

Rewritten

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Preacher: Pamela Hall

[0:00] So last week I had shared how God used the quote, before God can heal a broken heart, He has to have all the pieces. How He used that quote in my life to really begin to teach me about the brokenness in my own life.

And so this week I thought, well, you know, I'd like to look at some more quotes. I'm up for some quotes. And then I thought, well, I'm really interested in what people are putting on Christian t-shirts these days.

I'm not sure if this is a good idea or a bad idea, but that's what I did. So some of them make me laugh because they're the things that most Christians think but will never admit.

Right? And then some of them make me go, amen. Like, yes, absolutely. I agree. And then others make me just go, hmm, and I want to ponder. So here we go.

Self-care. Read the Bible. Hmm, right? Walking with the Lord is my cardio. I love God, but some of His children get on my nerves.

[1:05] Jesus loves you, but I'm His favorite. Now, my friends accuse me of believing that. I'm like, and you see a problem with this. Why? Jesus loves you. You should be His favorite. I'm going to let God fix it.

If I fix it, I'm going to jail. Walking by faith, tripping constantly. That's the amen one for me, right?

Don't sit at tables that Jesus would have flipped. See, it's a mmm one, right? If you bring up my past, you should know Jesus dropped the charges.

All right? Spoiler alert. God wins. You probably have seen that one before. My problem is, I want to follow Jesus and slap people, too.

I can do all things through a verse that is taken out of context. Philippians 4.13. I thought that was funny. All my role models went to prison.

[2:08] Joseph, Paul, Peter, John, Daniel, Jesus, Jeremiah. It's like, amen. They did. Walk into the room like God sent you. That's another good one.

And then lastly, changing your story, revealing God's glory. I love that one. So tonight, we want to talk about how God rewrites our stories.

And as we've seen over the last two weeks, God's rewriting of our stories begin with release. It's when God releases us through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

And he restores us as we walk by faith with him. And rewriting our story, as we're going to see tonight, it happens within the context of his bigger story. So rewritten, by definition, means to write again so as to alter or to improve.

And God rewrites our stories by divinely intervening in the story, right? And he reveals not just our story, but he reveals this greater story that gives us context for ours.

[3:14] Because it's his story that forms who we are and that informs who we are, how we live, and how we love. Now, there's a writer for the Gospel Coalition named Andrew Shanks. And Andrew writes this, I love that. That is such a good quote.

When God enters the story, he takes up the central role, and suddenly it becomes apparent that his role was central all along. He goes on in that same article, and he says, In the appearance of God within his own story, all of the other minor roles foreshadow and echo his critical one, the incarnation.

In which all other lives suddenly take on a whole new meaning and importance. In addition to their contribution to the story within their own plot lines, each individual life becomes a living echo of the story's main character, Jesus Christ.

So when we think about our stories and how God is working, they are actually echoing Jesus Christ. And I always say, God speaks in echoes. I mean, you hear something one time, another time, and another time, and another time.

And so through us as Christ followers, he is speaking in echoes through our story. So, the question becomes, how does God rewrite our story?

[4 : 40] Now, on your table, there are some discussion questions, but at the top of the discussion questions, there's a list. This is not an exhaustive list. This is a list of some of the ways that God rewrites our stories.

But it's a good place for us to start. So, first of all, this is not new information for us. But we know that when God rewrites our story, he gives us new identity, right? If you remember, the Bible teaches us that before we are in Christ, we are enemies of God.

And we are hostile to him. And when God saves us through Jesus, all of a sudden we move from that storyline to a completely different storyline. And their storyline then, the identity that we have is we're loved.

We're forgiven. We're adopted. We are called. We are co-heirs with Christ. We are God's beloved daughters. So, he gives us a new identity. The other thing that God does to rewrite our story is he actually gives us a new story.

And by that, what I mean is he gives us new ways to think about God, ourselves, and other people. So, think about the apostle Paul. When we are first introduced to him in scripture, he is known as Saul.

[5 : 55] He's a Pharisee and he's a persecutor. However, Christ saves him and then he becomes Paul, the apostle. Paul's story from the very beginning was to be Paul, the apostle, not Saul, the Pharisee.

But if Saul had continued on in his story that he was writing, he would have stayed there. And so, when we see that happening in Saul's life, that should encourage us to say, wait a second.

If the Lord can take somebody like Saul, who is a persecutor of the church, and equip him and call him and enable him to be the apostle, what can he do with our lives?

We don't need to be a Paul, but we do need to be who God has called us to be. Another way that God rewrites our story is that he repurposes our past.

He repurposes our past. So, he uses the things like brokenness. He uses things that not only are broken in our lives, but things that break us. All of those things.

[6 : 57] And he promises, I'm going to create beauty for ashes, right? And perhaps one of the best examples of this in scripture would be the woman at the well. If you remember her story, she had been married how many times?

Five times. And she was living with a man. She was so embarrassed by her storyline that she would not even associate with the people in the town because she felt humiliated and shamed. And so, she would go to the well in the middle of the day when it was super hot.

That's what they said back in the day, super hot. When it was so hot. And she would go to the well. And there, thinking that she was going to get water, she encounters a man who tells her everything she's ever done.

And he completely changes her life. And then, she leaves behind her water pots. And she goes into the town to the very people that she doesn't want to see.

And says to them, you've got to come and meet this man who told me everything that I've ever done. And if you've seen the series, The Chosen, the episode of the woman at the well.

[8 : 04] It's one of my favorite episodes because Jesus in that scene is at the well. And he's talking to his disciples. And they're confused because he's actually been talking to the Samaritan woman.

And they're having this conversation. And Jesus is saying, you know, I have food to eat that you don't even know about. And they all look up. And here comes this horde of people going to Jesus.

And at the front of that line was the woman at the well. So, what we see is God repurposes our past. I mean, it's so beautiful. He also transforms our sorrows and our grief into purpose.

As the author, this is good news, God always gets the last word. Right? Your life. God gets the last word. You don't get the last word.

I don't get the last word. Somebody else doesn't get the last word. It is God who gets the last word. And God's rewriting of our story, it doesn't erase our past. He doesn't need to erase it.

[9 : 02] He needs to redeem it. Right? And so, he redeems it. And he makes every single chapter of our lives a testimony to his power and his glory.

Those places and those things that we think are absolutely the worst things that could have ever happened to us in his hands will become the most powerful thing that he will use. I've seen it.

I know it firsthand. When he rewrites our story, he calls us to follow and not to lead. Oh, we love to lead.

God, will you please do this for me and do it this way and do it in this time and do it this, you know, this, this, this. We love to lead. But he gives us a spirit to indwell us and he gives us his word to guide us because he's teaching us how to follow.

If you remember when Jesus approached Peter and Andrew and James and John and Matthew, he said the same thing to them. Follow me. Follow me. He didn't say, follow me and then I'll let you be the leader.

[10 : 03] He said, follow me. And so we see that, especially in the story of Peter. I mean, poor Peter. He gets such a bad rap because he's so human and he's so real and he's constantly doing something that makes him look bad.

Right. So he rewrites Jesus when Jesus says that he's going to die. And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. He wants to build three tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah when they're on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And God says, listen to my beloved son. He refuses to let Jesus wash his feet. And Jesus says, I don't wash your feet. You have no part. I have no part of you or you have no part of me.

And then he goes, well, give me a bath. And Jesus says, you don't need a bath. I just need you to wash your feet. And then, of course, he boasts.

And he says, God, even if everybody else leaves you, I will die for you. But underneath all of those things is this thing that we also have in us, a desire to lead, not to follow.

[11 : 08] Jesus is not offended by Peter's impulsive, ambitious, self-assertive personality. What he does is he rewrites his story.

The Peter that you read in 1 and 2 Peter is very different than the Peter that you meet in the Gospels and even in Acts. So, Peter's story reminds us that following Jesus always works.

Trying to lead him never does. He just doesn't. Another way that God rewrites our story is he transforms our character through faith and surrender.

We know this. We're familiar with this. As we go along with God, God reveals the things that can no longer be part of our story. And I am pretty sure that if you look at your story, look back on it five years ago, you see those things that God has been taking out.

But, he says, anything that's going to sabotage our relationship, anything that is going to hinder others, those are the things he will take from our lives.

[12:15] Things like sinful behaviors, self-protection, unhealthy relationships, unhealthy boundaries, self-reliance, self-righteousness, a savior complex, false beliefs, addictive behaviors that show we love something more than him.

And he doesn't beat us over the head with it. He just says those things can't be part of your story. Sorry. But the good news is, in exchange for those things that he takes out, he gives us a lot of really beautiful, wonderful things.

He gives us his righteousness, his compassion, his kindness, you know, his gentleness, his patience, his love, his forgiveness and thankfulness. He gives us a new attitude. We begin to think differently, right?

He gives us new actions and new behaviors. All of a sudden, our work looks different. All of a sudden, we're sharing with people who are in need. All of a sudden, self-control doesn't have as much control on us as it did.

We learn how to be slow to anger. We learn how to be quick to listen. We learn how to enter in with one another. And that's because he's transforming our character through faith and surrender.

[13:37] Every time he requires us to change, it means that he's going to use us to impact somebody else. The last way that I would say, and again, this is not an exhaustive list, but just for tonight.

The last way that I would say that he rewrites our story is that he promises to finish the story. And as I was thinking about this, I actually was thinking about my oldest brother.

And my brother, when he was little, went to church, made some type of profession of faith. After he got older, he walked away. And he is probably about three or four years ago, he and I were talking.

He just wanted to live his life how he wanted to live his life. He wanted to have fun. He wanted to enjoy things. He wanted to be able to drink. He wanted whatever it was that he wanted to do. He wanted to be able to do it in his mind, God was going to say no to all those things.

And then about three or four years ago, God began to do this work in his life. Years of prayer have gone into this. And all of a sudden, he begins to be interested in the things of God.

[14:46] And that is mercy. Because sometimes, we're like my brother. We think that God writes the first chapter of our story, and we think he writes the last. But the truth is, he writes everything in the middle, too.

Every chapter, he is the author. You know, Proverbs 19.21 says that many are the plans of a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Ephesians 1.11 says that he works all things according to the counsel of his will. And then my personal favorite is Jeremiah 29.11. It's my life verse. For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

And each of these verses encourage us to seek him as the author of our story, right? Not just the editor. And sometimes we seek him to be the editor, but really, we need to learn to seek him as the author.

You're the one writing the story. What do you want to tell? God rewrites our stories according to the counsel of his will. And I was thinking about his will, because what does Paul say about his will in Romans?

[15:56] That it is good, that it is pleasing, and that it is perfect. And I think, you know, we can train ourselves as we are trying our best to submit to God. When we are feeling like we are being pulled in two different directions, we think we know what God wants for us, yet we want to do something else.

And in that moment, that's when we tell ourselves, wait a second. God's will is good. God's will is pleasing. God's will is perfect.

And then we have to answer the question, do I want his will or do I want my will? Is my will good, pleasing, and perfect? And a lot of times it's not.

It's just what I want. So, now there are some things that hinder the rewriting of our story. So, God, we're not robots. And God is the author of our story, but we also have to cooperate with him, right?

So, just three things. There are, again, more than this. But three things that hinder the rewriting of our story. One is pride. And I don't know if you've ever thought about it from this perspective, but the reason pride is such an issue is it creates an identity crisis.

[17:05] We lose sight of our true identity and who we are in Christ, and we become self-focused rather than God-focused. We become self-reliant rather than God-dependent.

And so, we're in this identity crisis trying to figure out how to live and what to do. We want wisdom, and we seek guidance, and we'll go, okay, well, what does God think about it?

And then we'll go, well, what does Google think about it? What does my friends think about it? What does social media think about it? And then we place all of those four options right there, and we go, which one am I going to choose? Well, as the author of the story, these get to fall to the side, and this is the one that obviously we should choose.

But when we're in an identity crisis, we find ourselves in a battle between what we are telling ourselves and what God is telling us through His Word. The second thing I think that hinders God's rewriting of our story is bitterness, and we saw that last week with Naomi.

When she was embittered in her heart and in her spirit, she was putting her hand up to God and saying, you know, it's okay for you to be in Bethlehem, but you are not coming here.

[18:18] You can't come in here. And I'm telling you, I have seen it over and over and over in my own life that any time I try to strong arm Him, He's bigger than me.

And in His grace and mercy, He starts doing this to eventually where I put my arm down. But, you know, it's bitterness that will cause us to do that. And we have to be careful that we don't look at the way that God has already written a story and say, because you did that, this is how I'm going to treat you.

I can't trust you. And God would say, because that happened to you, we need to move your hand back. Because there's something I can do with that, and I'm going to rewrite that story.

The third thing that hinders God rewriting our story is unbelief. We simply refuse to believe what He says. I think it's one of the reasons that we have the story of the Israelites, because if you look at their story throughout the Old Testament, what is always the issue with them?

It doesn't matter how many miracles God does. It doesn't matter how He provides for them. They simply don't believe. And so God says to them, listen, you will never enter into my rest, and you do not believe me.

[19 : 34] So unbelief hinders God rewriting our story. We turn away from God rather than to Him, and our hearts become hardened because of that. And we focus.

This is it. We focus on our circumstances rather than His promises, because we just don't believe Him. Now, if we're being honest, each of these sins, let's call them what they are, they're frenemies to most of us.

They're things that we're familiar with. They're familiar struggles. They're hindrances in our relationship with God. And that's why God tells us, it is absolutely essential that you guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of your life.

I like to think of it this way. When we find ourselves in that place, or when we sense that we're even going that way, the prayer should be, God, bring me to my senses so I can head home.

This is sounding familiar. The prodigal son, he came to his senses, he went home, but as he was going home, the father sees him from a long way off, and he runs to him.

[20 : 43] And that's how God is with us. And when He is rewriting our story, He's not surprised that we end up over here in the pigsty. He is just waiting for us to come home.

And I know some of you may be thinking, but Pamela, you don't know my story. You don't know what I've walked through. It's hard to trust someone when you feel like that you've been abandoned, or that you've been rejected, or that you haven't been protected.

And I can say, honestly, I do know your story. I know your story so well. There was a season a few years ago when it felt like that God completely disappeared from my life.

And I'd like to say it was just a month or so. It was three years. Three years of me praying and begging and crying and bargaining and ranting and raving, and you can keep going and fill in the blanks of what all I was doing to try to have some type of connection with Him.

And as I did all of that, God remained deadly silent. And I was like, what is going on? Where did you go? What did I do? If I've done something, please just tell me.

[21 : 57] And yet, God remained quiet. And as weird as it may sound, in that season, I felt like I went through a divorce.

Not from a husband, but from the God who loved me. I mean, I didn't know if I would ever come back. But of course, I did. Because I was never alone in that season.

And what I learned through that situation was that silence does not mean abandonment. That quietness does not mean rejection. And even in our darkest season, God is still writing your story.

I mean, maybe that chapter of my life was, have you ever seen a woman so mad? Have you ever seen a woman so broken? I don't know.

But those were the things that God would have seen. Sharon James, who's an author and a speaker, wrote, Don't get stuck in the difficult life chapters, but keep moving to the flow of the author's pen.

[23 : 02] God is still writing your story. So how do we respond to this author of our story, the one who writes it, rewrites it, and rewrites it, and rewrites it for us?

Well, we engage God in prayer as we work through our story. We learn that understanding our story is not the goal. But working through the relevant parts of our story means knowing and experiencing God more intimately in them.

And we trust that God is not calling us to face our story alone. We face Him, and we face it together. And, and this is so important, and I did not understand this for a long time, but we learn that God is not calling us to address everything in our past.

I am extremely detailed oriented. I want to dot the I's three times and cross the T's twice. And so my thinking about how God was going to work in my life is He was going to make me walk through every single thing.

But you know, He doesn't do that. He calls us to trust Him because in His own time, He reveals those experiences that He wants to redeem.

[24 : 15] And some of the things just fall away on their own. We don't need to worry about them. Someone has said that one encounter with God will change the story you tell.

And I believe that's true. One time when God does something for you, it changes the way that we view Him and the way that we think about Him. I think that's why John Newton was able to write Amazing Grace.

Right? Yeah. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now am free.

Now I see. To His grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear that hour I first believed. The Lord has promised good to me.

His word my hope secures. He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. The reason John Newton could write that song was John Newton's story.

[25 : 15] And God had rewritten it in such a way that he knew a grace that would enable him to write a song, a hymn that has been sung. Year after year after year.

I feel we'll sing it one day when we are with the Lord. Paul Tripp writes, Thankfully I am not the author of my personal story. Your story isn't an autobiography either.

Your story is a biography of wisdom and grace. Written by another. Every turn he writes in your story is right. Every twist of the plot is for the best.

Every new character or unexpected event is a tool of his grace. Each new chapter advances his purposes. So God is faithfully rewriting our stories.

We don't always see it. We don't always understand it. We don't always believe it. But he is doing it. And think about the impact that a story has on us. Did you know that, and I'm speaking this as someone who's teaching, for a message like this or a sermon, most people remember between 5 to 20 percent.

[26 : 29] And the 20 percent would be the people who are taking notes. But all that has to happen is someone stands up and tells a testimony, and you remember it.

You may not remember every detail, but you remember that story. That's the power of story. And our stories, they often offer to people a redemptive narrative.

Right? It's where God, this divine author, turns this crazy life, tragic plots, into masterpieces of deliverance and eternal hope.

So the gospel is a story of good news. God sent his son to save us because we could not save ourselves.

Jesus gave his life to release us from sin and death, to restore us to a right relationship with the Father, and to rewrite our stories, demonstrating his glory, his goodness, and his grace.

[27 : 35] So where are we now in the story? Only God knows, right? But we know this, all our days are written in his book before a single one comes to be, is why he tells us.

We know that he knows the end of our story from the beginning of our story. We know that scripture shows us through revelation that God gets the last word in the kingdom and in our individual lives.

And we know that he is the author and the finisher of our faith. He's the one who gives us this new identity and this new story. He's the one who repurposes our past.

He's the one who transforms our grief and sorrows into purpose. He's the one who calls us not to lead but to follow. He's the one who transforms our character through faith and through surrender.

And he's the one who promises to finish the story. And I forgot one more quote from a t-shirt. I saved the best for last, actually.

[28 : 38] God is still rewriting your story. Quit trying to steal the pen. Trust the author with your story.

He's writing a masterpiece. I don't mean to be crass when I say this but God does not write cheap, trashy novels. He writes a masterpiece. And it is a story for the ages.

And it's his story that our story fits into. And one day we will more fully understand this amazing story of what he actually has done.

even when it doesn't seem like it. You have an author who is writing your story or rewriting the parts that have broken you. And you have an author who's writing a story that will be better than you could ever write for yourself.

Amen? Amen. All right.