parents. I had the most amazing Dm come in the other day from one of you on Instagram. You said something to the effect of how much progress you've made from the tools you're learning and how much you love it. And then you said, could you do a podcast sometime about how to help kids – I can't remember what it was. It was something about helping kids get along and not argue and not be so volatile and could you do something on conflict resolution on children? That's what you asked me to do a podcast on.

And I didn't know this person. I didn't know how familiar they were with the model. But what I replied – I sensed that they were pretty familiar because

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of what they'd written prior about all the progress they'd made in their life. And I said, "Just put your kids in the C-line of your model."

And she replied and said, "Oh my gosh, you're right." So anyway, if you don't get what I'm saying, you will. Just keep listening. But other people have agency and this means that they are supposed to make their own choices, which means they're supposed to make mistakes.

What? They're supposed to do it wrong. Yes, even your kids, even your employees are supposed to choose the wrong sometimes. If they weren't, we would have just gone right along with Satan's plan, which was everyone will always choose the right all the time.

So when I'm coaching you guys and I tell you, like, no they're totally supposed to do that, I know sometimes you resist it, so I want to dive into that just a little bit more. The first example of this that really helps me get it is the story of Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were commanded by the Lord not to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. And so we could say they shouldn't be eating of that fruit. And yet they did eat the fruit, and then what we know is they were supposed to eat the fruit and they needed to eat the fruit, even though eating the fruit was choosing the wrong and there were consequences, which was being kicked out of the Garden of Eden, and then having this awareness.

And that was necessary though for the plan to progress. That was necessary for the rest of us to end up here and for Heavenly Father's plan to progress the way it has. So yes, it was a sin. Yes, they went against Heavenly Father's commandments, and they were totally supposed to do it.

Now, I remember when I was younger wrestling with, like, how could that be? It doesn't make sense. It's not a very linear logical thing to reconcile in your mind. That's the same way I think it goes with the other people in our lives and their agency.

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I can't explain to you exactly why and how that is that the people in your life are supposed to sin, but I know that they are supposed to because they have agency, right? So the question becomes, what now?

If our kids are supposed to sin – and by the way, when I say they're supposed to make mistakes and they're supposed to sin, I mean even the big stuff, even when they're young. Some of you say to me, "I mean, I know they're supposed to, but not this." I'm like, "Yeah, this..." We don't get to choose which sins and at what age and how severe it is. All of it is supposed to go down exactly how it's supposed to go down. Your spouse too. And even your parents.

We grow up thinking our parents are infallible and they do it right, and then we get older and realize, wait, no they're not and they've done some of it wrong. And then we get even older and we think, wait a second, I think they're doing it totally wrong, and especially our in-laws. Some of you are like, "My mother-in-law should like me and support me," except that she doesn't, so maybe not. Maybe she's not supposed to do it right. Maybe she's supposed to use her own agency.

So when we let go of the focus on trying to control other people's agency, we free up a lot of space for ourselves to then just focus on our own agency. Who do I want to be? Now, in this relationship with this person, who's making this choice?

Focus on your agency. You have some choices to make now, and you get to choose is the beautiful part. There is more than one option about how you can think and feel and behave in any given situation, always. Your brain might think this is the only option; we have to be scared, we have to be worried, we have to be upset, we have to be offended.

There's always at least half a dozen, if not more, options available to you. Step number one is recognizing that the way you're feeling and thinking and behaving is not the only option and that it is optional. So it's really easy to be our highest selves when everyone around us is behaving lovely, but they have agency.

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Can you be that highest version of you when the people in your life don't make the choices that you want to see them make? When your mother-in-law judges you, what will you choose then?

So when it comes to these interactions and relationships we have with other people, I love Byron Katie's work and using what she calls turnarounds. So basically, if my thought is, my mother-in-law doesn't accept me the way I am. We turn it around and we look at in what way is that not true and in what way can I turn that around and make it more about me and what I'm feeling and who I'm being?

So we might play with the idea that if the thought is that my mother-in-law doesn't accept me the way I am, I might try on, "I'm not accepting me the way I am." In what way is that true? It's true because if I was completely accepting of me the way I am and my mother-in-law didn't accept me the way I was, it wouldn't bother me.

I would think, "She's confused, she's wrong about me. I'm amazing the way I am." And also, the other turnaround we use here is, "I don't accept my mother-in-law the way she is," because the way she is is to not accept me and not understand me the way I am. And if I just accepted that about her, again, I would think, "She's confused, I'm amazing, and I love her and I accept that she doesn't accept me, I'm okay with that, I get it." So those turnarounds really put the focus back on you and your own agency.

Here's another example; if the thought is, "I'm really angry because my son is looking at pornography," we try some turnarounds because notice that thought is focused on his agency and wishing he didn't have it and trying to control it or take it away. So instead, we turn it around to, "I'm not angry because he's looking at pornography, I'm angry because I'm thinking he shouldn't be, he shouldn't lie, he's going to create problems for himself. This is going to be hard," or what if, what if, what if.

That's the reason I'm angry. I'm not angry because of what he's doing. I'm angry because of what I'm doing, which is the ruminating and the worrying and the thinking and the judging. That's why I'm angry. So that's that

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turnaround. Notice how it puts the focus on you and your agency and what you want to choose, and it shows you what you're choosing with your agency right now.

The other turnaround for that, again, we turn it back onto ourselves, "I'm angry because I'm looking at pornography." Even if you're not literally looking at pornography, notice that you're obsessing about pornography. You're focusing on pornography. You're focusing on the problem and you're giving pornography so much power in this situation. And that is the reason you're angry, not because of your son's focus on pornography but because of your focus on pornography.

So I love using these, like I said, to really just use your own agency rather than put your agency on a shelf and default to what your natural brain will tell you.

Now, let's talk about something lighter and more positive, which is the plus side of all the good that we do with our agency. The same agency that we make mistakes with and that other people make mistakes with is the agency that's used to do so much good. And if we didn't have agency, then all the good we do wouldn't really mean anything.

We wouldn't feel proud. We wouldn't feel grateful to people when they did it. We wouldn't feel more confident and we wouldn't improve that relationship with ourselves when we do what we said we would do. It's because we have a choice either way that it's pretty cool when we do it and we show up, or when other people serve us.

So agency is still a concept that, I think, I barely understand. I guess when I was younger, I used to think, yeah, it's really simple, we get to choose, duh. But now I think, oh my goodness, it's so complicated and it's so much more powerful, I think, than we even realize because it provides that contrast in our lives, the positive and the negative, the right and the wrong. Without wrong, there's no right, and vice versa.

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I think it is more living, more inspired, and more complicated than we even realize. It's the reason that we come here to this earth and are changed completely as a result of our time here. We make choices, and those choices shape us.

Sometimes, my clients want to discount their agency. They want to say things like, "I eat chocolate at night after my kids go to bed. I just notice that I eat chocolate every night. I notice that I don't get up in the morning like I want to. I get irritated when my husband does what he does. Or I put things on my calendar but then I just don't do what's on my calendar."

They tell me these things as if they're just describing something that happens to them, and when I ask them why do you do that, they'll say, "I don't know." The answer is always, because that's what I choose to do. I have agency and I get to make choices and these are some of the choices I've been making.

One of my colleagues, Corinne Crabtree, who is a weight loss coach, recently said, "Listen, there's food, and then there's your mouth. And in between those things is a decision you make to put that food in your mouth."

And I loved it because what it does is put the focus back on your agency, not so that you can beat yourself up or judge yourself, but you have to own your agency to get your power back. There's your alarm clock and then there's the decision you make to turn it off and stay in bed. There's the words that come out of your husband's mouth, and then there's your decision to think about what he says in a way that irritates you.

There's your decision to be in that marriage in the first place, or to stay in that marriage. There's your decision to stay in the room or to reply or not reply or sulk or do whatever it is that you do afterwards. But you're creating your experience with your agency.

There's your calendar and your list of things to do and your time, and then there's the decision you make to ignore it or to not do it, or to do it, in some

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cases. There is always a choice, my friend. And having agency isn't necessarily about doing what's easy or fun all the time, but it is always a choice. And when you own your agency, this is how you move out of being a victim and you move out of self-pity, and instead, you move into empowerment and confidence and determination.

Agency is what makes us the creators of our own life experience. It is not happening to you. You are shaping it all along the way with your agency. What an amazing gift.

Thanks for joining me today, you guys, I hope you have an amazing beautiful week and I will be back to talk to you again next week. Make sure you subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode and I will see you then. Take care.

If you have a question about something you've heard me talk about on this podcast or anything else going on in your life, I want to invite you to a free public call, Ask Jody Anything. I will teach you the main coaching tool I use with all of my clients and the way to solve any problem in your life, and we will plug in real-life examples.

Come to the call and ask me a question anonymously or just listen in. Go to jodymoore.com/askjody and register before you miss it. I'll see you there.