



Nine Questions To Ask Your Spouse

To Strengthen Your Marriage

*The right questions
asked in the right way can
determine the trajectory
of your relationship.*

It takes skill to use questions well —
and that skill can be developed. Here's
what you need to know.



A friend once asked me, “Have you stopped ignoring your wife?”

If I answered yes, it implied that I had been ignoring her in the past. If I answered no, it implied that I had been ignoring her and was still ignoring her. I felt as if I were on the witness stand with the prosecutor saying, “Just answer the question — yes or no.” It was a no-win situation.

Most husbands and wives don’t intentionally use these types of trick questions when communicating with their spouse. But if they aren’t intentional about phrasing and framing their questions in a winsome way, their spouse can feel manipulated or trapped.

Which question would get a better response if someone wanted to talk to a spouse about his or her current physical condition?

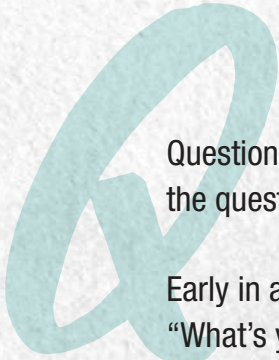
- **“So, how have you been feeling lately?”**
- **“So, how much do you weigh now?”**

The first question can open dialogue. The second question shuts it down.

Asking questions effectively is both an art and a science. The *right questions* asked in the *right way* determine the trajectory of your relationship. It takes skill to use questions well — and that skill can be developed.

Becoming a master questioner

I bought a chain saw several years ago to trim a large tree in our yard. The instruction manual began with 10 pages of safety instructions. I wanted to jump to the good stuff — how to make it work so I could start cutting off branches. But if I ignored those safety instructions, I could end up cutting off the wrong limbs — my own instead of the tree's.



Questions are powerful tools, so they need to be used with precision and care. It's not just the questions you ask, but the way you use them.

Early in a relationship, you ask questions for information: "Where did you grow up?" "What's your favorite food?" "What brings you the most satisfaction?" You're learning about each other, and information is important.

As your relationship matures, the questions should become more intentional, and your skills at asking them need to be honed. If you're asking the same questions you did in the beginning, it's tough to move your relationship forward.

Questions that strengthen relationships aren't primarily about gaining information; they're about gaining understanding. Information makes us more knowledgeable; understanding makes us connected. Seeing things through your spouse's eyes enables you to see his or her heart.

That's what Jesus did. According to Martin B. Copenhaver in his book *Jesus Is the Question*, the Gospels record 307 questions that Jesus asked. Those questions were intentionally designed to affect people at the heart level. If He had only told people what to do, they would just be getting more teaching. But by asking precise and appropriate questions, He allowed them to discover the answers they needed.

Jesus' questions to the Pharisees challenged their hypocrisy; His questions to people in need were based on His compassion.

- **One person came with honest questions, and Jesus "looked at him and loved him." (Mark 10:21)**
- **He showed concern in some of His questions: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Luke 18:41)**

In marriage, the goal of our questions isn't to show who's right. It's to build trust between each other, which comes through compassion. But how do you ask the right questions?

A simple process for asking effective questions

Here are some practical ideas you can use to make sure your questions strengthen your relationship.



- **Ask one question at a time. To encourage deeper discussions, make sure you ask open-ended questions rather than questions that can be answered with yes or no.**
- **Don't interrupt or defend yourself while your spouse is talking. Your only goal is to hear your husband or wife completely.**
- **Listen just to understand, not to formulate your reply.**
- **Explore your spouse's thoughts by asking a deeper follow-up question. It shows that you're listening and takes the conversation to another level. But don't add questions that take the conversation in a new direction.**
- **Tell your spouse you want to think through what he or she said, and that you'll come back later with your thoughts.**

Taking time to ask questions in this way demonstrates that you're more interested in hearing your spouse's perspective than correcting it. That builds trust, which opens the door to even more effective conversation in the future.

Sample questions to ask your spouse

If you're not quite sure where to start, you can try out some of these questions and follow-up questions.



1 What are some things that we used to do that you would like to do again? What did you most enjoy about those things?

2 What things about our life together make you happy? How frequently do you notice those things?

3 What's something you'd like to do together that we've never done? What makes it so inviting to you?

4 What was the last thing I did for you that you really enjoyed? What made it so pleasant for you?

5 Which of our couple friends or acquaintances do you admire the most? What is it about their relationship that impresses you?



6

What is the best part about being together? How does that make you feel?

7

What makes us a good team? What could we do to be an even better team?

8

When was a time you felt that I listened to you really well? What would you like us to discuss but have been hesitant to bring up?

9

On a scale of 1 to 10, how am I doing as a husband or wife? What one little thing could I do that would move that up a notch?

Conversations become more impactful when you ask follow-up questions. When you listen carefully and continue exploring your spouse's perspectives, you've shown respect and care. You've made it more about your husband or wife than about the issue.

A question of motive

What if negative information comes out? That could be challenging, but those issues will eventually surface anyway. If you regularly ask meaningful questions, you'll build the intimacy needed to have those tough conversations when they occur.



Pick a time in the next few weeks when you'll try the techniques explained above. Make the environment comfortable and natural, and simply try to see things through your spouse's eyes.

Here's the key to asking powerful questions that can strengthen your relationship:

**Care deeply, listen deeply.
Then watch your relationship grow!**



Dr. Mike Bechtle is a speaker and the author of *People Can't Drive You Crazy If You Don't Give Them the Keys*.

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