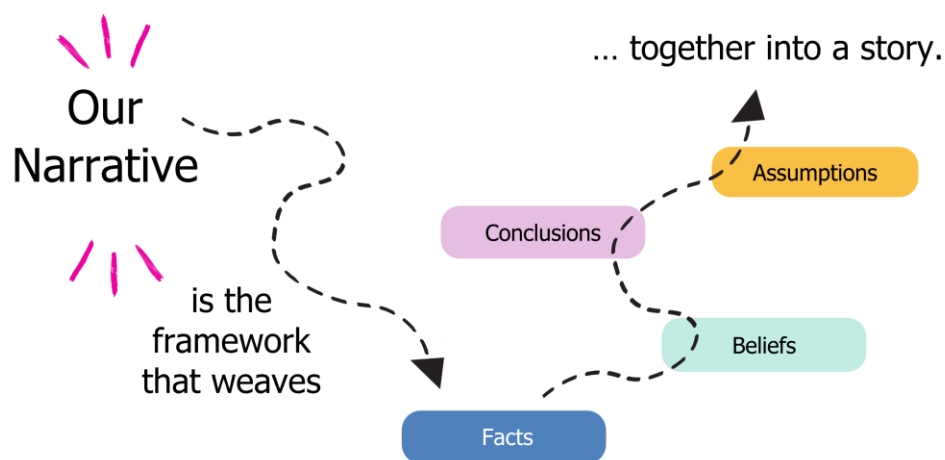


Chapter 3: Our Narrative Matters

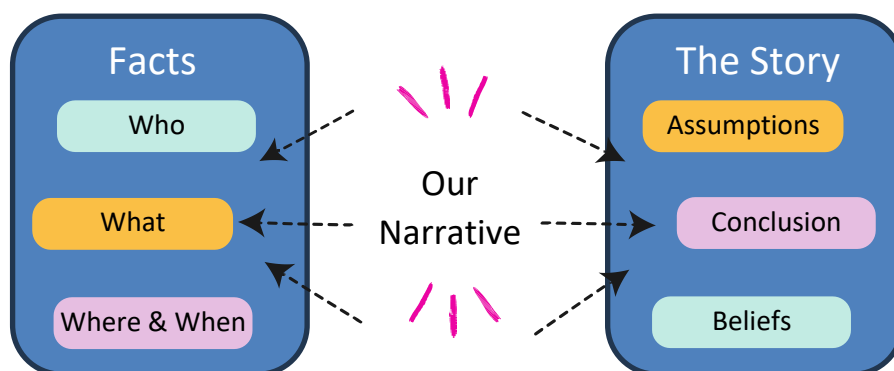
As we encounter challenges much of our apprehension can be related to questions like: What's next? Will I be okay? Will I have enough? Am I enough? Sometimes, we have the courage to work through differences and overcome obstacles to achieve our goals. Sometimes, we can feel like giving up. In this chapter, we are going to explore how a Big Picture Narrative helps us develop the love and confidence needed to turn challenges into opportunities for growth.

Narrative Defined

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are linking the events of our day and the impact of our choices together. Our narrative is the framework that weaves the facts and our beliefs, conclusions, and assumptions together into a story.



When considering Separating the facts from the story provides clarity.



The Research

Our narrative affects how we see ourselves, our problems, and our resources.

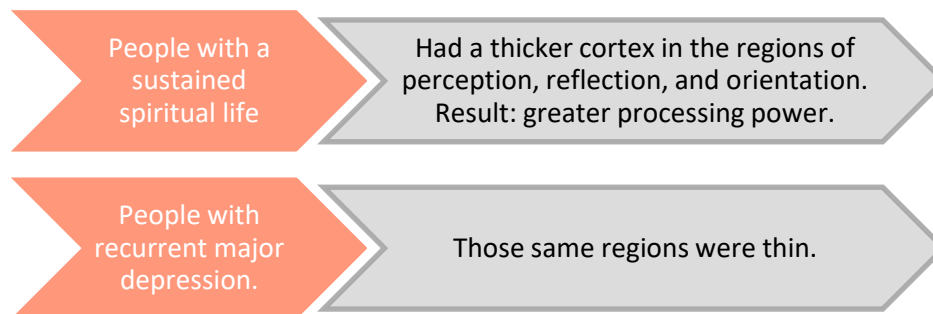
Scientists at Washington University in St. Louis discovered, the same regions of our brain we use to recall our past are the same regions we use to look forward into the future.

Research conducted by Dr Brene Brown shows:

“People who DON’T BELIEVE they are worthy of love and belonging, always wonder, “Am I enough?” so they try to numb their emotions or hide from their imperfections.

However, people who BELIEVE they are worthy of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect and build authentic relationships and the compassion to be kind to themselves and others.”

Dr. Lisa Miller, professor of psychology at Columbia University, looked through the MRI at people with a sustained spiritual life over eight years. She found:



That means our narrative doesn't just say what happened.



How we perceive the **PAST** events of our story affects...

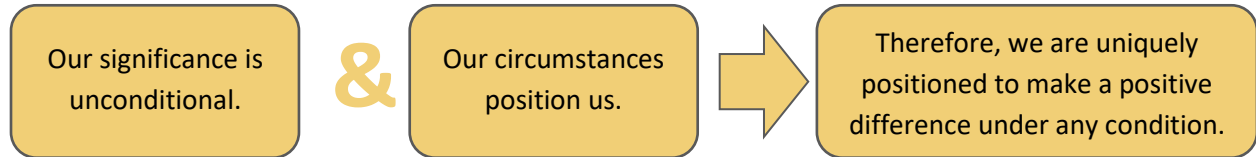
... how we see ourselves in the **PRESENT...**

... as well as our dreams about what we can and want to become in the **FUTURE.**

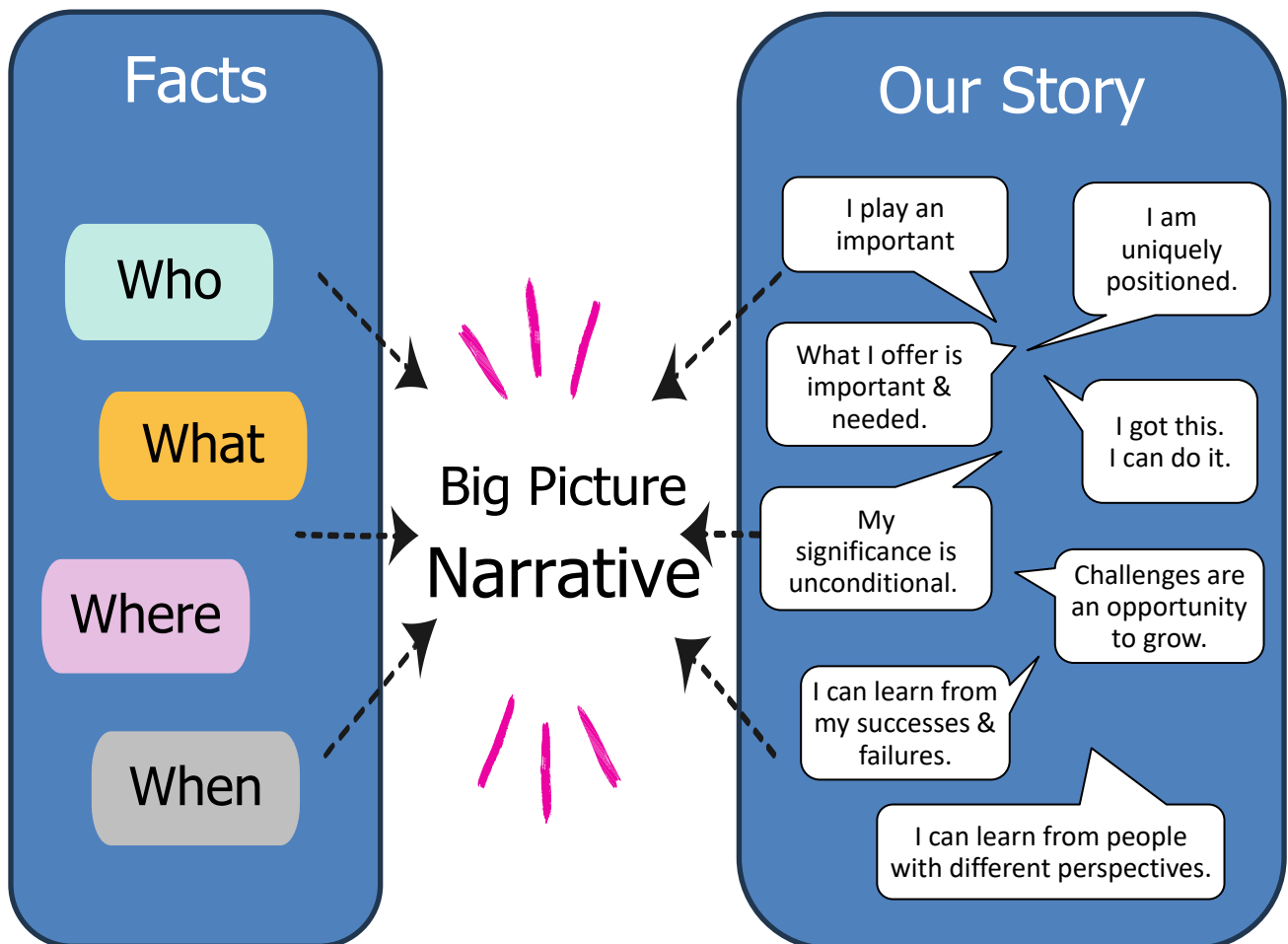
Similarly, how we see the future impacts how we perceive our past and the present circumstances.

A Big Picture Narrative

In everyday life, our struggles are real. Many things are out of our control. Things go wrong. We make mistakes. Those who intentionally position themselves to see how their whole story (the good and the hard parts) works to empower them to be positive contributors have what we call a “Big Picture Narrative.” A Big Picture Narrative helps us see:



So, the story we tell ourselves sounds like this:



In challenging times, it is normal to feel difficult emotions like stress, uncertainty, frustration, or anger. After all, our emotions are spontaneous or biological reactions to what is going on. However, being able to see your current situation as part of a bigger narrative allows courage and compassion to rise up and coexist with our feelings of stress and frustration. This gives us the strength and hope to move forward even when things are very difficult. Difficult emotions do not take away from our human dignity. On the contrary, they make us relatable to others.

Personal agency is a component of a Big Picture Narrative. It is the recognition that our actions carry weight and purpose. A healthy amount of personal agency enables us to acknowledge the struggle without becoming overwhelmed. Seeing how challenges can turn into growth opportunities gives us the confidence to push past our comfort zone. With less resentment and burn-out, it gets easier to support others while doing the hard work it takes to move our own dreams forward.

In a world of growing polarization, we can always choose to be kind and respectful. A Big Picture Narrative helps us see the value in diversity, making it easier to listen, ask questions, and receive feedback even when we do not agree.

It's quite incredible. Simply, choosing to see ourselves as an important part of a bigger narrative can help us develop the love and confidence to keep growing, even when things go array. While we cannot erase our past or the consequences of past actions, a Big Picture Narrative can empower us to make choices that improve our future.

The Power of Forgiveness

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was a commission put together by President Nelson Mandela to judge cases of crimes against humanity committed that occurred for many years in South Africa. Mandela asked Bishop Desmond Tutu to lead the Commission.

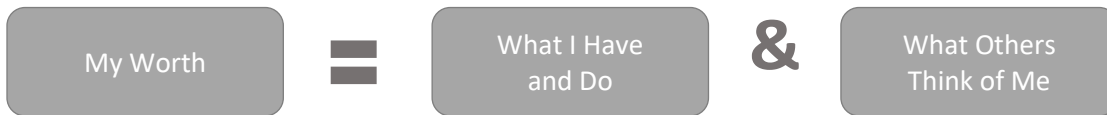
When Tutu was asked what sort of people, he wanted to serve on the committee with him, he answered he wanted people who experienced the atrocities of the crimes. He wanted people whose lives had been devastated and who had lost family members and loved ones. But, to many people's astonishment, Tutu added that he would accept only those victims onto the committee who had forgiven the guilty.

You see, Tutu believed that only those people who had forgiven the guilty were in the best position to help their nation move forward. Their "Big Picture Narrative" was formed through an education of empathy, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

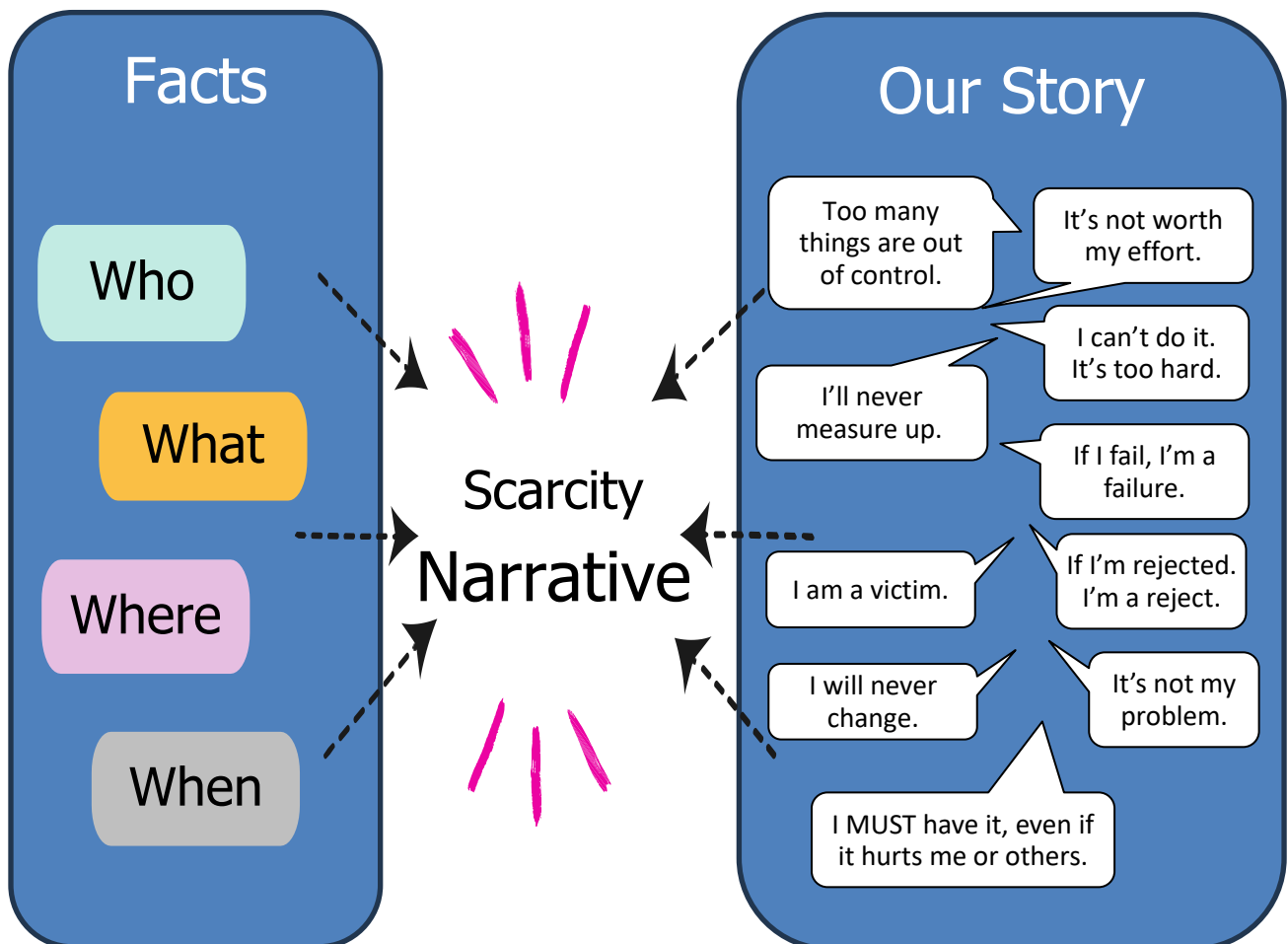
A Scarcity Narrative

A **Scarcity Narrative** only sees a fraction of the situation, causing us to focus on what we don't have."

When we have a Scarcity Narrative we think:



So, the story we tell ourselves sounds like this:



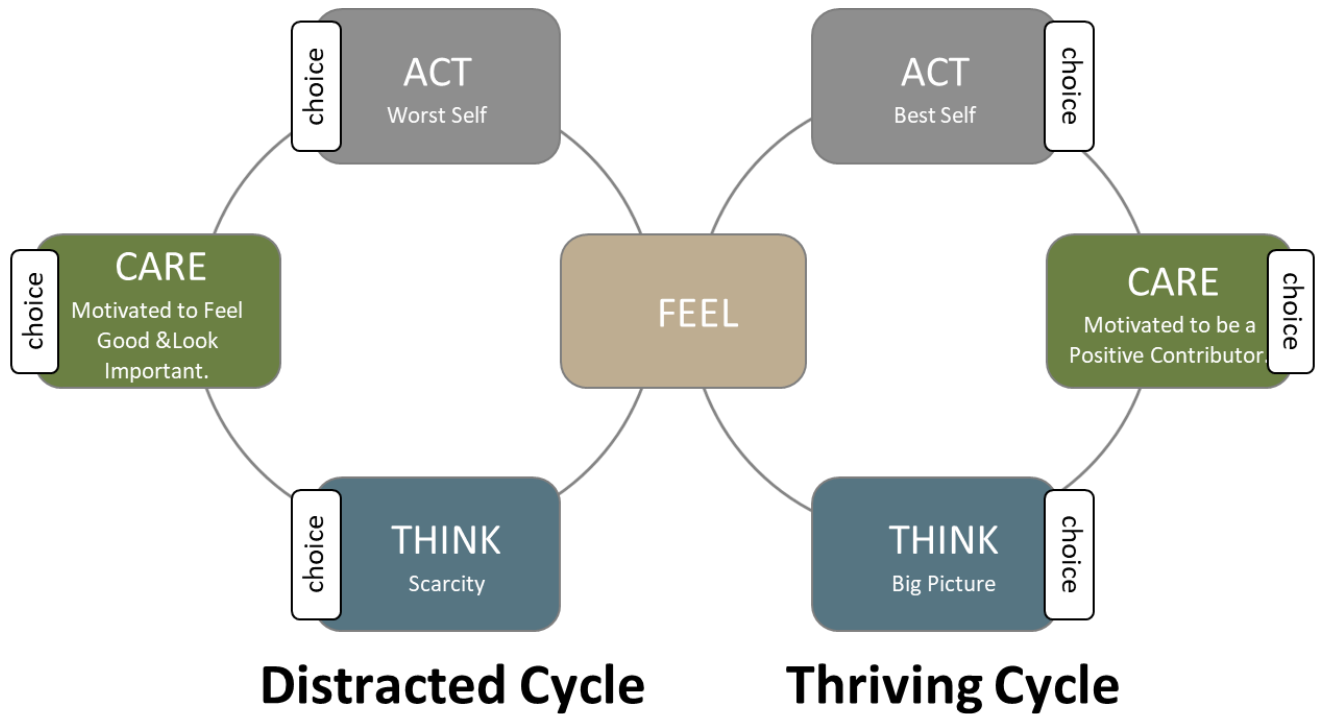
When we have a Scarcity Narrative, everyday situations like mistakes, harsh words, bad news, and comparisons can easily create a flood of difficult emotions that hinder our ability to think clearly. Believing our worth is dependent on our circumstances, the fear of failure or rejection is always present. Trapped in a story of not enough, no amount of success, wealth, and fame are enough to fight off feelings of insecurity.

Bottom line, a Scarcity Narrative keeps positive emotions from growing. Overwhelmed by feelings of resentment, burn-out or insecurity impede our ability to consider what we can do differently. Unable to see how challenges can turn into growth opportunities, it is very difficult to do the hard work it takes to move towards our own goals and dreams.

Yes, But How

So, how do we remember that our whole story empowers us to be a positive contributor? One thing we can do is pay attention to our emotions, acknowledge our mixed narrative, and utilize the **Power of a Pause** to realign how we THINK, CARE, and ACT when we get off track.

Our Mixed Narrative



The My Narrative Matters Exercise looks at the connection between our narrative and our emotions. After reviewing the facts of a challenging situation, we will consider how a Big Picture or Scarcity Narrative can impact our emotions. Then we will discuss strategies for realigning how we THINK, CARE, and ACT.


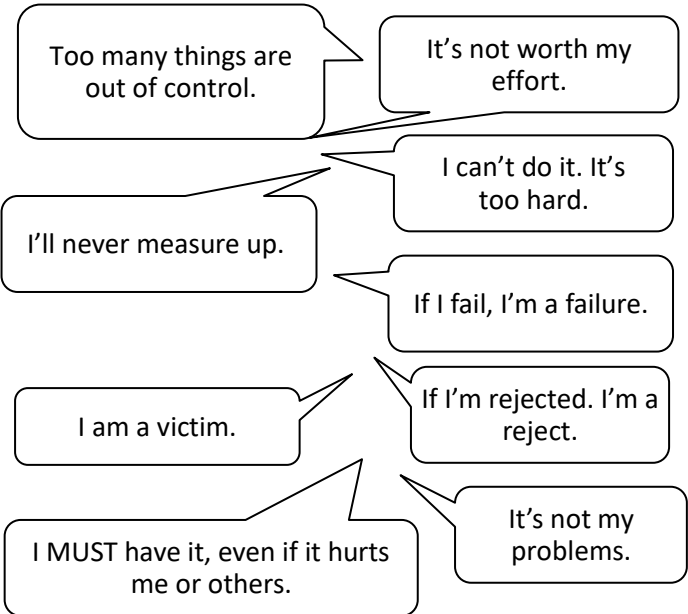
Keep in mind, the purpose of this exercise is not to eliminate difficult emotions. The purpose of the exercise is to help us see how a Big Picture Narrative helps us develop the love and confidence needed to turn challenges into opportunities that improve our impact.

My Narrative Matters Exercise

Directions: Write down the a few facts about a current challenge you are facing.

The Facts	
Who	What
Where	When

Next, use the check boxes to explore how our narrative can impact how you feel about the facts.

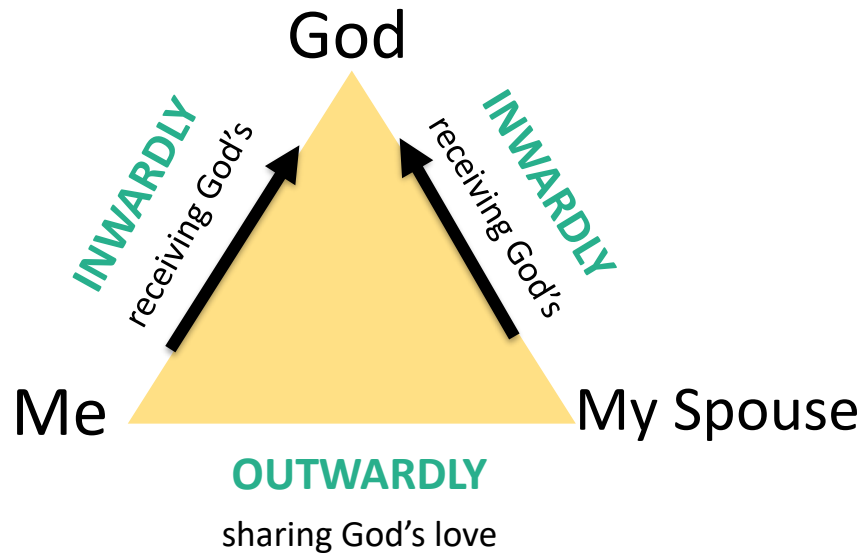
If I choose a Big Picture Narrative	I will likely feel more ...
 <p>I play an important role.</p> <p>I am uniquely positioned.</p> <p>What I offer is important & needed.</p> <p>I got this! I can do it.</p> <p>My significance is unconditional.</p> <p>Challenges are an opportunity to grow.</p> <p>I can learn from people with different perspectives.</p>	<p>Positive Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> at ease <input type="checkbox"/> connected <input type="checkbox"/> courageous <input type="checkbox"/> confident <input type="checkbox"/> curious <input type="checkbox"/> excited <input type="checkbox"/> grateful <input type="checkbox"/> joyful <input type="checkbox"/> loved, loving <input type="checkbox"/> positive <input type="checkbox"/> proud <input type="checkbox"/> remorseful <input type="checkbox"/> supported <input type="checkbox"/> excited <p>Difficult Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> anger <input type="checkbox"/> fear <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed <input type="checkbox"/> stressed <input type="checkbox"/> bored <input type="checkbox"/> worn-out <input type="checkbox"/> worried <input type="checkbox"/> scared <input type="checkbox"/> irritated <input type="checkbox"/> sad <input type="checkbox"/> embarrassed <input type="checkbox"/> disconnected <input type="checkbox"/> uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> powerless <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent other:
If I choose a Scarcity Narrative	I will likely feel more ...
 <p>Too many things are out of control.</p> <p>It's not worth my effort.</p> <p>I'll never measure up.</p> <p>I can't do it. It's too hard.</p> <p>I am a victim.</p> <p>If I fail, I'm a failure.</p> <p>If I'm rejected. I'm a reject.</p> <p>I MUST have it, even if it hurts me or others.</p> <p>It's not my problems.</p>	<p>Positive Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> at ease <input type="checkbox"/> connected <input type="checkbox"/> courageous <input type="checkbox"/> confident <input type="checkbox"/> curious <input type="checkbox"/> excited <input type="checkbox"/> grateful <input type="checkbox"/> joyful <input type="checkbox"/> loved, loving <input type="checkbox"/> positive <input type="checkbox"/> proud <input type="checkbox"/> remorseful <input type="checkbox"/> supported <input type="checkbox"/> excited <p>Difficult Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> anger <input type="checkbox"/> fear <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed <input type="checkbox"/> stressed <input type="checkbox"/> bored <input type="checkbox"/> worn-out <input type="checkbox"/> worried <input type="checkbox"/> scared <input type="checkbox"/> irritated <input type="checkbox"/> sad <input type="checkbox"/> embarrassed <input type="checkbox"/> disconnected <input type="checkbox"/> uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> powerless <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent other:

Talk about It

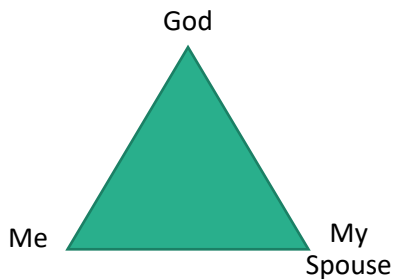
What did you notice about the connection between your narrative and emotions?

Stories Impact Relationships

At our BEST, we are growing INWARD OUTWARD and TOGETHER!

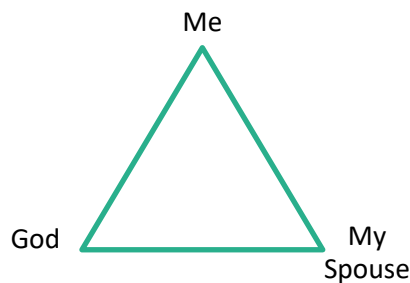


Trusting



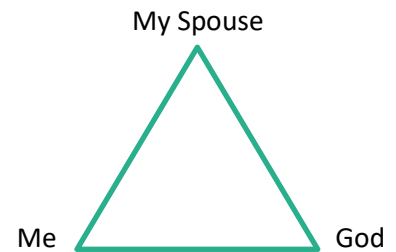
Trusting God's love, we are empowered to share God's love.

Self-Centered



Elevating ourselves, we want our way.

Co-Dependent



Elevating our spouse, we conform.

Victim

Self-Centered say- It is not my fault.

Co-Dependent say- It is not your fault.



Villian

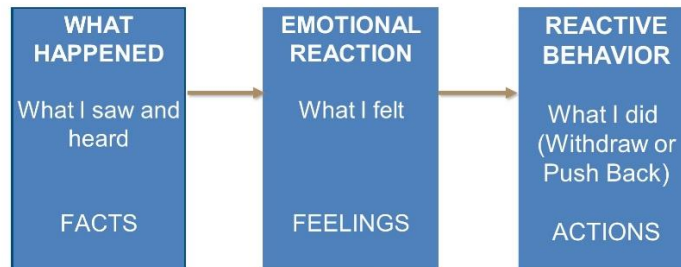
Self-Centered/Co-Dependent say-
It's someone else's fault.

Rescuer

Self-Centered say- You need to validate me.
Co-Dependent say- You can't do it so I will do it for you.

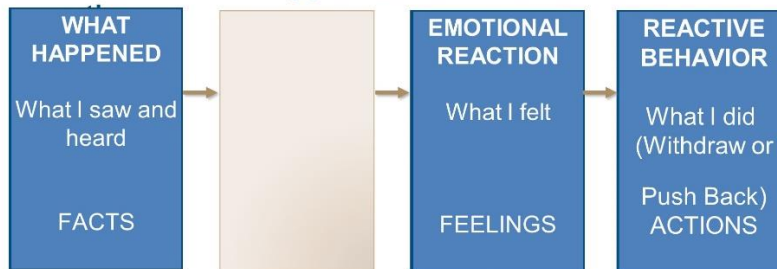
Let's explore how our stories impact our relationships.

We see or HEAR or SEE something, FEEL an emotional reaction, and then ACT on those feelings.



"When you rolled your eyes at me when I was struggling with my phone I felt angry and blew up at you in front of our friends."

We don't realize something going on *between* what happened and our emotional



"When you rolled your eyes at me when I was struggling with my phone...I felt angry and blew up at you in front of our friends."

Before our emotional response we tell a STORY about what happened. Our emotional reaction is not because of what happened, but by the meaning we attach to what happened – the story we tell about it. Ten people in the room can tell different stories about what happened. If we can change our story, we can change our emotions. Hope and confidence can build. If we can hold our story tentatively, we can change our story, we can change our emotions.

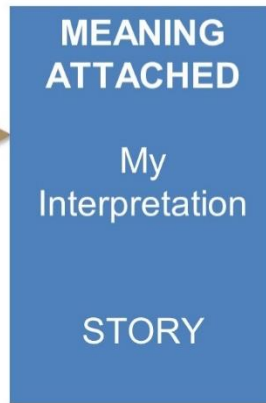
Let's break it down.

1st you see or hear.



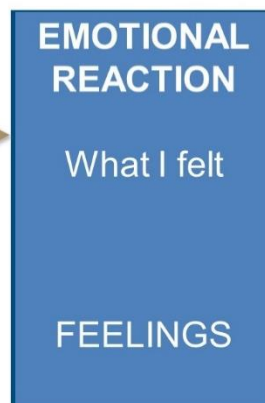
"When you rolled your eyes at me when I was struggling with my phone..." What story might you tell yourself?

2nd you tell a story



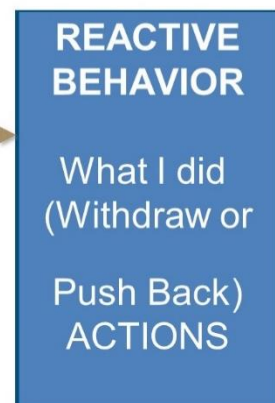
"He's trying to make me feel stupid!"

3rd you feel



You feel hurt, angry and defensive. You feel disrespected because he's making you feel not as smart as he is. What might these feelings lead you to do?

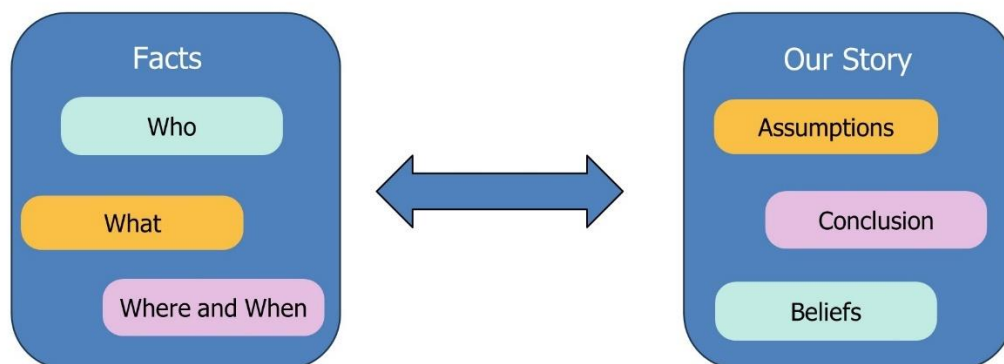
4th you act



You blow up in front of your friends.

How you are *acting* depends on how you are *feeling*. And how you're *feeling* depends upon the *story* you told yourself. The Idea is to be able to Separate Fact from Stories. So that we can hold our story tentatively and remain curious.

The same facts can tell an infinite number of stories.



Problem: We believe that the stories we tell are fact.

Better Choice: Separate stories from facts, suspend judgment and open our minds to alternative stories.

Bottom Line: That creates emotion that are different.

To conclude this session, complete the REACT Exercise and talk about it.

REACT Exercise (Part 2): Realigning

Directions: Use the prompts to explore how a Big Picture (Christ-centered) Narrative 1) Provides a framework that helps us to weave the facts into a story rooted in God's truth and 2) Enables hope and confidence to grow so it is easier to choose motivations and actions that move our goals and dreams forward despite or sometimes even because of our circumstances.

T	C	A	E	R
THINK	CARE	ATTITUDES	EMOTIONS	REALITY
<p>A Big Picture Narrative can remind me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I play a significant role in a bigger story. <input type="checkbox"/> I can do this. <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone has value, including me. <input type="checkbox"/> My circumstances uniquely position me. <input type="checkbox"/> I can learn from my successes & failures. <input type="checkbox"/> I am a beloved child of God with purpose. Nothing can separate me from God's love. <p>My Big Picture (Christ-centered) Story about the situation:</p>	<p>I want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> be a positive role model. <input type="checkbox"/> build healthy relationships. <input type="checkbox"/> create solutions & win together. <input type="checkbox"/> reach my full potential. <input type="checkbox"/> support others. <input type="checkbox"/> grow through challenges. <input type="checkbox"/> succeed w/ others. <input type="checkbox"/> live out my faith loving God & others <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <p>Other:</p>	<p>I can be more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> gracious <input type="checkbox"/> considerate <input type="checkbox"/> perseverant <input type="checkbox"/> brave <input type="checkbox"/> encouraging <input type="checkbox"/> gentle, calm <input type="checkbox"/> grateful <input type="checkbox"/> respectful <input type="checkbox"/> sincere, honest <input type="checkbox"/> supportive <input type="checkbox"/> trustworthy-loyal <input type="checkbox"/> warm, friendly <p>Other:</p>	<p>I can be more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> self-aware; honestly evaluating the impact of my choices. <input type="checkbox"/> focused & attentive. <input type="checkbox"/> perseverant through problems. <input type="checkbox"/> seek to understand; ask questions & accept help. <input type="checkbox"/> collaborative with others. <input type="checkbox"/> resourceful; utilizing available resources. <input type="checkbox"/> willing to help/ serve others. <input type="checkbox"/> Organized, prepared, on-time. <input type="checkbox"/> encouraging; celebrating the success of others. <input type="checkbox"/> engaged in respectful conversations. <input type="checkbox"/> willing to reconcile, say I'm sorry. <input type="checkbox"/> open to giving/ receiving feedback. <input type="checkbox"/> engaged in opportunities that cultivate growth. <input type="checkbox"/> humble; leaning into my faith. <input type="checkbox"/> balanced, integrating self-care & fun <p>Other:</p>	<p>As a result, I will feel more...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> at ease <input type="checkbox"/> connected <input type="checkbox"/> courageous <input type="checkbox"/> confident <input type="checkbox"/> curious <input type="checkbox"/> grateful <input type="checkbox"/> hope <input type="checkbox"/> joyful <input type="checkbox"/> loved, loving. <input type="checkbox"/> positive <input type="checkbox"/> supported <input type="checkbox"/> open <p>Other:</p> <p>10 Months:</p> <p>10 Years:</p> <p>Describe how these choices could help you grow in the next: 10 Minutes:</p> <p>Recall feelings are neither right nor wrong. They are spontaneous.</p>

Talk About It

1. Work together to create a list of the ways a Big Picture Narrative can help us grow through challenges.
2. Work together to create a list of the ways a Scarcity Narrative can hinder us from growing through challenges.
3. How are you feeling about the challenge you described right now? What connection do you see between how you feel and your narrative?
4. What is one thing you can do this week to cultivate a Big Picture Narrative about your challenge?
5. What support would you like?