

A Do-It-Yourself Marriage Retreat

By Deepak Reju

General Idea

Most couples talk about problems, victories, and other matters that are a part of daily life, but rarely do they set aside time to survey their own marriage. The purpose of these questions is to help you “check-in” with your spouse to see how your marriage is doing. I have provided a wide range of questions to help you get a good overview of your entire marriage.

When and How?

There are really two ways in which you can get the questions answered:

1. Ideally you would set 1-2 days aside every year to get away with your wife, have fun, relax, enjoy one another and reflect on the past blessings and health of your relationship. Your goal is to relax, rest, relate, plan, & pray.
2. For many parents, a weekend retreat is not always possible, so at the very least you can go out for an extended dinner where you talk through at least a few questions. I have met some couples who work through just a few questions at a time over a series of dinner dates. That way, you spread out the evaluation over a period of time, and you also develop a good habit of asking each other heart-probing questions.

What would a 1-2 day retreat look like?

It's recommended that you get away from your house, children, job and other responsibilities for at least an over night. (Again, if you can't get away, you can at least plan an extended dinner where you plan to take a couple of hours to talk.) Couples can go through this list of categories and questions however they see fit.

One way that seems to be helpful is to design 3 sessions. After your breakfast and quiet time, go off on your own and reflect for an hour on the questions related to Section 1. Come back and discuss your answers. (If you finish Section 1 before lunch, then start Section 2.) Take a break for lunch. After lunch, discuss Section 2 (this section likely doesn't need too much personal reflection). Take a break (run, enjoy each other) and then, over dinner, discuss Section 3 together (this section likely doesn't need too much personal reflection). It's also a good idea to pray both before and after each Session – so that a spirit of grace, charity, encouragement and trust in God's faithfulness permeates your time. With the above schedule, you can have a relaxed, fun, but purposeful day. Be sure to make time in car or plane ride or boat as you head to the retreat sight. Start asking questions on the way there or finish off things on the way back home.

It is important to make sure you cover all of the general categories so you get to survey all the aspects of your marriage. If you find that you are getting “stuck” on one subject, make note of the problem area and plan to come back to this subject later. If you find

that you can't resolve a particular issue, take some time to pray about it and (if the disagreement persists) seek out an elder in your church.

Three Practical Tips to Enrich Your Retreat

Tip #1 (for husbands): Before you leave for the retreat, go through this document and check off the questions you hope to get done. Not every question is helpful for your marriage, so mark the ones that you think will be *most helpful*. Prioritize these questions first over the course of your retreat, and then if you have extra time, go back and do the other questions with the time remaining.

Tip #2 (for husbands and wives): Don't just spend your entire time just talking about your marriage, but be sure to take time to pray with each other and for your marriage (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Tip #3 (for husbands and wives): Another way to enrich the marriage retreat is to spend your personal devotional times in some of the marriage texts in Scripture. This provides a good back-drop for your marriage retreat conversations. Suggested texts: Gen 1:26-28; Gen 2 & 3; Eph 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Session 1: The Past and our God of Providence

- Remember the past year
 - Note any highlights (chronological and social), including highpoints and low points. Where you can, be sure to connect events directly or indirectly to your marriage (i.e., “I graduated seminary in December. I know that this has created a more free time for me to spend with you and the kids.”)
 - Our God is a God of providence (Gen 50: 19; Rom 8:28), who brings all things into our life for our good. Reflect on what the events of the past year has taught you about God, yourself, your spouse, etc.
 - Reflect on and list at least three ways you can give thanks to God for blessings of the past year.

Session 2: Personal Discipleship and Relationship with one another

- **Personal Discipleship, Spiritual Life, and Biblical Roles**
 - In general, how are you doing spiritually?
 - How has your love for God grown?
 - Has your love for others grown? If so, how?
 - How is your devotional time going? (Specifically Scripture study & prayer)
What are you reading and learning in your quiet times right now? What do you want to accomplish in QTs in this upcoming year?
 - Has your life been governed increasingly by God’s Word?
 - Is there another spiritual discipline that you would like to develop? (fasting, scripture memorization, etc.)
 - What can I do to help you grow spiritually?
 - Do you still grieve over sin? (Whitney)
 - Name one sin that you continue to struggle with.
 - What could I do to help you with this struggle?
 - Name one sin you see that I continue to struggle with.
 - What would you encourage me to do to deal with struggle?
 - Is there some way that you can help me with this struggle?
 - What would indicate to you that I really desire to be more Christ-like?
 - Name one way that my leadership/submission has strengthened our marriage.
 - What could I do to lead/submit better in our marriage?
 - Name one way that we could make our marriage more Christ-like.
 - Do we want to do anything together spiritually (e.g., read Scripture, devotionals, a book, memorize Scripture together, etc.)?
 - In ten years where do you hope to be *spiritually*?
 - In ten years where do you think I should be *spiritually*?

○ **Communication**

- In general, how are we doing with our communication?
- Do we communicate biblically?
 - Have we been quick to listen and slow to speak (Jas 1:19)?
 - Have we cultivated the habit of giving and receiving godly encouragement (Eph 4:29) and godly criticism (Pr 24:26)?
 - Do we use a gracious and loving tone when we speak to each other (Prov 15:1)?
 - Are we quick to forgive each other (Eph 4:32; Isa 43:25)?
- Do we communicate unbiblically?
 - What communication habits do we have that *intentionally* “push each other’s buttons”?
 - What communication habits do we have that *unintentionally* “push each other’s buttons”?
 - Do either of us tend to:
 - Interrupt our spouse (Prov 18:13)?
 - Not pay attention when our spouse speaks to us (Prov 18:2)?
 - Judge our spouse (1 Cor 4:5)?
 - Make sweeping generalizations (Eph 4:25)?
 - Blame-shift (Gen 3:12)?
 - Be passive about communicating (Eccl 3:7)?
 - Blow up in the middle of a conversation (Ps 4:4)?
 - Dig up past problems as a way to hurt our spouse (1 Cor 13:5)?
 - Speak harshly, scold, or put-down our spouse (Jas 4:11)?

○ **Emotional Support**

- How are you doing emotionally? Do you feel more like a mother than a wife? Do you feel more like an employee than a wife? (vice versa for husband)
- Name one way I serve you that brings you great joy.
- Are there specific ways that I can serve that I am not already doing?
- What could I do to cause you to feel *more* loved?
- What could I do to cause you to feel *more* respected/honored?
- What could I do to cause you to feel *more* understood?
- What could I do to cause you to feel *more* secure?
- Is there anything else we can do together to ensure that we’re relating well to one another?

○ **Sexual & Physical**

- How’s our sex life? Are we having sex regularly?
- Is there anything you want to encourage, discourage, change, adapt, or keep the same in our sex life?
- Have I acted selfish in our sexual life?
- For husbands to ask wives: Have you ever experienced an orgasm?
- Physically, what do we want to commit to in terms of health and exercise?
- Are we happy with the way we’re eating? What foods/drinks do we want to encourage and discourage in our house?

Session 3: Work-Family-Ministry Balance

- **Work**
 - Are we happy with the current work schedule?
 - How are things going at home? How does the wife feel about her responsibilities as a homemaker—overwhelmed and frustrated? Content and organized? Somewhere in-between?
 - How can we adjust things to make our home-life run more smoothly? How can I (the husband) serve and support you (the wife) in your ministry in the home?
 - Do we want to make a schedule to manage tasks and responsibilities?

- **Children**
 - Name one thing about each of our children that brings you great joy.
 - What are each of our kids struggling with? What can we do to shepherd them through these struggles?
 - Are we prepared for the next stage of development? (For example, if our son is almost done learning the alphabet, are we already thinking about how to teach him phonics?)
 - In general, how are we doing raising our children? What can we do to improve our parenting? What do we want to keep the same and what do we want to change in order to shepherd our kids well spiritually?
 - What are our specific objectives/goals for the next 6 months or year?
 - What are our long-term goals for our children?
 - The husband asks the wife: Have I shown godly leadership in the area of parenting? Or, have I abdicated my leadership in this area?
 - Is the father getting to spend enough time with each of the children?
 - In what ways is mother discouraged and encouraged about the children?
 - Do we have a good roster of babysitters that we trust? What do we want them to do with the children when they are babysitting?
 - How do we portray church to our children? Do we speak positively or negatively of church in front of the kids?
 - Are we being consistent in showing Christ to our children when they are being corrected?

- **Family**
 - How has your love for our family grown?
 - How are we as a family? Are we happy with family nights and family time together?
 - How are we doing with family worship? What can we do to improve our time in family worship?
 - How can we use Sunday afternoons/evenings well unto the Lord?
 - How do we want to think about date night? When should it be? What types of things would we like to talk about to ensure that we are relating well?
 - Is there something *new* we might do together that would bring greater joy to our marriage/family?

- Are you still cleaving (Gen 2:24) to your extended family (especially your parents) and how does that need to change?
- **Friendships and Extended Family**
 - What specific relationships would you like to intentionally to cultivate for discipling purposes?
 - Any friendships you want to cultivate?
 - How is our relationship with your parents and grandparents? Siblings? Nieces & Nephews? And your in-laws?
 - What stressors does our extended family bring upon us? Are we coping with these stressors in a godly way?
 - Are we planning any trips to see extended family this year?
 - How can we bring encouragement to the Christians in our extended family?
 - How can we be more evangelistic with the non-Christians in our extended family?
- **Ministry and Church**
 - What ministries did you participate in this past year? How can I be more supportive of your ministry endeavors?
 - Do we share a ministry together as a couple? Are we happy with our ministry?
 - What should be our ministry goals for this upcoming year (i.e., Bible study, hospitality and fellowship, charity work/support)?
 - Do you delight in being involved in church? If so, name one thing about our church that currently brings you great joy.
 - Name one thing that would increase your joy in church?
 - How can we be an encouragement to the elders and staff at our church?
 - How can we (as a couple) foster greater unity in our church?
- **Finances**
 - What are our debts?
 - What are our monthly liabilities?
 - What's our income?
 - Where and to whom do we want to give our money (church, missionaries, etc.)?
 - What's our budget (i.e., spending priorities and goals for the year)?
 - What are our savings goals and what do we need to do to implement them?
 - How do we want to manage our finances on an ongoing basis (i.e., who should manage, what software, etc.)?
 - The husband asks the wife: Have I shown godly leadership in the area of finances? Note: this does not mean the husband does all the work, but it does mean (at the very least) he charts the direction for the family budget and keeps up-to-date on how the finances are going.
 - The wife asks the husband: Have I shown a willingness to follow the budget priorities you set for our family?

- **Fun & Recreation**
 - Are there any hobbies you want to cultivate?
 - Are there cultural outings and events you'd like to do this year?
 - When/where do we want to take family vacation(s)?
 - Do we want to plan any day trips away this year? Where?
 - What about any one-nighters just the two of us?

- **Future**
 - The husband asks the wife: Name one thing I can do that would cause you to feel *more* confident in our future direction.
 - What are our goals for the next year...
 - ...as parents?
 - ...as husband and wife?
 - ...financially?
 - ...spiritually?

- **Wrap-Up**
 - On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate our marriage?
 - Keeping in mind on everything we have talked about, how can we make our marriage a 10?
 - Is there anything else that we should discuss?

Bonus Session

For those of you who want even more questions for the car ride home, here are a few additional things you can ask your spouse:

- How does it feel when I....(name something that you know displeases or discourages her)
- What goes through your mind when I...(name something that you know displeases or discourages her).
- What specifically would you like to see me do to change...(name something that you know displeases or discourages her).
- How does it feel when I....(name something that you know pleases or encourages her)
- What goes through your mind when I...(name something that you know pleases or encourages her).
- Name one godly attribute you would like me to develop or one personal goal you would like me to achieve this year. How can you help me to pursue this attribute/goal?
- Name one godly attribute would you like to develop or personal goal you would like to achieve this year. How can I help you to pursue this attribute/goal?

- If you have been helped by this marriage check-up or you have suggestions to make it better, please email *Deepak [at] capbap [dot] org*.
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- Copyright: You are encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and you do not charge a fee.
- Thanks to Ryan & Sebastian for letting me rework and expand a shorter format that they use with their wives.
- References: There are lots of questions that I have written, but there are also questions that have been taken and adjusted from Don Whitney's *10 Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, Lou Priolo's *The Complete Husband*, Tom Elliff's *Marital Questions*.