



01

Module 1

YOUR OLD MARRIAGE STORY

Your Old Marriage Story



“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

— Viktor Frankl

Every marriage has a story.

It’s the story you tell yourself about who your spouse is, what your relationship means, and what you can expect from each other.

And here’s the most important thing to understand as you begin this course:

Your experience of your marriage is created by the story you’re telling about it.

Not by your spouse’s intentions.

Not even by their behavior.

But by the meaning you assign to what happens.

Two people can live in the same marriage and experience it completely differently—because they are living in different stories.

The Gap Between What Happens and How You Feel

There is always a space between the moment something happens and the way you experience it.

- **Moment** - Something happens.
- **Story** - You have a thought about it.
- **Emotion** - That story creates an feeling.
- **Reaction** - That feeling drives how you show up.
- **Reality** - How you show up creates your experience.

This happens in seconds. Most of us never slow it down long enough to see it. But once you do, everything changes.

1. Moment

The moment is neutral. It's simply what happened—what could be captured on video without interpretation.

Examples:

- Your spouse doesn't respond to your text for several hours.
- They criticize how you handled something with the kids.

The moment itself has no meaning yet.

2. Story

This is where things shift.

Your brain immediately assigns meaning to the moment. This meaning is shaped by past experiences, unmet needs, past hurts, assumptions, or fear.

Examples of common marriage stories:

- "They don't care."
- "I'm not a priority."
- "They're so selfish."

3. Emotion

Your story creates an emotion.

Not because of what happened—but because of what it meant to you.

Examples:

- The story “I don’t matter” creates sadness or shame.
- The story “They’re disrespecting me” creates anger.

Most couples fight at the emotion level without realizing the story underneath it.

4. Reaction

Your emotion drives your reaction.

This is what your spouse actually experiences from you.

Examples:

- You snap, criticize, or attack.
- You withdraw, shut down, or go quiet.

Reactions are often protective. They’re your nervous system trying to keep you safe (but not always in the best way).

5. Reality

Over time, repeated reactions create a shared reality:

- “We can’t talk without fighting.”
- “I walk on eggshells.”
- “We’re more like roommates.”

This reality didn’t appear overnight.

It was built moment by moment, story by story.

Breaking Down the Story

You've seen how quickly a moment turns into a story—and how that story shapes your emotions, reactions, and the reality of your marriage.

Now it's time to slow one moment down.

In this exercise, you'll choose a recent moment that triggered you. Not the biggest or most dramatic—just something real.

You'll use the model to break it apart and see what actually happened versus what you told yourself it meant.

First, you'll map the original experience:

- What happened in the moment
- The thought or story you told yourself
- The emotion that followed
- How you reacted
- The result or reality that was created

Then, keeping the same moment, write a different story that you could have told—one that is honest, grounded, and within your control. Notice how a new story creates a new emotion, a new reaction, and a different outcome.

This isn't about pretending or excusing behavior. It's about recognizing where your power actually is.

Take your time. Be specific.

Clarity here sets the foundation for everything that follows.

REWRITE YOUR STORY

PRINT OUT AS MANY COPIES OF THE WORKSHEET BELOW AS YOU'D LIKE AND USE THEM TO PRACTICE THOUGHT DOWNLOADS.

	OLD STORY	NEW STORY
MOMENT		
STORY		
EMOTION		
REACTION		
REALITY		

