

Q & A

*“Church leaders are always giving us rules to follow.
Isn’t it taking away our agency
when they tell us what to do all the time?”*

NEW ERA

Church leaders do give us a lot of guidelines, but we shouldn’t mistake their counsel for an attempt to take away our agency. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained how he led the Church: “I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves” (quoted by John Taylor, in “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star*, Nov. 15, 1851, 339).

For example, you’ll find quite a few do’s and don’ts in the *For the Strength of Youth* booklet, but the first section, called “Agency and Accountability,” explains why we have agency and what it means:

“While you are here on earth, you are being proven to see if you will use your agency to show your love for God by keeping His commandments.

“While you are free to choose for yourself, you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions. . . . Wrong choices delay your progression and lead to heartache and misery. Right choices lead to happiness and eternal life” ([2001], 4).

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Seventy said:

■ **We have agency, but we cannot choose the consequences of our actions.**

■ **Church leaders simply help us make choices that will lead us to happiness through God’s plan of salvation.**

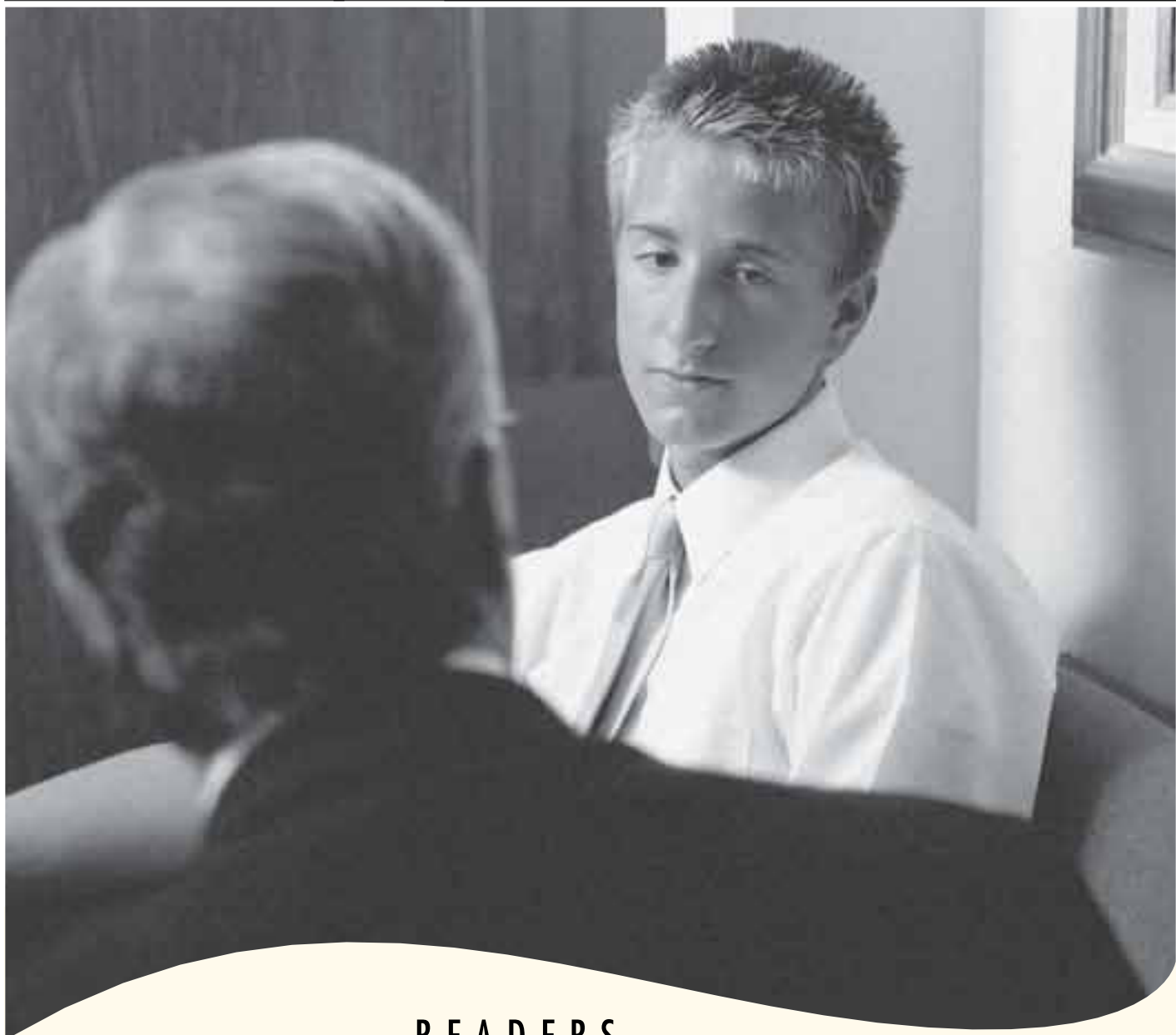
■ **Following the counsel of Church leaders brings us greater freedom through the Savior, as opposed to the captivity of the devil.**

■ **Choosing to obey brings spiritual growth.**

“Some complain that when the prophets speak with clarity and firmness they are taking our agency away. . . . The prophets do not take away our agency. They simply warn us of what the consequences of our choices will be” (“Our Destiny,” *New Era*, Oct. 2000, 46).

When Church leaders give “rules,” they are not trying to dictate how we should live every detail of our lives. They are simply teaching us gospel principles to help us make the choices that will bring us happiness. Far from restricting our agency, these guidelines lead us to much greater freedom than we would have if we were to make wrong choices (see John 8:31–32).

In the Book of Mormon, Lehi taught that the main choice before us is between “liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men,” and “captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27). Choosing to follow the counsel of God’s servants will lead us to greater freedom. Choosing to disobey will cut us off from God’s Spirit, leaving us open to the influence of the adversary, who “seeketh that all



READERS

men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). God’s plan is a plan of happiness, and “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). All of the “rules” our Church leaders give us can help us grow spiritually. Guidelines on dress or entertainment, for instance, aren’t just attempts to make us conform to old-fashioned standards; they help us avoid worldly influences that can dull our spiritual sensitivity and lessen our desire to draw near to God. Great blessings come from using our agency to obey. **NE**



The rules we are given by no means take away our agency but give us a clearer knowledge of what we can do to return to our loving Father in

Heaven. It’s hard to watch close friends make decisions that bring painful consequences to them. I have never before been more grateful for having the knowledge of the things that we need to do to live the commandments. I am blessed to be a member of the Church. People may see commandments as rules, but I see them as a doorway to the celestial kingdom.

Kate S., 18, Arizona



Church leaders do not make the rules; Heavenly Father does. Our leaders are there to help us make the right choices. They are looking out

for us and telling us which choice would be righteous. We get the final say in everything we do, and that is the responsibility and blessing of agency.

London B., 15, California

One of the purposes of our coming into mortality is to develop attributes of godliness. Obeying the commandments helps us

to do this. Obedience protects us from Satan and spiritual death, educates us on how to become gods, and governs us, which prepares us for eternal life. Cecil B. DeMille said, “[God] made man free—and then gave him the Commandments to keep him free.”

Josiah E., 17, New Zealand



Church leaders want what is best for you. They are inspired by Heavenly Father to help us achieve eternal life. You always have agency. Your Church leaders have experience and reasons

for what they tell you. They love you and want you to be happy. They also want to keep you safe, protect you from temptation, and guide you through the straight and narrow path.

Mariah W., 15, Massachusetts

I’ve been able to see in my own life that happiness and misery are a result of our choices. What might seem like rules that restrict choices are the guidelines that give us freedom (see John 8:32). As a missionary, we have many rules, but they are given to us by those who can see further than we do (see D&C 101:45–54). Following even the smallest rule can give us greater peace.

Elder Jashinsky, 21, Missouri Independence Mission



They don’t take away our agency. Agency is the freedom to choose. When our leaders give us rules, they are trying to prevent us from committing sins, freeing us from the

pangs of guilt and regret.

Alex D., 17, South Carolina

Although to some it may seem like the Church leaders are taking away our agency, they are really giving us more freedom if we choose to do as they say. One day, my friend was talking to me about her complicated “love life.” She had



“Some . . . do not readily see the relationship between obedience and agency. And they miss one vital connection and see obedience only as restraint. They then resist the very thing that will give them true freedom. There is no true freedom without responsibility, and there is no enduring freedom without a knowledge of the truth.”

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Agency and Control,” Ensign, May 1983, 66.

to deal with a lot of unnecessary stress because she had chosen not to wait until age 16 before dating. She felt very restrained in many ways that she wouldn’t have if she had waited. This friend told me, “You guys are so blessed! At church, when they tell you to wait until you’re 16, they mean it!” The more I thought about this, the more I realized she was right. Sometimes we don’t see the reason for things, but people who have been through it know a lot of things we don’t.

Name withheld



Rules are set in place ultimately by our Heavenly Father through our Church leaders. They are intended to protect us and give us more agency. For example, the Word of Wisdom

protects us from becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol. The commandments help us maintain our agency that Satan is trying so hard to take away.

Katie C., 19, Nevada

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as pronouncements of Church doctrine.

NEXT QUESTION

“My sister lies to our parents about where she is and who she is with. What should I do?”

Send your answer by December 15, 2007 to:
New Era, Q&A, 12/07
50 E. North Temple St. Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA
Or e-mail: newera@ldschurch.org

The following information and permission must be included in your e-mail or letter.

FULL NAME

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I grant permission to print response and photo.

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PARENT’S SIGNATURE (if you are under 18)