

Resolutions and Conversion - Abridgment
Talk given by Trace Rogers
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"You must choose your own path through life." Dauntless Motto in book Divergent

"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." from Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

"We all make choices, but in the end our choices make us." Ken Levine

In the Doctrine and Covenants, we read "Let every man choose for himself"

In Moses, "Thou Mayest choose for thyself".

Our lives upon this earth are full of choices. From the mundane: What will I eat for breakfast? Will I work out today? To the very important: What career am I planning to follow? What will I do with my life? To the eternal: Who shall I marry? What is truth? Are there eternal impacts to the decisions I am making today?

Throughout our lives, decisions and thoughts of truth can change as we mature, age, and go through life experiences. Today's truth may be tomorrow fallacy, and today's theory may be tomorrow's truth. The blessing of those who believe in ongoing revelation is that new or expounding truth can, should, and will be revealed in the time of the Lord. Some things, those in the past believed as truth, through further light and knowledge become understood differently. We have come to better understand that we need to be malleable in our understanding of truth.

Conversion is a lifelong process. The choices we make along with our desire to improve, sometimes on our own, and other times with the help of others, is how we accomplish our goals. We get closer to the person we want to be and hopefully who our Father in Heaven would want us to be.

Before I continue, I want to be clear that I have many sins, weaknesses, false understandings, and many other things I must improve. I would expect most of us do. I want and need to be a better home teacher, a better friend, a better saint, a much better father, a significantly better husband, and better to my fellow man. For me, it will likely be a lifelong and more likely be an eternal process to reach these goals.

Today, as we begin the new year, I would like to relate to you a story I wrote over the past two weeks. I would anticipate various aspects of this story may relate to you, your loved ones, ward or family friends, or others in your acquaintances.

One year not long ago, there lived a fine man. Someone you might easily recognize as the person around the corner. He tried to do what was right. He attended church each week, attended to his callings. He tried to have daily scripture study with his family with varying amounts of success and family home evenings generally occurred.

You see, George Hardy was like many of you. He had a family, went to work each day, was striving to do everything asked of him. He was the every man's latter day saint. While he knew he had many faults, he was trying to work on them. Even though he didn't necessarily always follow the counsel from the pulpit, he knew within himself what he ought to do.

This brings us to two weeks before the end of the year. Before heading off to bed, George was overwhelmed looking at his schedule that would continue through the end of the following year. There was just too much on his schedule to be accomplished with the time he had. In looking at the list, the first thing he saw that could come off his plate was home teaching.

Just to be clear, George had 5 families to home teach ... a quick note...I will only be relating the story of 2 of these families to ensure we have ample time for Adam. Contact me if you would like the full story.

The Francums were a happy family of Heather, Sam, and their two children Eve and Derek. They had been in the ward about 6 months. George saw them every week at church and it seemed to him that things were going well for them.

Then there was the Granger family. The family that always had a positive attitude and had everything together. The boys were eagle scouts and the girls earned their young women's medallions. All the boys and most the girls served missions. They seemed to go to every activity and went to the temple each month. They did more than their fair share of cannery and building cleaning assignments. Josh, the father, had previously served as the Elder's Quorum President and a counselor in the bishopric, and at that moment was serving as a teacher's quorum advisor. They were the quintessential LDS family,

Up to this point, as a home teacher, George believed he was on par with the rest of the quorum. He saw his families almost monthly and would always ask if there was anything they needed from him. Each time they said no. These families were well balanced in the Gospel and didn't need him taking away their precious family time.

Because of this, George decided he would no longer visit them in their homes, he would simply chat with them at church each month in the hallway and see how things were going. He was almost certain they would say things were fine and everything was going well. This would give him back at least 5 hours a month.

As George said his prayers that night, he added some comments about his home teaching families to protect them through the holidays. He then said something that would change him and the direction of his life. George prayed, "please help me understand what I can do to help me come closer to thee and better understand those around me. Help me become a tool for thee to better help the lives of those within my influence."

So, even though George was busy, even though George had many things on his mind, he was still willing to, at least, vocalize his desire to help his Heavenly Father help those around him. What he didn't realize was how deeply his prayer was about to effect him.

What George didn't know was this same evening, Brother and Sister Francum and Josh Granger prayed for help and prayed for thanks for their home teacher Brother Hardy. They thanked their Father in Heaven for the blessings he had been in their lives and asked that he

would be protected. What George didn't realize was his prayer along with these other prayers were about to be answered.

George lay in bed stressing about all the things he had to get done and the busy year ahead. Eventually he fell asleep and midway through the night he suddenly felt a presence. He didn't know whether he was awake or dreaming, but he looked across the room and saw a person standing there. He was shocked and somewhat scared not knowing what to expect from this stranger. The man looked calm and appeared very kind.

Eventually the visitor spoke with a soft voice and said, "George, my name is Jeremiah and I am here in answer to your prayers."

That did not calm George's nerves as now he was wondering if this individual was a person of flesh and bones or spirit. Also, George did not understand what prayers Jeremiah was answering.

It seemed that Jeremiah could read George's mind because he answered saying, "I am a spirit and I am here to answer the request you made tonight to '... understand those around you and become a tool to better help the lives of those within your influence.'"

Jeremiah asked George who he already knew he could help. After listing several people, Jeremiah asked why he had not mentioned his home teaching families. George stated that of all his acquaintances his home teaching families were already closest to God and there were many others who could benefit more from his help.

Jeremiah calmly asked, "Are you sure about this?" George told him he spent time seeing them each month and they never seemed to need anything. They all seemed to have everything together when it came to their faith and priorities. They didn't seem to need any help from him.

Jeremiah then asked, "Would it surprise you to know this very evening at least one person in each of your home teaching families prayed specifically for help from their Heavenly Father for sincere difficulties they were each going through? Furthermore, they each prayed for you and voiced thanks for you and your service to their families."

George was surprised. He had no clue as to why they might be praying for help and was surprised each of them prayed for him. He didn't feel he was doing anything spectacular as a home teacher.

Jeremiah then continued, "George, if you agree, tonight you will be given an amazing gift. You will have the opportunity to see a future in which you visit each of your families this week. This is not necessarily what will happen, but one of many possible futures that could happen. The one true fact from this experience is you would understand the reason why each of your home teaching families prayed for help this very night. My question to you is whether you are willing so see this potential future and be willing to live with the consequences of knowing the struggles of your families?"

George contemplated whether he truly was willing to take upon himself this information. Once he learned their struggles, his relationships with them would be forever altered. The burden of

this information would put a level of responsibility on him to be there to support them. In the end he answered in the affirmative and said he would be willing to see this potential future.

In a moment George and Jeremiah appeared at the front door of the Francums. After ringing the bell, the door opened to a tearful sister Francum. Upon seeing George, she started crying even more, but invited him into the house. Even though Jeremiah stood next to George, he didn't appear to be noticed.

Almost as soon as George sat down with the Francum family, Heather spoke and said how happy they were to see him and how they had just prayed the previous night hoping he would stop by. George just sat in awe. Eventually he spoke up and asked what he could do to help.

Brother Francum spoke in a broken voice and said they had been grateful that almost as soon as they moved into the ward Brother Hardy had shown up to welcome them and let them know he was their home teacher. He seemed to always show sincere interest in their family and he was the first person they thought of when they heard the news. At that moment brother Francum broke down and began to cry in earnest.

George didn't know what to do now but somehow felt, and followed his conscience, to reach across and place his hand on Sam's shoulder and ask, "Of what news were you made aware?"

Sister Francum spoke up stating the day before their 6 year old daughter Eve was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer that was terminal in all previously known cases. George suddenly felt the weight of this knowledge. He felt sincere pain and grief for what this family must be going through.

Brother Francum then said, "How could a loving Father in Heaven allow this to happen? How can I pray to Him now? How can anything good come of this? I keep wishing if this cancer had to impact our family, why couldn't it have fallen on me? That would at least allow Eve to have a full and happy life?"

As Sam continued crying he said, "George, we strive to do everything we are asked. We think we are following the commandments and serving in our callings. But still we are given this curse. Our daughter will suffer a painful end of her life. We will not see and she will not experience all the milestones in her life. Where is the joy in this? George, why?"

There was a silence in the room and then Jeremiah spoke and only George could hear it. "What are you asked to do in your role as home teacher? How can you be a tool to better help those around you? How can you be the answer to someone else's prayer?"

As George sat trying to think of what he could say, he suddenly remembered a book he had recently finished. He had found the book *Planted* while wandering through Deseret Book. It caught his eye so he purchased it. He thoroughly enjoyed reading it and loved the insights the author Patrick Mason brought to help him better understand discipleship.

A quote came to his mind, "Family, friends, home and visiting teachers, Relief Society and quorum presidencies, bishoprics, and stake leaders can't cure cancer, but they can provide support, relief, comfort, strength, a listening ear, and love." George's love for this family continued to grow.

What George said was in no way enough to solve the families immediate, life altering struggle, "Sam and Heather, I do not understand why something like this is allowed to happen and don't expect to understand any better tomorrow than I do today. But, what I do know is I am here for you." George began crying himself. "I am here to mourn with you, I am here to sit with you. I will pray with you, I will pray for you. I will suffer with you."

Just after that Jeremiah and George reappeared in his bedroom. George's tears continued flowing. Jeremiah was the first to speak, "You see George, your families do have true needs and struggles. I realize if you don't go see your families, others may fill their needs, but you have a great opportunity. You know them. You already have a relationship of trust with them. Do you see now what benefit you might have in visiting them in their homes?"

George agreed and then said, "I don't know what I would do if I were them. Such a traumatic thing to happen. Possibly something too hard to bare. I only hope that I might be able to be someone that could help lighten their burden through this terrible time in their lives."

George sat in contemplation for a short time while the tears eventually stopped flowing and then said, "I am still willing to continue in this evening's discovery."

In a moment George and Jeremiah appeared in the Granger's living room. This time, only brother and sister Granger sat before them.

Brother Granger began, "Brother Hardy, these past few days have been some of the most difficult in my adult life, I feel like my gospel foundation has been ripped from me. Earlier this week while preparing for my next teacher's quorum lesson, I was studying several topics on lds.org. I came across some information that didn't make sense to me. This information didn't align with what I had been taught growing up and didn't align with my current understanding of the church or the Gospel."

Brother Granger continued, "It spun me down several long nights of reading from various official church websites. I won't share with you what caused this, but it has shaken my testimony and brings so much doubt in my mind that I wonder if I can even continue in the church. I have served my whole life in this church and am wondering if any of it was worth it. I have prayed all week for help in this. I have hoped that an answer to my prayers would easily explain away my concerns. My paradigm has shifted and I don't know if I can ever go back to where I was before this week began. Is there anything I can do Brother Hardy? Please help me."

George sat again amazed. Before him sat his example. Josh was the person he thought had everything under control. The person he thought was the strongest of his acquaintances in the church. George continued to sit somewhat dumbfounded... Finally, Jeremiah's words came to him again, "What are you asked to do in your role as home teacher? How can you be a tool to better help those around you? How can you be the answer to someone else's prayer?"

George thought a little more and then said, "Brother Granger, I can not begin to understand what you are going through right now. In my own life, I have not yet experienced this level of struggle as it relates to the church and the gospel. What I do want you to know is I am willing to stay with you in the wrestle you are going through. I want to be there to support you. To see

what direction your path takes and to be someone you could rely on to listen and not judge. To be a sounding board."

George continued, "Brother Granger, I just had a couple thoughts come to mind from a book I recently finished. I think this book might help with the internal turmoil you are going through."

"It is possible to live within the church even while racked with doubts, questions, and feelings of alienation. When you run into trouble, exiting the church is not the only option. There are many benefits of staying within the community even if you are distressed by one or more of its aspects, and even if you have to renegotiate some terms. In most cases, issues can be best worked through in the company of other Saints rather than by leaving them and the church behind...In short, there are models all around us of people who endure and even thrive in the face of paradox, not in spite of it."

George then said, "Brother Granger, while I can't understand everything you are going through, would you consider what I've just shared. Also, if I were to loan you the book which these quotes are from, would you consider reading it as you continue your wrestle?"

With some hesitation Brother Granger agreed.

With that, Jeremiah and George were back in his bedroom. Jeremiah spoke, "George, you had the amazing opportunity to see a potential future in your life. You learned some very personal struggles of your families and you now have the chance to determine what you will do with this information."

With tears continuing to flow, George graciously thanked Jeremiah for this overwhelming experience. He then expressed to Jeremiah that he hoped he could live up to the blessing that had been shared with him that night.

At that moment George's alarm clock went off.

The story never explained what happened in the lives of George's families. We don't even know what actually transpired when George visited each of his families before the end of the year, all we know is he did. George was there for them.

That evening several years ago, It seemed like George's heart grew three sizes dramatically increasing his ability to love and his desire to understand those around him. He resolved to strive to always make time for the sacred opportunity to be a part of his home teaching families' lives. Over the years George would work hard to look beyond himself to help his family and other and became a tool to better help those around him and in so doing became the answer to many people's prayers.

This story ends with Jeremiah asking EACH OF US, "What are we asked to do in our roles as a home and visiting teachers? How can we be tools to better help those around us? How can we be the answer to someone else's prayer?"

Brothers and Sisters, as we begin the new year, my hope is that each of us, especially me, will continue to strive to follow the admonition of President Uchtdorf,

"To avoid some of the deepest regrets of life, it would be wise to make some resolutions today. Therefore, let us: Resolve to spend more time with those we love. Resolve to strive more earnestly to become the person God wants us to be. Resolve to find happiness, regardless of our circumstances."

May we strive this year to be more cognizant of our own paths through this life, May we strive to have more resolve towards conversion. May we lighten the loads of those around us.

Remember the words of Christ in Luke 22, "... I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Brothers and Sisters, I hope to dedicate the rest of my life in the continuing search for truth. I love the Savior. While I haven't had significant manifestations of his existence, the ones I connect to Him are very cherished and strengthen my hope and faith and buoy me up during the hard times.

My prayer is that each of us can work towards being the answer to someone else's prayer.

In the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.