

The StoryChanger

How God Rewrites Our Story by Inviting Us into His



David Murray

An Introduction

“Is it up to me to craft my life story? Is there a greater power that has determined my story that leaves me with no control over it? Is it possible that the story of my life could take a dramatic turn in another direction? These are the kinds of questions David Murray addresses in this inviting book, which serves as an invitation to discover all that we were created to be in the context of a far greater story.”

Nancy Guthrie, author, *Even Better than Eden*

“*The StoryChanger* is a book about three characters and their stories. The first is a Scotsman named David Murray. I have known him for years, but until reading these pages I had no idea how his story was changed. The second character is anyone who picks up this book, reads it, and discovers how helpful it is to understand the story of their life written thus far. And the third character? Well, he’s the StoryChanger—who is pretty aptly named. But I should leave it to David Murray to introduce you to him.”

Sinclair Ferguson, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“Are you trying to make sense of your life or the lives around you? Are you looking for purpose? What matters? What matters the most? David Murray’s *The StoryChanger* will give you answers and might even change your story. He writes as a man who understands people, but even more importantly, who understands God. Prepare to be encouraged and to see your life as part of a much grander and more important story than you can imagine.”

Jason Helopoulos, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church; author, *The Promise: The Amazing Story of Our Long-Awaited Savior*

“David Murray has given us a practical, accessible, and personal guide to show us how the Bible’s big story transforms the stories of our lives. Jesus alone can change our stories—moving us from sadness to satisfaction, from loneliness to belonging, and from despair to hope. What a relief to know that we’re part of a bigger story and that there’s hope for us even after we’ve made a mess of life. I’m eager to see how this book will transform many people by introducing them to the divine author and StoryChanger we all need.”

Drew Hunter, Teaching Pastor, Zionsville Fellowship,
Zionsville, Indiana; author, *Made for Friendship*

“Can the story of my life be rewritten? If you or a friend is feeling trapped in a story that seems messy and meaningless, let David Murray introduce you to the StoryChanger who is rewriting the story of David’s life and can do the same for you.”

David Sunday, President, WordPartners; Teaching Pastor,
New Covenant Bible Church, Saint Charles, Illinois

The StoryChanger



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David Murray

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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*To my beloved congregation, First Byron CRC.
You have changed my story for the better and forever.*

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Introduction

If life is a story, is your life a good read? Is it a feel-good story or a tearjerker? Is it going according to plan, or is it out of control? Is your story going forward, backward, or round in circles? Is it exciting or boring? Wow or meh? Are you proud of your story or ashamed of it? Are you the hero of it or the villain in it? Will your story have a happy ending or a sad one? Are you writing your own story, or has someone else taken your pen? Are you wondering, “How do I change my story?”

If you're like most people, you're not happy with your story. You'd love to change parts of it or maybe rewrite the whole thing. Even if your story so far reads better than most, there are without a doubt painful chapters ahead that no amount of denial can delay. Perhaps you'll have chapters like “My Cancer” or “My Failed Marriage” or “My Disastrous Decision” or “My Addiction.” At some point, we all ask, “How do I rewrite my story?”

If we do get through life with relatively few bad chapters, we still have to face the ultimate questions: How will my story end? Is this life all there is, or is there a sequel? If there's a sequel, how do I make sure it's a better story than this one? Is there a connection between my present life and my forever life? How do I rewrite my story both now and forever?

To change our story, we need the StoryChanger, Jesus Christ. By faith, we hand over our pen to the world's best-selling author, Jesus

Christ, and ask him to rewrite our story by inviting us into his Story. Then we'll get a story that was worth writing and a story that will be worth telling. Let's get to know the StoryChanger and how this amazing author can change our story with his Story.

Writing a new story begins with reading what we've written so far—even though it's often a difficult read.



Our Messy Stories

We can't go forward until we go backward. We can't write a new story until we've read our old one. "Why can't I just throw my old book away and start over? Why can't I just press *delete* then *open new document*?" Because we won't need or want to meet the StoryChanger until we accept *that* our stories need to be changed and admit *where* our stories need to be changed. If we don't read the story that got us to this point, we'll scrawl the same story of failure and frustration again and again.

It's not easy for many of us to confront our stories and be honest about them. That's why God's Story includes King Solomon's story. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon demonstrates how to read and assess our story so that we will ask God for the new and better story that he wants to coauthor with us. Come and read Solomon's story with me, so our story can be changed by God's Story, just as Solomon's was. Then our story will end up in God's library of priceless books rather than in the bargain books dumpster.

Background

Solomon's story was a mixed story. When he lived for God, his story was great. When he left God out, his story went from bad to worse. We get both sides of his story in Ecclesiastes.

Thirty times in this book he describes a person living life “under the sun.” That’s the phrase Solomon uses to sum up his godless years. “Life under the sun” is a life lived only for the present and this world. It’s a life that never looks above the here and now, never looks beyond this world’s horizon. It’s a life that’s lost sight of the eternal and the heavenly above and beyond the sun. Pessimism and skepticism dominate these “under the sun” sections of his book.

But in thirteen other sections Solomon brings God into the story. There Solomon lives “above the sun.” He sees beyond this planet, people, and time, and he sees God everywhere and in everything. Certainty, joy, and hope infuse these pages.

In Ecclesiastes 2:17–26, Solomon invites us to read, live, and feel the two contrasting sides of his story. It begins with a godless life (a life lived “under the sun”), but ends up with a God-centered life (a life lived “above the sun”).

How did God rewrite Solomon’s story? The same way he rewrites ours: by first helping us recognize and confess that our stories need to be rewritten.

Our Stories Need to Be Rewritten

Before we observe what makes our lives so messy and meaningless, we must remind ourselves that it wasn’t always like this. As we’ll discover in the next chapter, God originally made us to have good, meaningful, and purposeful stories with happy endings (Gen. 1–2). The first draft of world history and the human story was pristine perfect. But sin splattered ink all over the pages, and now no one’s story lives up to God’s ideal. Instead, as Solomon explains, our stories are sad, short, senseless, and stressful.

Our Stories Are Sad

Wherever he looked, Solomon saw sadness. “I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me” (Eccles. 2:17). Whatever he attempted left him more depressed than before. How much did he try, though? He tried everything. The first two chapters

of his book describe his fanatical yet futile pursuit of satisfaction. He tried education (1:12–18), pleasure (2:1–3), success (2:4–17), and then work (2:18–23). His verdict on it all? Hatred of life because of the sadness of life. He tried everything in life, but everything left him tired of life.

Our Stories Are Short

Our stories are not only sad; they are also short. “All is vanity,” Solomon concludes (Eccles. 2:17). The word *vanity* occurs thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes, and means something short, transitory, and short-lived. It’s used in the Bible for a breeze, a breath, or a vapor. That’s what the longest and largest life amounts to—a short puff of wind. The book’s opening words go even further: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity,” Solomon complains (not exactly the most appealing of opening sentences). “Vanity of vanities” was an ancient way of saying the shortest of the short, superlatively short (see Eccles. 1:2). Everything is so totally temporary and transient.

Our Stories Are Senseless

Solomon worked vigorously to find meaning in life, but without God in it, he couldn’t see any sense to it or value in it. “For all is vanity and a striving after wind. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? . . . This also is vanity and a great evil” (Eccles. 2:17–19, 21). What’s really bugging him here is that everything he’s worked for will eventually be handed over to someone else he doesn’t know, someone of unknown character, someone who will probably fritter it all away without a thought for the person who worked so painfully for it in the first place.

“What’s the point in that?” he asks. It’s as irrational as trying to catch the wind. He despairs because there’s no significance or meaning to it all. Nothing makes any sense to him (Eccles. 2:20). “Is this it?” he agonizes. No wonder he hates life under the sun. It’s just foolish drudgery.

Our Stories Are Stressful

If you thought stress, insomnia, and work-life imbalance were just twenty-first-century problems, think again. Solomon was one of the elites, in the 1 percent, yet even for him, “all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity” (Eccles. 2:23). Work took a terrible toll on his body, mind, and soul. He was exhausted but couldn’t sleep because of the stress. Smartphones and social media were still three thousand years away, but depression and anxiety were just as much a problem then as now.

This is life lived “under the sun,” life lived from a purely human and worldly perspective. It writes stories that are sad, short, senseless, and stressful. Solomon was saying that if you want to hate life, live it without looking beyond it.

Changing Our Story with God’s Story

“My story is sad.” Does Solomon’s story sound like your story? Can you relate to it? If, like Solomon, you confess to God that your story isn’t turning out as you hoped, there is hope for you. Bring your story to God and say, “My story is not going well. It’s sad, short, senseless, and stressful. Please change my sinful story, StoryChanger.” You can’t begin to imagine what kind of story he’ll begin to write for you when you ask him to be the author of your life.

“My story will work out.” Maybe you’re still young and you think, “I’ll be more successful than Solomon. I’m going to live life ‘under the sun’ but I’ll be happy. I’ll make it work.” Don’t waste your life. No one else has succeeded at this. Why do you think you’ll be the exception? Don’t give God just the last chapter (though he’ll happily take that), but

right now give him every chapter you have left. He can write a much better life story for you than you ever could. And even if you fear you're near the end of your story, the StoryChanger can turn your painful life into a Pixar ending.

*If you write your own story,
you'll write a tragic story.*

So, if our stories need to be changed,
who can change them for good and forever?

God Rewrites Our Stories

Wouldn't you prefer a story that's happy instead of sad, endless instead of short, meaningful instead of meaningless, peaceful instead of stressful? The only way to get "above the sun," to get above the horizon of this world, is to bring God into our stories and install him at the center of our stories. God can change our stories with his Story. Solomon had been searching in vain for the "good" life, but instead of good he found only vanity. Although it does not come across in English translations, in the Hebrew text he mentions "good" four times. What's changed? God is now in the picture.

God Writes a Happy Story

After multiple verses of misery, joy shows up three times in Solomon's story: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of *God*. For apart from *him* who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases *him* *God* has given wisdom and knowledge and joy" (Eccles. 2:24-26). What made the difference? What switched Solomon's sad story to a happy one? God.

God's name has appeared only once up to this point in Solomon's book, but now God's name shows up four times in just a few verses. We read "good" four times because we see *God* four times. Solomon is no longer looking at life from a human-centered perspective but from God's vantage point, and he concludes that God is the only source of joy. "For apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" (Eccles. 2:25).

God Writes a Meaningful Story

What made Solomon so happy? Did his life dramatically alter? No. It was still eating, drinking, working . . . eating, drinking, working. What changed was that he connected God with everything. "This [eating, drinking, working] also, I saw, is from the hand of God" (Eccles. 2:24). He traced everything to God's hand and spotted God in everything. He spied divine significance in the everyday and in the mundane. He was eating the same meals, drinking the same drinks, doing the same work as the "under-the-sunners," but he's now an "above-the-sunner" and therefore finds enormous joy in locating his big God in the small things. By relating everything to God, everything took on a whole new meaning and had a whole new value.

God Writes a Grace Story

Solomon didn't just see God in everything; he saw that God had graciously given him everything. "This also, I saw, is from the hand of God" (Eccles. 2:24). He had not earned it, but rather had been gifted it by God. Life was no longer about what he achieved, but what he received. He didn't have the power to give himself happiness; it was something given by God.

Solomon now took nothing for granted but considered everything as gifted: food, water, appetite, digestion, sight, hearing, smell, memory, health, sanity—all was from the gracious hand of God. God's grace was so astonishingly satisfying. It wasn't just material things that improved by grace; intellectual and spiritual things improved too. "For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy" (Eccles. 2:26). Previously, Solomon's pursuit of

wisdom and knowledge arrived at grief. But when God gave wisdom and knowledge, Solomon arrived at joy. All things were new. When our lives connect with God, we experience a new contentment with life. Heaven has begun on earth.

Changing Our Story with God's Story

Give the StoryChanger your book and your pen. Hand your story over to God and ask him to become your StoryChanger by becoming your StoryWriter. Jesus said, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus came to change your story from one of death to one of life. If you ask him to change your story, the most common words will no longer be *I, me, and myself* but *God, God, and God*, because a God-centered life is a satisfying life. Pray, "Jesus, take the pen."

"I like my story so far." Maybe your godless story so far has been better than most, but have you read the ending? "To the sinner he [God] has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind" (Eccles. 2:26). No matter how hard you work to accumulate, you will leave empty; but those who live for God will inherit riches. Your epitaph will be "This also is vanity and a striving after wind." Theirs will be "God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy." Rewrite your story to rechisel your epitaph.

Jesus, though, offers even more than a happy *ending* through grace; he offers a happy *existence* through grace. Nothing gladdens like grace. Grace isn't just love for the undeserving; it's love for those who deserve anger. If a total

stranger hands me a thousand dollars one day, I'm going home pretty happy. If someone I've stolen a thousand dollars from hands me a thousand dollars instead of punishing me for stealing a thousand dollars, I'm going home with a completely different kind of happy—a grace happiness, an off-the-scale happiness.

There's something about being gifted salvation when we deserve damnation that makes it far more enjoyable than an earned salvation. Most joys lose their initial energy, but grace-joy increases every day. Grace-joy jumps higher with age and, even when we die, we'll jump all the way into heaven's joys and never stop for all eternity. We won't need trampolines in heaven.

*Do you want a happy-ever-after ending
or a hell-ever-after unending?*

Summary

Why can't I just press *delete* and *open new document*? Read your messy and meaningless story to see how much needs to be rewritten and what needs to be rewritten. You will find that you need the Story-Changer to rewrite your story.

How God Changed My Story with His Story

Although I was raised in a Christian home, I rejected my Christian upbringing in my teens and lived for money and pleasure. To outside observers, my life may have looked relatively moral, successful, and happy. But there were dark chapters in my past

and dark habits in my present, and I knew there was a dark ending ahead. I tried hard not to think about my real story, preferring the fantasy version.

In my early twenties, my closest work colleague died of cancer in his thirties, and one of my bosses went to jail after killing a six-month-old baby in a car crash caused by his drunk driving. I saw that their stories could easily become mine. My story was already messy and meaningless, destructive and deadly.

I tried to rip some pages out, then whole chapters, but soon realized that I had to shred the whole thing and start over with a blank page. But how? How could I get rid of my past story? And even if I could wipe out the past and get a redo, how could I be sure I wouldn't write the same chapters all over again?

Seeing my growing depression, my mother gave me a Bible study book and urged me to read my Bible, which had lain unopened for years. Through reading God's Story over some weeks, I met the StoryChanger and saw how he could change my story for the better. God was offering to rewrite my story by inviting me into his. And he did.

Questions

1. How would you describe your story so far? What parts are you pleased with? What parts would you like to rewrite?
2. What makes you hate life? Or what would you say to someone who told you, "I hate life"?
3. How can you find more joy and satisfaction in everyday life and ordinary things?
4. How can you increase your enjoyment of God's mercy? How does being saved by mercy make someone happier than being saved by merit?

5. Take a piece of paper and write one-sentence descriptions of:

- Your past story
- Your present story
- Your future story
- Your forever story

Where do you need the StoryChanger to work first and most?

6. How has God changed your story so far?

Prayer

StoryChanger, I confess that my story is messy and meaningless. I hand my story over to you. Please rewrite it with your Story. Amen.

If our stories are messy and meaningless, how did they get that way? Was this how God made us? Not at all, quite the reverse, as we will now discover.