A Do-It-Yourself Marriage Retreat  
By Deepak Reju

General Idea
Most couples talk about problems, tasks, and other matters as a normal part of daily life, but rarely do they set aside a focused period time to survey their marriage. The purpose of this marriage retreat is to help you check-in with your spouse to see how your marriage is doing. It’s a health check-up for your marriage. How is your marriage doing? What would your spouse say? What would you say?

Where you go and how much time you spend away either can add a lot or take away from the experience, but the most important thing is to have fun, fellowship and really good conversations. So the goal is simple—to get away from the frantic pace of life and focus on your spouse. Get a barometer reading on how your marriage is doing now, so that years later, you don’t find yourself married to a stranger.

To assist you in this endeavor, I’ve provided a wide array of questions to help you get a glimpse at the landscape of your marriage. I’ve given you questions to guide your conversation, and so that you don’t have to come up with questions on your own!

A caveat: The format, organization, and content of this retreat ultimately doesn’t matter as much as the spirit of this, so the most important step is setting aside time to talk about your marriage.

How a Retreat Helps Your Marriage
So a marriage retreat is an attempt to create space in your life to talk about your marriage. You probably already talk some about your marriage, so why do you need me to help you? Because in your day-to-day conversations, you don’t get to do much more than problem solve, joke around, talk through logistics, talk about the weather or your kids or your plans for dinner, etc. Day-to-day conversations often lack depth because there just isn’t time to talk. So how about getting away for a weekend and giving yourself time to talk more in depth? (If you are the wife, you’re loving this thought; and mono-syllabic husbands, some of you are freaking out right now. Don’t worry; it’s actually not that painful, and often times, this is very useful.)

Think of your daily life as a battle in the trenches. A marriage retreat is like flying in a plane at 30,000 feet. You get to survey the entire landscape of your marriage in one sweep. You can see the big picture, which is much harder to do when you’re daily battling through life in the trenches. The chaos of normal life leaves few opportunities to step back and get a glimpse of the bigger picture. I’m hoping this marriage retreat would create an annual excuse for you to get away for a weekend and try to have larger, more comprehensive conversations about your marriage.
The *When* and *How* of a Marriage Retreat

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

1. Ideally you would set 1-2 days aside every year to get away with your spouse, 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, and pray.

2. For many parents, a weekend retreat is not always possible, so at the very least you can go for an extended dinner where you talk through a few questions. I have met 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 one 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 you see fit.

Try to cover as many of the general categories as you can so you can to survey different 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 a godly couple or a pastor in your church.

Practical Tips to Enrich Your Retreat

*Tip #1:* 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. (There are seven pages of questions, so there is no way to do them all in one weekend!)

*Tip #2:* 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). Pray matters, so we must go to the Lord and ask for his help.

*Tip #3:* 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.

*Tip #4:* Don’t spend the entire time analyzing your marriage. A good marriage retreat will entail lots of fun with your spouse, including time when you are *not* talking about your marriage, but simply enjoying time with one another.
Session 1: The Past and our God of Providence

• Remember the past year
  o 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 in December. I know that this has created a more free time for me to spend with you and the kids.”)
  o 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.
  o 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

  o 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 and prayer)
    ▪ Am I spending consistent, quality time with the Lord? Is my relationship with the Lord stagnant, boring, slowly progressing, or growing at a steady pace? If none of these words describe your relationship with the Lord, what word would you use?
    ▪ 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?
    ▪ How can we improve our prayer life, both individually and as a couple?
    ▪ 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?
    ▪ 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. How would you encourage me to do to deal with this 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 I have encouraged you spiritually and helped you in your relationship with Christ.
    ▪ 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.)? When was the last time we did it together?
  - 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?
- When was the last time we had a meaningful conversation about something other than our kids or schedules?
- 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)? When was the last time I said “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you”?
  - When was the last time I said “thank you” for an ordinary task like making dinner, paying the bills, doing the dishes, fixing the car, or folding the laundry?
  - When was the last time I (cheerfully) asked, “How can I help you this week?”
  - Name one way that I communicate that is helpful for our marriage.
- 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)?
    - Give a cold-shoulder or silent treatment?
  - Are there hurts, sins, or fears that we need to disclose to one another?
  - Are there ways we can improve our communication?

**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?
- Do I tell you “I love you” often enough? What should I do to show my love?

○ **Sex, Intimacy, Affection**
  - 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?
  - Do we ever hold hands?
  - Has our physical intimacy grown cold, infrequent or the source of too much stress or pressure?

**Session 3: Work-Home-Family-Ministry Balance**

○ **Work**
  - Are we happy with the husband or wife’s current work schedule?
  - What challenges are you facing at your work?
  - What joys do your experience at your job?
  - How can I be more of a support to your work? (and vice-versa)
  - How can we show a healthy interest and support to one another’s careers?
  - How is your evangelism in the workplace?
  - How is the balance between work and home going? Is there adjustments that need to be made?
  - What are your career goals? Have you attained them? What is needed to progress further?
  - Is there further career training (designations, degrees, etc.) needed, and if so, at what cost? When will you do this training? How will this training help in your current or a future career?

○ **Home**
  - 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?
  - Is our home an inviting place for friends, family or others to gather?
  - Is our home an inviting place for our kids’ friends to gather?
Children
- Name one thing about each of our children that brings you great joy.
- Do we consistently and properly love our children?
- Do we consistently and properly discipline our children?
- Do we support one another in front of the children?
- 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 the most important character traits we want to see our children develop?
- 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?
- Are our children involved in church?
- Are our children showing wisdom in their choice of friends?
- How are our children doing with their extra-circular activities? Are they benefiting from these activities? Are these activities in any way too costly (financially or time) for our family? Do they have too many activities?

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 change or 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?

  o **Friendships and Extended Family**
    - What specific relationships would you like to intentionally to cultivate for discipling purposes?
    - Any friendships you want to cultivate? Are there specific people you’d like to get to know better?
    - Are there people in our neighborhood or church that we should help, befriend or care for?
    - 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?

  o **Ministry and Church**
    - If we are not going to church regularly, what changes should we make to be more consistent in our attendance?
    - Are we active or passive in our involvement in 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? If so, 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 our 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.
    - Name one thing that is hard/difficult about our church. Can we start praying about this difficult thing?
    - 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?

  o **Finances**
    - How are we doing with our financial situation? Are we content with it or do we need to improve it?
    - What are our debts? Is this an acceptable amount? Do we have a plan for dealing with our debt?
    - What are our monthly liabilities? Are there an unnecessary expenditures that we can get rid of?
    - 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 we set for our family?
- How do we handle allowances for our children?
- Are we saving for the children’s education?
- Are we saving enough for retirement? What should our perspective on retirement be in light of our calling?

- **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?

- **Personal Health**
  - Are we getting enough exercise? If not, what can we do to improve our exercise?
  - Are we happy with the way we’re eating? What foods/drinks do we want to encourage and discourage in our house? How can we improve our eating habits or our family’s eating habits?
  - What do we want to commit to in terms of health and exercise?
  - Are we getting enough sleep? If not, what can we do to improve our sleep habits?

- **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?
  - What do we want our marriage to look like five years from now?
Wrap-Up

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate our marriage?
- Is our marriage headed in the right direction? Are we growing closer and is the relationship maturing?
- 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.
- Updated: January 2016.
- 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, Kevin DeYoung’s End-of-Year Marriage Check-up, and Mike Farrell’s Goal Planning Weekend.