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LDS MISSION PODCAST

Episode 144 - What Makes Missionaries Spiral

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Hey, what's up everyone is Jennie Dildine, the LDS mission coach and you are listening to the LDS mission Podcast, episode number 144. What makes missionaries spiral? I'm Jennie the LDS mission coach. And whether you're preparing to serve a mission, currently serving a returned missionary or a missionary mama like me, I created this podcast just for you. Are you searching for epic confidence? Ready to love yourself and to learn the how of doing hard things? Then let's go. I will help you step powerfully into your potential and never question your purpose. Again. It's time to embrace yourself. Embrace your mission. Embrace your life, and embrace what's next.



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Hey, everybody, welcome to the podcast. Gorgeous day out side. Yay for the sun finally. Woot. Woot woot. I think the grass is starting to turn a little bit greener. Today, the sky is blue, I can see little buds starting to come out on the trees. And I just want to say people, and we have survived the winter. Well, I don't know how well you did this winter. I feel like I did. Maybe better than I have in winters past. But some of the reason that I did do better is because of what we're going to talk about today. And I have a lot of people that have ideas about why missionaries are struggling on the mission. And I have my own sort of theory about it, that I want to share with you today, which is why missionaries spiral like what makes them spiral down. Now, before we jump into that, I want to make sure to remind you that we're running a special right now in celebration of my birthday, which is April 1. April Fool's Day. It's not a joke. That is actually when I was born. We are running a special right now for mission prep plus. Now if you don't know what mission prep pluses, I highly recommend you go straight to my website right this very moment. And check it out. Because it is our newest program, where we are running like a online sort of MTC home picture like the home MTC but all for your mental and emotional health. And a lot of people are asking questions like Are they videos? What is it exactly? And what it is is exactly you will be meeting with some of my RM mentors who are teachers in there just like you would at the MTC, you are also going to be meeting with my coaches for some more in depth q&a Plus coaching plus, diving more into the tools that maybe you don't. And the questions by the way that you feel like maybe you can't ask when you're in the MTC like, maybe you don't feel comfortable with being like, Hey everybody, I'm super homesick or Hey everybody, I miss my boyfriend or Hey, everybody. I have started feeling anxious. And I don't even know what to do

with that now that I'm here. So we address all of those questions. No question is off. You know, off the table like any question is welcome. We want to help you with I've started thinking about it like the behind the scenes of you serving a mission where the MTC when you go to Provo or my nephew just got called to speak Spanish speaking in Virginia. So he's going to be going to the Mexico MTC anyways, totally side tangent, but in the MTC, they teach you sort of the front facing part of missionary work that everybody else is going to see. And what we do is we do the behind the scenes with your mental your mindset, your emotions, how you see yourself how you see the work, how you see your relationship with your companion, all of those things. So it's so fun, and life changing and mission changing. And I want you in there so if you have any questions, of course, just shoot me an email Jennie at Jennie@dildine.com. I'd love to hear from you. And I'd love to hear where you're going, where you're serving when you're starting and all of that good stuff. And Jennie@dildine.com If you want to learn more about mission prep plus and now is the best time and we have so many missionaries getting their calls right now getting ready to head out this summer. And just come with a friend and then you can get it for cheaper. Buy one get one half off mission prep plus, so yay for that.



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Okay, so let's dive into what I wanted to talk to you about today. Which is this mission. nary a downward spiral. So first, let's do a quick review of what the way I see life sort of just working right is we have these brains, their information, problem solving machine, they take in information, with our senses, with our intuition, with all of the things going on outside of us with our eyes, with sound, all of that takes in all of this information, our brain wants to process this make sense of it, and often trying to solve for a problem. So we're gonna automatically be observing all of the things that happen on our mission, we're going to be observing our thoughts and feelings and actions, and we're going to be observing the thoughts, feelings and actions of other people, we're going to observe them about ourselves. That's just what we all do. Now, before I go a little bit further, I do want to say that I think this is not just for missionaries, if you're a mom, this is going to apply to you, if you are a mission leader, this is going to apply to you, if you are a returned missionary, this is going to apply to you because the concept I'm going to teach you is what causes us as I've observed myself over my life, going down this down, downward spiral. So keep listening, even if you're not a missionary. Keep listening. Okay. So again, I'm going back to where I left off, which is, that's what our brains do, that's what they're designed to do, they take in the information, then those little thoughts or synapses connects in our brain, which creates a motion in our body.



06:41

Guys, this is just what, why we're here actually, we're supposed to take in these experiences, we're supposed to have thoughts about them, we're supposed to feel feelings are supposed to take action, and then we're gonna see these outcomes that happen in our life is called being a human. Now, for some reason, when we go out on the mission, or maybe post mission, we think that I am not human any longer, I should not be susceptible to the human condition, which when we say that out loud, makes no sense, right? Of course, you are going to also because your brain goes with you on your mission. And by the way, your your past experiences, the emotions you've experienced in the past, the thoughts that you've had, the way you were raised your genetics, all of it goes with you on the mission. So you are a missionary, but you are a human missionary, just like I'm a human mom, and a human business owner. And maybe you're a human college student or a human newlywed, none of us were meant to go through this life, never experiencing the full range of human emotion, right. And that's why we have a Savior, He has our back. That's how we can learn to have our own back to take

care of ourselves when things are challenging. Okay. All right. So that is just the way the world works is we're gonna think and feel and have experiences, take some action. And some of it's gonna feel really awesome. And some of it's gonna be hard and heart wrenching, and difficult. Okay. So here's what I see happening with missionaries and return missionaries. Most often that causes us to go into a down word spiral, is we notice that we're feeling sad. And then we decide to add meaning to it. I was actually just talking to a preparing missionary that's getting ready to head out in April, just here in a couple of weeks. And he was saying, I said, Well, what's the emotion that you don't really love feeling? And he said, I don't like feeling sad. And I was like, well, let's talk more about that. And he said, Well, yeah, I think there's this stereotype that if you're on the mission, you're supposed to always feel happy and motivated. And I was like, Yeah, I think there is that stereotype. So then what happens is, we think we're supposed to be a certain way. And then when we're not that way, when we actually have a human experience on the mission, like I'm feeling sad, I'm feeling overwhelmed. I'm feeling trunky I'm feeling like I can't get out of bed today. All of those human things, what we do is we add meaning to it. Now, the thing itself isn't a problem at all. It's not a problem that you feel sad. It's not a problem that you think you're not good enough. It's not a problem, that you have thoughts about your companion that they're super annoying or buggy or whatever. None of that is a problem. That is called being human.



09:53

Okay, that's just your brain, doing what brains do. But when we add meaning to it, we add in a bunch of stuff to it, that leads a person to spiral downward. Because listen to what some of these thoughts are, that we often had have if we're sad, or if we're anxious. Okay? I'm not a good missionary. Right? Can you see how it's just not useful to think that so we've got the thing where we're feeling sad, maybe we're just missing our family. But then when we think no, I'm, no, I'm not a good missionary, because I'm sad. It that is what sends us a downward spiral. Maybe we add meaning to something that we did, maybe an action that we took, maybe we got up at seven in the morning instead of 630. Or maybe if we're an RM, we decided not to work out that day, or we couldn't get out of bed on time to work out or whatever it is that we're trying to do. But what we, we just that thing all by itself, not a problem, not a problem that you slept in, at all, totally not a problem until you add meaning to it. And maybe we then think, Oh, well, now I'm not worthy of the spirit. Hey, that that doesn't have to mean that at all. I promise you, you can get up a few minutes late. And it doesn't have to mean that you're not worthy of the Spirit. It can just mean I'm a human. I was probably tired. And it's okay. And I'm going to try to do better tomorrow. But it doesn't mean like, oh, spirits gone for the rest of the day. Okay. Because here's what happens. If you think that if you add that meaning to something that doesn't have meaning. That is what you'll continue to discover more throughout your day. So I think I talked about it last week on the podcast, which is, then your brain will go to work proving that chirps like oh, no, see, I don't have the spirit, I'll see I don't have the spirit. When if we think about it, logically, we can separate those two things. And they're not even connected. The amount of rest that we get, and the spirit. I don't, I don't know that they're connected. I mean, they might be but in this particular instance, it's not useful to add meaning to the situation. Okay, maybe we are having thoughts about our companion. And we're just like, I just can't with this companion is just not clicking with them, I maybe either they're not working enough, or maybe they're working you too hard, or whatever that is. And that's totally fine, that's normal and human, for your brain to be concerned about that, to be interested and curious about what's going on with them or what's going on with you. But the problem becomes when we add meaning, I'm not a good person, if I have these thoughts. It's just not necessary. It's not even true, that you're not a good person. What is true is you're a human. Okay, maybe you are thinking about a friend that you haven't talked to in a while. Or maybe you haven't gone to lunch for a while or something. And that all by itself is a problem that maybe you want to think about that you want to solve, you'll be like, Oh, maybe I get to more of that.

And we all that all by itself is totally fine. But then we add meaning to that. Like I'm not a good friend. That is what causes the downward spiral because that meaning we layer on more emotion, we layer on more shame, we layer on more guilt than is just required, or necessary to just like live your life.

 13:50

Let me give you a few more examples. Um, I should be more blank. That's another thing that we add meaning to like, maybe I am feeling chunky, and I, you know, I'm ready to go home and I'm missing my family a lot. Then we add meaning to it, like I should be more dedicated. I shouldn't be more committed, I should be more present. In in really meeting my goals here on the mission. Here's what's true, guys. We don't have to add that meaning. You could just decide, guess what I'm missing my family feeling a little bit unmotivated, and I can still be committed. I can still hit my goals and feel both of those things. Don't add unnecessary meaning. Maybe you haven't been asked to do any sort of like leadership position. Or maybe you haven't gotten a position or a promotion at work. And that's totally fine. Like your brain can figure that out. That could be a problem that maybe we'd want to solve. Maybe we want to be like oh Maybe I should say something or maybe I should address this, or maybe I should, um, you know, apply for more promotions, or whatever it is, that's something that we can address. But we head into a downward spiral. When we add meaning to what is just going on, maybe we decide, I must not be leadership quality. I'll share, let me read it first, all of these back to you. So we have the stuff that just happens, right? Like, that's what we're saying, we're feeling sad, or feeling overwhelmed. We're feeling stressed, we're feeling pressure, we're feeling anxious, whatever, it is totally fine, human, human missionary, human returned missionary, human mom. The thing that sends us downward is the meaning making that we do the meaning that we add to it. Let me read you this. I'm not a good missionary. I'm not worthy of the spirit. I'm not a good person. I'm not a good friend, I should be more Christ like I should. I'm not, I'm not leadership, quality.

 16:09

All of those things, do you see how those thoughts are the ones that spiral us downward, and then they layer and layer and layer and layer and push us down and down and down and down. And pretty soon, so we're not just sad. But then we're like, I shouldn't be sad, I'd be a better person if I wasn't sad. And then we make that mean something that we're thinking those thoughts. And then we mean that we make that mean something that we're having those thoughts and feelings about the thought and feeling and the thought and feeling. Do you see what I'm saying? It's like, pretty soon, we're just like, spiraling downward. And I'm gonna give you some ideas about what we can do about this. But first, I want to share a couple more examples, and then I'm going to share a personal example. So maybe you're experiencing some anxiety on the mission, or since you've gotten home, maybe some social anxiety, I see that a lot when missionaries get home. And we can just stop there, we can just be like, Oh, I noticed I'm feeling anxious because of what I'm thinking and because of this, but we don't have to add the meaning. I'm not cut out to be here. On the mission, or I stink at coming home from the mission, or I stink at life, we don't have to make any, it doesn't mean any of that. It just means you're human having anxiety. I was just working in another program where I work in Jody More's the lab. And we do these like written coaching questions. People can write in questions, and then we send information or answers back to them. Well, she was saying that her husband was parking his car in the garage. Instead of letting her park in the garage, it was a brand new car that her husband got. So there's just that there's that problem where we can be like, oh, let's figure this out. But you know, what she did is she went on a downward spiral because of the meaning that she added to her husband parking the car in the garage. You know, what she was making it mean is that my husband

doesn't love me. Right? When we say it out loud. It's kind of a stretch, don't you think? Right To Be like, husband's new cars in the garage. He must not love me. But our brain is always trying to problem solve and make sense of stuff. But make sure you're problem solving for the right thing. Like, let's just figure out how to make the car time in the garage more equal, or whatever it is. And don't add meaning to it. That is what causes missionaries to spiral downward if they can just be more understanding, and Christ like with themselves and with other people, and understand, Oh, guess what we're all doing here is we're being humans on a mission. And it's totally fine. And I don't have to add any extra meaning. We would save so much pain and suffering for all of us.

 19:24

One thing I've noticed about myself is when I can just be like oh, I guess I'm anxious today. Oh, I guess I'm guess I'm feeling embarrassed or awkward today. I guess I'm feeling sad today. I noticed that I no longer go down in those like day long, just like spiral down. Me adding all of this meaning like I must be a horrible person. I must not be a good mom. I must not. No one must care about what I'm talking about. Or no one cares about me all that extra meaning is just not useful. Okay, instead we can just be like yeah, Human day today, doing the human thing where we feel stuff. Totally. Okay. All right, my personal experience that I was going to share with you is it's really kind of funny to think about now. But when I became a mom, I really wanted to have girls, I grew up in a family of with two sisters. And so I just thought, that's what I want. I want to be a girl mom. Well, wouldn't you know that I had a boy. And then I had a boy. And then by that time, I just was like, not sure how big our family was going to be and things like that we hadn't totally decided. But I started to feel a little bit desperate. And I started to make meaning out of the fact that heavenly father hadn't given me a girl. Um, I actually did start thinking things like maybe I'm, I wouldn't make a good girl, mom. Maybe I'm not faithful enough. Maybe I'm not diligent enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith. Right? When in fact, maybe none of that is true. And, and it was the meaning I was adding to it that made it feel so painful, and made it feel like suffering. Ironically, when I was able to let go of that meaning, and just be like, well, I guess this is what it is this, this is the family I have. Ironically, that's when I ended up actually having a girl I kind of just gave it to God, honestly, it was like, Okay, well, this is kind of what I want. And I don't think it means anything bad about me if I don't have a girl. But this is just kind of what I want. So I did have another boy. So I had three boys. And then I had a daughter, and then another daughter. So my one daughter is a junior in high school. And then my last daughter, she is in sixth grade middle school right now. So um, I could have saved myself so much pain and suffering. If I just spend like this is what it is. Is there anything we want to do about this? Yeah, I want to have faith. Yeah, I want to believe maybe I want to pray. Maybe I want to ask for the things that I want. But I didn't need to add like maybe I'm not a good mom, maybe I'm not worthy. Maybe I don't have enough faith, all of that stuff. We can totally cut that out of the equation. Okay.

 22:24

So what do we do? I have five things, there's probably more I just like, jotted down a couple. Number one, if we want to avoid the missionary downward spiral, ask yourself, What am I making this mean? So let's say your companion wants to play cards all day, instead of working. Instead of just being like, you know, angry and then mad at yourself for being angry or thinking you're not Christ. Like, just ask yourself, what are why is this bothering me so much? What am I making this mean? Or maybe it's something going on for you? Maybe you are, maybe you bombed a lesson or something? I don't even think that that's a thing to be able to bomb a lesson on the mission. But let's say that's what you're kind of thinking is, maybe lesson didn't go the way you wanted it to? Or maybe you flubbed up a

couple words in the language or something. Ask yourself, What am I making this mean? That is going to help you so much from avoiding the downward spiral because you'll identify it, you'll be able to notice like, oh, you know what, I could just work a little bit more on the language instead of making it mean that I'm a bad missionary.

 23:42

Number two, see how you are connecting to things that don't belong together. Like I was talking about with the car, and the love the car being parked in the garage, those things don't go together. Okay, me having a girl born in my family are not it's not connected to my worthiness, those two things are not connected. Whether or not you get asked to do like a leadership role on the mission or get a promotion at work is not connected to your ability to leap. And our brains will want to connect those two things, but it's not connected. Okay, so that's number two. See, notice how you're connecting to things that aren't connected.

 24:30

Number three, validate yourself and tell yourself it makes sense that you feel the way you do. And it makes sense that your brain wants to muddle those things together. So in the instance of this lady who was thinking her husband was didn't love her because he was parking his car in the garage, we can see that they're separate. Okay, those two things are separate, but then we tell ourselves and it may sense that my brain wants to put those things together. And it makes sense because our brain is a problem solving machine. It's trying to figure out if we belong, it's trying to figure out how we fit into this marriage or into this companionship.

 25:14

Number four, untangle. Once you see it, once you see how they're separate, once you tell your okay yourself that you're okay, that that your brain has put those together, then start to untangle them, put them in separate containers in your mind, like, okay, there's the problem where I don't like, I want my car in the garage more. And then there's the problem where I want to experience more love in my relationship with my husband. Those are two separate things. Or for me, there's the problem where maybe, like, is there anything I can do to have a girl? Is there anything else I can do on my part? And there's the other problem where it's like, oh, and maybe I need to work on my self esteem. And not question myself so much right? Or question God's plan. Those are two separate problems. So we untangle them.

 26:16

Number five, addressed the original thought and feeling. Okay, so the, like, let's see. I'm, I'm, so let's say we notice we're feeling angry or sad, right, or anxious or something like that. And then we start to add meaning to that, like, I'm not a good missionary, instead of believing that I'm not a good missionary, go back to the original thought, what was the original thought that made you angry? What was the original thought that made you sad? What was the original thought that made you anxious? It's basically like, we take the top layer off of the meaning we just let go of the meaning completely. And we just decide to think and feel the thing that we just do. Think and feel because

we're human. Okay. All right. I hope that all makes sense. Um, it really does, has been the thing that causes missionaries to do a downward spiral. I've seen it in my own self, I've seen it in return missionaries, is the extra meaning that we add to just the human experiences that we just are meant to have here on this earth. Okay. So what I would say to all of us, is, let's just stop the meaning making this missionary that I was talking to earlier today. He said, Well, I just I don't like feeling sad. And if I'm sad on my mission, it's going to block me from being the kind of missionary I want to be. That's going to prevent me from enjoying the experiences that I have. And I was like, Listen, friend, sadness is an emotion. It doesn't block you from anything. It doesn't prevent you from doing anything. It's just an emotion you feel in your body. Let's not add additional meaning to just being sad. You can just be sad. It doesn't have to mean anything. It's like yeah, I guess I'm sad today. I guess I'm gonna miss my family today. I guess I'm gonna be sad that that lesson didn't go how it went, I guess I'm gonna be sad that I didn't get that leadership position. Totally fine. You guys feel the way that you're gonna feel. And if you want to avoid the downward spiral, stop the meaning making don't add meaning to something that just is okay and feels fine. If missionaries could just be at peace with the fact that they are going to think thoughts and feel feelings and have all kinds of experiences and not add meaning it would completely change. So if possible, and when possible, and believe me, your brain will still want to add meaning. That's why I gave you those steps. But if you can stop the meaning making, it will save you so much heartache, and so much suffering and then when you do have a bad day, you'll be able to bounce back so much quicker than you would have had had you layered on all of that meaning an additional downward spiral emotion. Okay. All right. I hope this helps you. Go out, give it a try this week, and we'll talk to you next time.



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Serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints can present a unique set of challenges. And many of those challenges you might not even see coming And so, you're gonna want a unique set of solutions. It's easier than you think to overcome worry and anxiety serve the successful mission you've always dreamed up and navigate your post mission experience with confidence. That is why I created some amazing free goodies that I'm sharing in my show notes. Maybe you'll want to grab the free training for preparing missionaries might video course for RMS or maybe you and I should hop on a free strategy call. If you're ready to take your preparedness to serve or your preparedness to come home to the next level. Then go grab one of those freebies. And in the meantime, no matter which part of the mission experience you were involved in, just know that Jenny, the LDS mission coach is thinking about you every single day