

1. What would you say to someone considering this retreat?

The retreat was an incredibly enriching experience, far exceeding our expectations. Over the course of those four days, we journeyed through a spectrum of emotions—laughing until our sides hurt, sharing heartfelt tears, and deepening our love for one another in ways we hadn't anticipated.

What stood out most was the profound sense of safety and support we felt throughout. The environment was perfectly conducive to exploring our personal histories, examining our beliefs, and addressing the complexities of our lives without fear of judgment. This safe space allowed us to delve deeply into our own experiences and vulnerabilities, knowing we were backed by a compassionate community.

During the retreat, I experienced a remarkable closeness with my wife. We not only connected on a deeper emotional level but also gained practical tools and insights that we're eager to integrate into our daily lives. The retreat has equipped us with the resources to enhance our relationship and navigate our future together with renewed strength and understanding.

2. What are three things about the retreat that were most beneficial?

First, the Communication Bridge exercise was invaluable. Having dedicated breakout time with Phil allowed me to deeply explore and articulate my feelings before sharing them with my wife. This focused introspection helped me to more clearly and effectively communicate my emotions and needs, ultimately enhancing our dialogue and mutual understanding.

Second, developing a clear purpose and vision for our family, along with actionable strategies, was incredibly impactful. For my wife and me, aligning our goals and aspirations is crucial for maintaining harmony and direction in our relationship. I am eager to return home and build on the conversations we started, as we work together to solidify our shared purpose, vision, and strategic plans for the future.

Third, the repair attempt strategies were eye-opening. Understanding the specific ways in which my wife needs me to demonstrate my efforts to mend and improve our relationship was enlightening. It was gratifying to see her have similar realizations as I shared my insights, as these moments of mutual understanding pave the way for more effective and empathetic communication between us.

3. What if anything would you change?

I genuinely can't think of anything I would change about the retreat. From the moment we arrived, we were enveloped in an overwhelming sense of love and care. Throughout our time there, we repeatedly found ourselves asking, "What did we do to deserve this?"

As a couple who is constantly pouring our energy into others, it was initially challenging for us to fully accept the outpouring of service and support directed towards us. However, we are profoundly grateful that we allowed ourselves to receive it. The experience has left us feeling rejuvenated and equipped with a rich toolkit of insights and strategies. We're now returning home not only refreshed but also eager to put these new tools into practice and continue our mission of serving His kingdom with renewed vigor and clarity.

4. What, if anything, about this retreat surprised you?

I was truly surprised to discover how what might appear to be minor issues in our marriage can actually be deeply intertwined with intense emotional backstories. Through various activities and exercises, it became clear how profoundly our personal histories and origins influence the way we react, respond, and interpret situations.

The retreat provided me with the invaluable opportunity to gain insight into my wife's backstory and origin. This experience deeply touched my heart and allowed me to develop a greater empathy and understanding for her. It challenged me to look beyond her initial reactions and responses, recognizing the underlying emotions and experiences that shape her responses. This newfound perspective has fostered a more compassionate approach to our interactions and has significantly strengthened our connection.

5. What parts of the process were most helpful to you?

Without a doubt, the Communication Bridge exercise was the standout element for me. It proved to be an incredibly invaluable tool in our journey. Watching Phil and Vicky seamlessly employ this technique in real-time was both enlightening and inspiring. They seemed to effortlessly navigate through complex conversations, and it became clear that this process was second nature to them.

Learning this method and then applying it ourselves was a transformative experience. With each practice session, we became more adept at using the Communication Bridge, finding that it increasingly facilitated our discussions. The process not only helped us articulate our feelings more clearly but also allowed us to reach mutually agreeable solutions. More importantly, it provided us with deeper insights into the underlying issues contributing to our pain, leading to more understanding and empathy between us. The ability to address and resolve conflicts with this tool has been a game-changer for our communication and overall relationship.

6. Were any parts of the retreat challenging for you?

As a man, I often find vulnerability to be a challenging and uncomfortable experience, particularly in one-on-one settings. However, Phil and Vicky's warm and welcoming presence played a crucial role in easing my apprehension. Their genuine openness and willingness to model vulnerability themselves created a safe environment that encouraged me to open up more freely.

Despite this supportive atmosphere, I still found it difficult at times to access my emotional core during some of the activities. It's all too easy for me to remain in my headspace, analyzing and overthinking rather than truly connecting with my feelings. Phil was instrumental in helping me bridge this gap; he consistently guided me to shift my focus from intellectualizing my thoughts to engaging more deeply with my heart. His gentle encouragement and insightful prompts made a significant difference, helping me to experience and express my emotions more authentically.

7. In what ways did the setting, location, and meals help your experience?

I genuinely felt as though we were at an all-inclusive retreat, where every detail was thoughtfully attended to. At times, I found myself questioning whether we truly deserved such an outpouring of love and attention, but the experience was nothing short of extraordinary.

The meals were a highlight, impeccably balanced and delicious. Phil and Vicky went above and beyond to understand our preferences, including any dietary restrictions or dislikes, and they tailored the culinary experience to suit our needs perfectly. Each meal was not only satisfying but also a delightful treat.

The home itself was both beautiful and inviting, offering a perfect blend of communal spaces for collaboration and private areas for relaxation. It struck a wonderful balance between openness and intimacy, especially when it came time for rest.

We also appreciated the variety in session locations, which shifted from indoor settings to outdoor spaces and even the dock. This variety kept the environment dynamic and refreshing, enhancing our overall experience and engagement. The change of scenery was a fantastic touch, contributing to a sense of adventure and discovery throughout our time there.

8. What features of this retreat were different from other marriage classes, etc?

We had never attended a marriage retreat that extended beyond a single day's workshop, so the extended format of this retreat was a new and profoundly enriching experience for us. Being able to leave our children behind and focus exclusively on our relationship, along with the exceptional guidance of Phil and Vicky, was truly remarkable. It allowed us to immerse ourselves in each other without the usual distractions of daily life—no kids, family obligations, or other activities pulling our attention away.

This uninterrupted time together provided a unique opportunity to reconnect deeply and invest in our relationship in ways that are often difficult in our busy lives. The date night was a particularly special feature. It offered us a dedicated space to reflect on what we had learned, discuss our plans for implementing new insights, and simply enjoy each other's company in a relaxed setting.

To be honest, the thought of not experiencing something as transformative as this again is a bit disheartening. The retreat offered us an invaluable space for growth and connection, and it's hard to imagine when or how we might have the chance to engage in such a meaningful experience again.

9. What would you say about your hosts?

Finding the right words to describe Phil and Vicky feels almost impossible because their impact was so profound. They meticulously considered every detail to ensure our experience was exceptional. Their warmth and intentionality were evident in every interaction—they made us feel genuinely welcomed and cared for from the moment we arrived. They were not just hosts but became like family to us. We shared moments of laughter, tears, and prayer, and felt a deep sense of connection and love together. Their genuine care and thoughtful engagement created an environment where we could truly be ourselves and experience profound growth.

10. What did they do to make you feel safe, seen and heard?

What impressed me most about them was their remarkable ability to perceive and understand the state of our hearts in various situations. I often struggle to articulate certain emotions, and even when I manage to find the words, it can be challenging to convey the depth of my feelings. Yet, Phil and Vicky had an extraordinary gift for sensing where we were emotionally and adapting their approach to meet us there. Their keen intuition and empathetic support significantly enriched our experience throughout the weekend.

11. What impact will this retreat have on your family? Your ministry?

My wife and I are eagerly looking forward to implementing the tools we learned during the retreat and starting to apply them right away. We're also excited about the opportunity to model these tools for our children. What better way to demonstrate the love of God to them than by investing in and nurturing our marriage in their presence? By actively working on our relationship, we hope to show them the importance of love and commitment in a tangible, meaningful way.

We're particularly enthusiastic about reducing the frequency and duration of the "break time" in our repair cycle, aiming to resolve conflicts more swiftly so we can get back to enjoying our time together.

Moreover, many of the tools we learned will be invaluable in our ministry. At the very least, they will serve as conversation starters, prompting discussions that encourage growth and learning among those we serve. As we continue to become more comfortable and proficient with these tools, we anticipate being able to integrate them even more effectively into our ministry efforts, further enhancing our ability to support and challenge others on their own journeys.

12. What other feedback?

Thank you so much for the incredible work you do. Your dedication and service truly embody the hands and feet of Jesus, and it has made a profound impact on us. We often find that our own cups are filled as we serve others, but this weekend, your exceptional care and generosity have overflowed our cups in ways we could never have anticipated.

Your service to us went above and beyond, providing us with an abundance of support, love, and attention. We are deeply grateful for the way you have poured into us, and we recognize the significant difference it has made in our lives. Your efforts have not only replenished us but also inspired us to carry forward the same spirit of service in our own lives. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and for blessing us with such a transformative experience.