

# PRIESTHOOD, AGENCY, AND BLACK POWDER

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Served as a member of the Seventy from 1992 to 2005



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Leslie James Anderson, the father of my wife, Verla, grew up in the small town of Manti, Utah. In 1919, when Les was only 14 years old, Sanpete County built a road up Manti Canyon using what was then a common method—detonating black blasting powder to remove difficult rocks and sharp canyon walls. Late that summer, Les; his cousin and best friend, Lyle Anderson; and two other friends decided to go up that new canyon road to fish and camp overnight at the Corduroy Reservoir. They loaded their camping gear into a one-horse buggy and started up the canyon as a foursome without any adult supervision. These boys were about as happy as Tom Sawyer to be on an overnigher on their own. I can imagine them making their way up the canyon road, cheerfully anticipating all the fun and adventure that awaited them.

On the way, the boys found by the side of the road a supply of explosive black powder that had been left behind by the road builders. Les and Lyle were intrigued by the discovery and instantly imagined the fun they could have with the powder that night around the campfire. Eagerly they filled their pockets and a hat with as much black powder as these could hold.



Later that afternoon when they arrived at camp, they turned their horse loose to return home to Manti, knowing the horse was needed at home and that they could pull the little buggy back down the hill themselves. At about 9:00 that evening, after the boys had pitched their tent and built a campfire, Les and Lyle thought they'd have some fun. They started throwing black powder into the fire and watching it explode with a bang. But with one of these explosions, a spark landed in the hat filled with powder and ignited it. It exploded, igniting the powder in the boys' pockets. In an instant, the air was filled with piercing screams, and the boys' clothing was a mass of flames. The two boys in the tent rushed out to help Les and Lyle, but they couldn't put out the flames until the clothing was almost entirely burned off and Les and Lyle were covered with deep burns. The boys wrapped quilts around Les and Lyle and placed them as gently as possible in the buggy and started pulling the buggy down the canyon in the dark.

All the way down the canyon, the two burned boys kept calling for water. At one point Les could hear water running in the creek close to the road. The buggy was going quite slowly at that moment, so Les rolled himself out of the

buggy and into the creek. The cool water eased the pain of his burns, which Les later felt saved his life.

Lyle was not as fortunate.

He stayed in the buggy near death. The boys finally arrived home at about 11:00 p.m. Despite a constant vigil of medical attention throughout the night, Lyle died the next morning.

It took Les two years to recuperate, including one full year of missed school. I met him when he was 53 years old. Although his face was scar free, he still had deep scars from his feet all the way up his back and along his arms. Thanks to the fasting and prayers of the good people of Manti and his own faith and sheer will, he healed well enough to live a full life.

### **Avoiding Danger**

In important ways, you young adults are in a situation similar to what Les faced as he ventured up the canyon nearly 90 years ago. Many of you have left the nest of your parents' homes and are discovering how to be your own boss and live life on your own. You have more opportunity than ever before in your lives to exercise your agency.

Sooner or later each of you will happen upon your own black powder. At first you may feel curious about it; it may even seem to hold great promise of fun. But I hope you won't risk playing with it. What seems harmless, manageable, and acceptable can quickly burst out of control, leaving destruction and heartache in its wake. Your own black powder might be inappropriate movies, late nights alone with your girlfriend or boyfriend, drugs, or cheating on an exam. But whatever it is, you will be warned by the Holy Spirit. And when that warning comes, please, please obey. You cannot venture, even once, to risk your spiritual well-being. The stakes are high; your eternal soul is in the balance.

The gospel was restored in these last days to help us refrain from acts that will put us in danger and to help us instead do righteous acts that will bless our lives and the lives of others. Your young adult years are a critical time for making choices that will affect the rest of your life. The decisions you make at this stage of your life will not necessarily have immediate consequences. In fact, the consequences may take a lifetime and longer to come about. But "be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL MANN

The decisions you face—how you will live your life, how you will address your studies, whether you go on a mission, to whom and where you will be married, how you will raise your children, and how you pursue your career—are of great interest not only to Heavenly Father but also to Satan.

### **Remaining Faithful**

Fortunately, you are not alone in your quest for righteousness. The Lord has restored the priesthood so that there is accessible to every member a spiritual and temporal counselor who knows you and who, because of his priesthood ordination, is entitled to receive the necessary discernment and inspiration to give advice you may need. Our leaders are the Lord's anointed. They had hands laid on their heads and have received priesthood keys appointed to their calling.

Some years ago I served with my wife as president of the Canada Halifax Mission. Two of our elders were serving in an area that was a cold place, both in terms of the weather and of the people's reception of the missionaries. After a particularly long stretch of rejection, they called me, feeling discouraged. I suggested they consider proselyting in the countryside nearby, where I hoped the people would be a little friendlier.

The next day the elders drove out into the country, parked their car, and spent the day going door to door without any success. When they came back just after dark to their car, they discovered that it had been vandalized. Someone had smeared manure across their car's windshield, doors, and windows. The afternoon sun had caused it to melt

through the cracks of the doors, where it had then frozen in place.

That night I received another phone call from these elders, who were even more discouraged than before. The senior companion felt the full brunt of rejection. Over the phone he wondered out loud whether he was worthy to be a zone leader, whether they should be transferred, or whether he should just give up and go home. He just couldn't see that he and his companion were accomplishing anything. I suggested that he and his companion call another set of elders across town and ask for priesthood blessings and then recommit themselves to the work. We talked about how difficult things had been but how important it was that they carry on.

These elders did not know it at the time, but this was a pivotal point in their missions. Although nothing changed in the next few weeks, they chose to carry on, remaining faithful to the commitments they had made when they became full-time missionaries. They moved ahead, staying focused on preaching the gospel with love. They were obedient and faithful and continued to work hard. Later in their lives this strength of character and commitment led to successes in their careers and families. They now serve with distinction in their families, wards, and communities. Their success then and their success now have come from following their priesthood leaders.

At the press conference when she received the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa was reportedly asked, "So, how do you feel now that you have been working to feed the poor and ease their misery for decades, and things are still just as bad—or worse—in Calcutta as when you started?" Her profound response is an example to us all. She said that we have not been called to be successful but to be faithful.

### **The Only Safety**

In the Book of Mormon, Jacob taught, "Ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life" (2 Nephi 10:23). He also taught

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his brethren to remember “the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one” (2 Nephi 9:39).

Lucifer is determined to fight a war against good. He is seeking to surround us with every conceivable form of temptation, hatred, bigotry, and corruption. So where is there safety? Where but in the Church, under the protection of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the priesthood of the Most High? Is not today much like Noah’s day, when the population of the earth was wiped out in the Flood and but eight souls were saved? (see Genesis 7; 1 Peter 3:20). Do we respond to our own seers and revelators more than the people of Noah did, or are we so foolish that we will not learn from the mistakes of Noah’s contemporaries?

We have a singular protection not enjoyed by the world in general. The prophet will never lead us astray. President Wilford Woodruff wrote: “The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as president of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so he will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty.”<sup>1</sup>

Keep your eyes on the prophet!

### Healing from Black Powder Burns

In closing, I return to my father-in-law, Les Anderson. If you have already happened upon some black powder and have been badly burned, do not despair. You have access, even today, to be completely (and I underscore *completely*) healed. You must repent. The process is not easy. You must confess, you must forsake, and you must replace bad with good. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). But if you will turn to your Father in Heaven and, when necessary, enlist the aid of His agent, your bishop, I promise you that in the Lord’s time you will be 100 percent healed. Determine today to repent and be healed. Please rely upon the power of the priesthood and its ordinances. That power is Christ’s Atonement, which overcomes the effects of sin on condition of complete repentance. Seek counsel from

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your parents. Supplicate the Almighty on your behalf.

May you always love the Lord and keep His commandments. May He protect you both physically and spiritually. And may you listen to the Holy Ghost. Beware of Satan and his temptations of black powder. ■

*From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho, January 13, 2004.*

#### NOTE

1. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1946), 212–13.



### HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. Consider reading the first story in the article and list some of the dangers or “black powders” in our world today. As a family, list the ways to avoid these dangers. Role-play how to respond to situations that you might encounter. Conclude by reading the last section of the article.
2. Point out that Elder Sorensen testifies, “We have a singular protection not enjoyed by the world in general.” Ask what this protection is and then read the section entitled “The Only Safety” for the answer. Take turns sharing personal examples of how following the prophet has blessed your life.