**30-Day Marriage Devotional (Week One):**

**Carried or Cursed — The War of Voices in Marriage**

**Anchor Text:**

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* **(John 10:10, ESV)**

**Day One – What Are You Carrying?**

**Scripture:**

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

—John 10:10 (ESV)

Reflection:

Let’s not kid ourselves—every couple drags something along for the ride.

Sometimes it’s the easy stuff: the inside jokes that only make sense to the two of you, the half-baked plans you talk about late at night, or that story you keep retelling about how you met—never quite the same way twice.

Other times, it’s the stuff you pretend isn’t there: the argument you both agreed to drop but never really did, the silent tally of who’s owed what, or the slow, creeping sense that maybe you’re both waiting for the other to blink first.

Marriage never comes without baggage. The real question is, **who packed your suitcase for you, and whose instructions are you following when you lug it around?**

Depending on who you ask—Jesus included—there are supposedly two voices narrating the story you keep telling yourself about your marriage:

* First, there’s the thief—the one who insists marriage is just another burden to shoulder. He’s the voice whispering that you’re always one mistake away from blowing it, that your partner should be doing more, or that you somehow got shortchanged in the deal. He’s the one who swaps out grace for guilt and turns empathy into a running list of grievances.
* Then there’s the **Shepherd**, who doesn’t promise to make the load disappear but suggests maybe you’ve been carrying it all wrong. In his version, marriage isn’t a test to pass or a problem to solve; it’s more like a garden you’re supposed to tend, even if you’re not exactly sure what you’re growing half the time.

The Shepherd’s idea of abundance isn’t about piling on more expectations or grand gestures. It’s about figuring out how to carry what you’ve got with a little more honesty and a lot less pretending.

So maybe the question was never whether you’re carrying something—because you are. The real question is, whose story are you carrying, and does it even fit you anymore?

**Carry Check:**

* What are we carrying in our marriage right now—truth or tension?
* Are we reacting to each other from the weight of past stories… or from the presence of Christ’s story?
* How has shame, fear, or entitlement shaped our load?

**Prayer:**

**Jesus, Shepherd of our souls,**

**Help us recognize the weight that does not belong to us.**

**Expose the lies we’ve been believing—about ourselves, each other, and what marriage is supposed to be.**

**Teach us to carry with truth, not resentment.**

**To lift with love, not assumption.**

**And to follow Your voice—not the thief’s whisper.**

**Make our marriage a reflection of Your abundant life.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

Tonight, take 10–15 minutes and ask each other:

* *What’s one thing I may be carrying that you didn’t realize feels heavy?*
* *Where do you think we’ve unknowingly let the “thief” shape our expectations or reactions?*
* *What would it look like for us to begin this journey listening to the Shepherd together?*

**Day Two – The War of Voices**

**Scripture:**

*“The sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”*

—John 10:4 (ESV)

**Reflection:**

If you look closely, there’s a battle playing out in your marriage, and, contrary to what you might think, it’s not the usual you-versus-your-spouse standoff.

No, the real skirmish is between the voices that quietly (or not so quietly) script how you see each other, how you see yourself, and what you imagine this thing called marriage is supposed to be.

Every day, it’s as if two competing narrators are auditioning to set the emotional soundtrack for your marriage.

* The **Father of Lies** speaks in accusation and fear.

*“You’re alone.”*

*“You’re not enough.”*

*“They’ll never change.”*

His words come at you with the urgency of a fire alarm, convincing you that something—anything—needs to be fixed right now. That voice doesn’t just whisper; it tightens your chest, shrinks your world to the size of a pinhole, and leaves you running on fumes, convinced that if you just try harder, you’ll finally get it right.

* The **Good Shepherd** speaks in love and assurance.

*“I am with you.”*

*“I will sustain you.”*

*“I will finish what I started.”*

That voice, on the other hand, doesn’t try to drown out the noise or pretend the struggle isn’t real. It just sits with you in the mess, refusing to bolt for the exit. It invites you to loosen your grip, to trust that maybe, just maybe, you don’t have to hold everything together by sheer force of will.

The truth is, we’re all following someone, whether we admit it or not.

And more often than not, we end up following the voice that feels most familiar—the one we’ve practiced, replayed, and let set up shop in our heads.

So maybe the real question isn’t just, what story are we buying about our marriage?

Maybe it’s deeper than that: whose voice have we let become the soundtrack we call truth?

**Visual Metaphor:**

Picture two backpacks:

🪨 One is *full of rocks*. Each rock is etched with a word: **Prove. Fix. Perform. Earn.** It gets heavier with every argument, every silent assumption, every attempt to control.

👣 The other is *empty*, but not hollow. It’s labeled **Witness**.

It invites you to carry—not the weight of results—but the calling to stay present, attuned, and surrendered.

Let go of the rocks.

Carry the witness.

**Carry Check:**

Before reacting today, pause and ask:

1. “**Who told us this?**”
2. “**What is the fruit of believing this?**”
3. “**Is this voice asking me to control… or to trust?**”

**Prayer:**

**Jesus, You are the Shepherd and the Gate.**

**Quiet the voice of the thief in our minds and marriage.**

**Expose the lies we’ve grown used to.**

**Train our ears to know Your tone—one of peace, not panic;**

**of presence, not pressure.**

**We surrender the weight of proving and fixing.**

**Teach us to follow You with soft hearts and open hands.**

**We choose to carry the witness.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *What “voice” has been the loudest in our marriage lately—accusation or assurance?*
* *Which rocks have we been trying to carry that Jesus never asked us to hold?*
* *What would it look like to carry the role of “witness” instead of “fixer” this week?*

**Day Three – Bearing Witness, Not Burden**

**Scripture:**

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

—John 10:10b (ESV)

*“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed…”*

—Genesis 1:29 (ESV)

*“And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.”*

—Genesis 2:19 (ESV)

**Reflection:**

Somewhere along the way, people started acting like God handed out marriage licenses with a set of dumbbells and said, 'Here, carry this thing by yourself.' But if you actually read the fine print, you’ll notice God never asked you to haul the whole weight of your marriage on your own back.

What He actually did was invite you to show up and bear witness to something a little bigger, a little messier, and a whole lot more eternal than just two people figuring out how to split the chores and not kill each other.

Of course, the enemy’s playbook is pretty simple: convince you that if anything goes sideways, it’s your fault, and you’re the one who has to fix it.

He wants you to believe you’re supposed to manage everyone’s emotions, patch up every bit of dysfunction, carry the outcome, and—while you’re at it—write the whole story from start to finish.

That voice in your head starts barking orders: 'If you don’t handle this, it’s all going to fall apart.' As if you’re the only thing holding the universe together.

Meanwhile, Christ’s approach is the exact opposite—no bullhorn, no panic, just a quiet invitation to stop trying to run the show.

It’s stronger, too, but not in the way you flex at the gym. More like the kind of strength that doesn’t need to announce itself.

And, yes, it’s sacred—though not in the stained-glass, hush-your-voice kind of way. More like the sacred that sneaks up on you when you’re not looking for it.

He’s not handing you the pen and telling you to write the whole script.

He’s just asking you to show up and play your part—no Oscar-worthy performance required.

**🪴 In Genesis 1:29, God provides seed—not to exploit but to sustain.**

He says: *“I’ve already given you what you need.”*

Your role is not to consume one another’s energy, affection, or growth—but to **cultivate** what God has already planted.

Love doesn’t have to be manufactured.

It’s more like a houseplant—ignore it and it wilts, pay attention and it might surprise you.

**📝 In Genesis 2:19, Adam names the animals—not to dominate them, but to partner with the Creator in the act of reflection.**

Naming wasn’t just a job; it was sacred, intimate—like seeing something for what it is and not what you wish it would be.

It meant seeing something for what it was—and calling it into being.

Marriage asks you to do the same thing—see your spouse for who they are, not who you wish they’d become after a few self-help books.

You are not your spouse’s god.

You’re there to witness the whole mess—grace, growth, the memories you’d rather forget, and the promises you’re still trying to keep.

You remind them who they are when they forget—because, let’s be honest, we all forget.

You hold up the mirror when the world tries to warp their reflection, reminding them there’s still dignity left, even on the days it’s hard to find.

You’re not supposed to carry them like a sack of groceries up three flights of stairs.

You’re called to **carry the story—what God is up to in them, not just what you wish He’d hurry up and fix.**

And sometimes, the hardest thing is stepping back—not because you’re giving up, but because you finally realize you’re not the one writing the ending.

**Visual Reframe:**

Lay down the burden of fixing.

Pick up the mantle of witnessing.

You are not carrying your spouse.

You are walking beside them—both of you being carried by the One who knows how to redeem every broken place.

**Carry Check:**

* Have I been trying to be my spouse’s Savior—or their witness?
* Where have I believed that the outcome of our marriage depends on my performance?
* What has God already provided in our relationship that we need to cultivate—not control?

**Prayer:**

**Jesus,**

**Thank You for reminding me I don’t have to carry what was never mine.**

**Forgive me for the ways I’ve tried to fix, manage, or control our story.**

**I surrender the burden of outcomes—and I receive the invitation to witness.**

**Teach me how to name, not shame.**

**How to nourish, not demand.**

**How to reflect You, not replace You.**

**You are the Shepherd of this marriage—**

**Help me to follow You, not fear.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *What’s one area of our marriage where we’ve been trying to “carry” each other instead of returning to the One who carries us both?*
* *What are some “seeds” God has already provided in our relationship? How can we begin to cultivate them together?*
* *How can we practice “naming” each other this week—not based on faults, but on promise?*

**Day Four – Alienation Through Scarcity**

**Scripture Base:**

* *“But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.”* — Job 1:11 (ESV)
* *“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God…”* — Genesis 3:5 (ESV)
* *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”* — John 10:10a (ESV)

**Reflection:**

The so-called satanic thesis, if you can call it that, is as straightforward as it is quietly destructive.

**If you can convince a person that what they have is not enough, that the universe is somehow shortchanging them, it’s only a matter of time before they start shaking their fist at the sky.**

It played out in Eden, it played out in Job’s story, and if you look closely enough, you’ll see it sneaking into the cracks of marriages everywhere, not with a bang but with a whisper.

The truth is, Satan doesn’t need to come crashing through the front door to wreck your relationship.

All he really has to do is hand you a cracked pair of glasses and let you go about**your day.**

Suddenly, the way you see yourself, your spouse, your promises, even your God, starts to warp just enough to make you question what’s real.

Picture living in a house where every wall is made of broken mirrors—every reflection a little off, every angle just enough to make you wonder if you’re seeing things straight.

You catch your own face in the glass and can’t quite tell if it’s you or some funhouse version you’re supposed to recognize.

Before long, the person you married starts to look less like a partner and more like someone you have to defend yourself against.

The vows you made start to feel less like a calling and more like a cleverly disguised trap you walked into with your eyes half-closed.

And yourself as **alone**, even when someone is right beside you.

That, in a nutshell, is how alienation works its way in.

It doesn’t happen all at once, of course. There’s a process—four stages, if you want to get clinical about it.

**1. Steal Reality**

**(Genesis 3:1)**

*“Did God really say?”*

First, a little seed of doubt gets planted. Suddenly, reality starts to bend around your suspicions, and you find yourself reading your spouse like a suspect instead of a partner.

**2. Kill the Sacred**

Intimacy becomes transactional. You start measuring connection—*What do I get? What do I owe?*—instead of offering presence.

**3. Perversion of Purpose**

Marriage, which was supposed to be about reflecting something bigger than yourself, gets repurposed as a tool—something to prove you’re worthy, to patch up old wounds, to fill the empty spaces you’d rather not talk about. It stops being about God’s image and starts being about your own personal renovation project.

**4. Shame and Accusation**

**(Revelation 12:10)**

You start keeping your spouse on trial for things they did years ago, and you keep yourself locked up for your own failures. Grace, which was supposed to be the air you breathe, gets crowded out by a constant, nagging whisper.

*“This isn’t working. You’re not enough. They’re not enough. God’s not coming.”*

And the whole thing, the entire mess, starts with one quiet, almost reasonable-sounding lie.

**You don’t have enough. That’s it. That’s the line that gets the whole circus started.**

**Emotional Beat Drop:**

Scarcity isn’t just about money or time.

It’s about meaning.

When couples start believing **“we don’t have enough”**—

enough connection, enough effort, enough hope—

they stop becoming **enough for each other**.

Scarcity breeds competition.

Faith invites collaboration.

Scarcity isolates.

Faith reconnects.

**Theological Insight:**

At the root of this spiral is something ancient:

**Interpretive autonomy**—the belief that we get to decide what’s good and what’s evil.

We stop listening.

We start scripting.

We crown ourselves judge and narrator.

But there is **another voice**, and **another way**—

Not to control the story, but to walk by faith in the One who holds it.

**Carry Check:**

* Where have I started to feel “we don’t have enough” in this relationship?
* Have I begun seeing my spouse through a broken mirror—focused on threat, not truth?
* Am I living by faith or scripting by fear?

**Prayer:**

**Jesus,**

**You are the Giver of every good thing.**

**Forgive me for the ways I’ve listened to the voice of scarcity.**

**Heal the places in me that doubt Your provision,**

**And restore the way I see my spouse—not as a rival, but as a gift.**

**Tear down the house of broken mirrors.**

**Give us eyes to see each other clearly again—**

**through Your abundance, not our lack.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *Where do we feel scarcity in our marriage—emotionally, spiritually, or practically?*
* *How have we fallen into patterns of “fixing” or “proving” instead of witnessing?*
* *What would it look like to walk by faith, not fear, in this area of our relationship?*

Here is your fully developed **Day Five Devotional: The Shepherd’s Invitation – From Scarcity to Abundance**, crafted to follow the thematic arc of the previous days and bring hopeful clarity and emotional restoration. It blends **Scripture, Reflection, Metaphor, Carry Check, Prayer, and Couple Discussion** for a 15-minute devotional experience.

**Day Five – The Shepherd’s Invitation: From Scarcity to Abundance**

**Scripture Base:**

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

—John 10:10b (ESV)

**Reflection:**

Scarcity isn’t just a concept you read about in economics textbooks; it’s got a soundtrack all its own.

It’s that low-level static buzzing under every conversation, the kind you try to ignore but can’t quite tune out.

It’s the awkward silence that settles in after someone misreads your look, and suddenly you’re both pretending nothing happened.

It’s the sharpness in your voice when you start to wonder if your needs are even on the table anymore, or if you’re just background noise in someone else’s story.

Then, out of nowhere, the Shepherd’s voice slices through all that static with something so out of place it almost feels suspicious.

**Abundance. Not the kind you see on late-night infomercials, but the kind that actually means something.**

Not abundance as in excess, or the kind that makes you feel guilty for not being grateful enough, but abundance as in just enough to keep you from losing your mind.

Enough grace to keep growing, even when you’re convinced you’ve hit your ceiling for the week.

Enough peace to hit pause before you say something you’ll regret, or at least regret until the next argument.

Enough presence to stick around when every instinct is telling you to make a run for it.

When Jesus says *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,”*

He’s not promising you a marriage that looks good on Instagram or makes your therapist jealous.

He’s talking about a marriage that’s built on actually showing up, keeping your word, and having just enough to get through the day without losing your sense of humor**.**

**Contrast of Voices:**

* The **thief** says: *“You’re falling behind. You’re not enough. There’s not enough to go around.”*
* The **Shepherd** says: *“I am here. I will sustain you. You already have what you need in Me.”*

Abundance isn’t about how much you can crank out, or how impressive your highlight reel looks to the neighbors.

It’s about what you’re actually plugged into when the lights go out.

Jesus isn’t asking you to perform your marriage—He’s inviting you to **abide in Him through it**.

**Visual Metaphor:**

Think of your marriage like a vineyard.

The vine doesn’t strain to produce grapes. It simply stays **connected**.

Fruit isn’t the result of pressure—it’s the result of presence.

Jesus didn’t say, *“Strive for fruit.”*

He said, *“Abide in Me.”*

In seasons of drought, don’t dig new holes.

Sink deeper roots into the Source.

**Emotional Reframe:**

Your marriage is not running out.

It may be tired. It may be tender.

But it is not beyond renewal.

Because **abundance is not a feeling. It’s a foundation.**

The Shepherd’s invitation is not to hustle harder—but to rest in the truth that **you are held.**

**Carry Check:**

* Where in our marriage have we been operating from scarcity instead of connection?
* Are we trying to bear fruit without abiding?
* What would it look like today to receive instead of strive?

**Prayer:**

**Jesus,**

**You are the Shepherd of abundance.**

**When scarcity speaks, help us remember Your voice.**

**When we try to fix or perform, bring us back to abiding.**

**We lay down the myth that we are behind, broken, or barren—**

**and we receive the truth that in You, we are whole, rooted, and held.**

**Teach us to live from enough.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *Where have we been believing there’s “not enough”—of time, love, peace, or connection?*
* *How can we begin to shift our focus from performance to presence in our relationship?*
* *What might it look like to practice abundance this week—not in what we do, but in how we show up?*

**Day Six – Co-Narrators, Not Competitors**

**Scripture Base:**

*“Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.”*

—Genesis 2:19 (ESV)

**Reflection:**

Let’s be honest, if you’re looking for a script, the beginning of the story isn’t where you’ll find it. God didn’t hand Adam a set of instructions, a checklist, or even a rough draft.

What Adam got instead was an open invitation to participate—no lines to memorize, just a chance to show up and see what happens.

By the time Adam showed up, the animals were already milling around, the heavy lifting was done, and the stage was set. All that was left was the part nobody ever seems to want: paying attention and naming what’s right in front of you.

Adam’s job? Not to rearrange the furniture or start a new project, but to call things what they are—no small feat, considering how easy it is to get that wro**ng**.

He was supposed to witness what was already there and, somehow, speak into it with a kind of reverence that’s hard to muster when you’re still figuring out what’s what.

This wasn’t about taking over or running the show.

It was, if anything, a kind of collaboration—though not the kind where everyone agrees on the playlist.

Which, if you squint at it long enough, starts to look a lot like what marriage is supposed to be.

Not a solo act, not a dictatorship, but a story you’re both writing—sometimes in the margins, sometimes over each other’s sentences.

Two image-bearers listening, naming, creating—not from competition, but from connection.

But too often, couples drift into a different dynamic:

* **Who’s keeping score? Who’s doing more? Who’s quietly seething while pretending not to care?**
* **Who’s not pulling their weight, and who’s going to bring it up first?**
* **Whose version of the story gets to be the official one, and whose gets quietly edited out?**

When fear and ego replace mutuality, marriage turns into a tug-of-war instead of a testimony.

But we were never meant to fight for the pen.

We were supposed to **write together, even if that means arguing over commas and crossing things out along the way.**

**Metaphor:**

Imagine a battered old notebook, the kind with coffee stains and a few pages missing, and two pens—one probably out of ink, the other chewed on at the end.

One pen isn’t red and the other black.

Nobody’s just editing while the other writes, at least not if you’re doing it right.

You’re both narrating, sometimes at cross purposes, sometimes in harmony, but always together.

You both get to speak life into the story, even if you don’t always agree on what that looks like.

You both get to name the good you see, and sometimes, if you’re lucky, you notice things the other missed.

You both get to reflect the character of the One who started the story.

The goal isn’t to have the last word or to win the argument.

It’s to keep holding the pen together, with as much humility, curiosity, and stubborn hope as you can muster.

**Emotional Reframe:**

You are not enemies in competition for clarity.

You are partners in the sacred task of **naming what God is doing—even when it’s messy, even when it’s slow.**

Let go of the need to be right.

Grab hold of the calling to be real.

**Carry Check:**

* Where have we slipped into comparison or competition instead of collaboration?
* How often do we ask what God might be writing—rather than just pushing for our version of the story?
* Are we naming each other with faith or with frustration?

**Prayer:**

**God,**

**You are the Author of every good story.**

**Thank You for inviting us to co-create with You.**

**Forgive us for competing for control,**

**For naming from fear instead of from faith.**

**Teach us to hold the pen together—**

**To speak life over what You are doing,**

**To honor the voice of the other,**

**And to trust that the story You are writing in us is still unfolding.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *What’s one way we can affirm each other’s voice this week—in our decisions, our story, or our growth?*
* *Where have we tried to narrate for the other instead of naming with them?*
* *How can we practice co-authoring with Christ—together—in this season of our marriage?*

**Day Seven – Naming vs Narrating**

**Scripture Base:**

*“Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.”*

—Genesis 2:19b (ESV)

*“Death and life are in the power of the tongue…”*

**Reflection:**

Somewhere between what we call things and the stories we spin about them, there’s a gap most people don’t notice until they’ve already fallen into it. The difference between naming and narrating isn’t loud, but it’s the kind of thing that can upend a conversation or a marriage before you know what hit you.

* **Naming, when you actually do it, is about showing up. It’s about being present enough to see what’s in front of you, even if it’s still half-baked or in the middle of falling apart. It’s not about slapping a label on something so you can move on; it’s about acknowledging what’s real, even if it’s uncomfortable**.
* **Narrating**, especially when you’re anxious or just trying to keep the wheels from coming off, is all about control. You start filling in the blanks, assigning motives, predicting endings, and basically deciding what’s going on before anyone else has a chance to weigh in. It’s the mental equivalent of writing the Yelp review before you’ve even tasted the food.

In marriage, this shift from naming to narrating happens so quietly you don’t even notice it. One minute you’re describing what’s actually happening, the next you’re the unreliable narrator in your own relationship, convinced you know how the story ends.

* *“You’re just lazy.”* ← That’s a **narration**.
* *“I notice you’re tired and have been checked out lately.”* ← That’s **naming**.
* *“This marriage is broken.”* ← That’s a **narration**.
* *“We’re in a hard season, and we need help.”* ← That’s **naming**.

Narrating is what we do when we want to skip to the last page and pretend we already know how it all turns out.

Naming, on the other hand, is sticking around for the messy middle, even when you’d rather fast-forward.

**Metaphor:**

Narrating is like being that person who stands up at intermission and starts explaining the plot to everyone, as if the ending is already set in stone and the actors are just filling in the blanks.

Naming is more like sitting in the front row, watching the whole thing unfold, not pretending you know what’s coming next, but still holding out hope that Act III might surprise you.

When you start narrating out of fear, you lock the story in place. Nothing moves. Everyone’s stuck playing the part you’ve already assigned them.

But when you name what’s actually happening, especially if you can do it without flinching, you give the story a chance to breathe. Sometimes, that’s the only way anything changes.

**Emotional Reframe:**

In your marriage, your words have the power to bind or to bless.

The enemy wants you to rehearse stories of failure.

The Shepherd invites you to name what is true—and trust what is still being written.

You don’t have to tell the whole story today.

You just have to name what’s real—and leave room for God to surprise you.

**Carry Check:**

* Have I been using my voice to narrate out of fear—or name with hope?
* What have I declared “done” that God may still be working on?
* What is one thing I can name in my spouse today—not as a critique, but as a witness?

**Prayer:**

**Jesus,**

**You are the True Word,**

**And You speak life over what others call dead.**

**Help us unlearn the habits of fearful narration—**

**The need to explain, control, or predict.**

**Teach us to name from Your Spirit—**

**With tenderness, with courage, and with trust.**

**Let our words make room for healing.**

**Let our speech bear witness to what You are still doing.**

**Amen.**

**Couple Discussion Prompt:**

* *Where have we been scripting each other’s motives instead of naming what we see with grace?*
* *How can we practice naming without narrating this week—especially in conflict or vulnerability?*
* *What’s one name you believe God is speaking over us right now? How can we agree with it together?*

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