

## Leader Interview

### Scott Ridout Lead Pastor, Sun Valley Community Church, Gilbert, Az.

*Author note: On the weekend of October 19, 2013 Pastor Scott Ridout, a leading pastor in the Phoenix area, invited me to do a pastoral interview on my findings about men and women for a sermon series he was doing on relationships. Between services, I had a few minutes to share with him what I learned in The Good News About Marriage research. He shared a few thoughts afterward that are valuable for other pastors and counselors who work with marriages.*

**Pastor Scott:** Unfortunately, the shocking negative stats get the attention. But that gives a very wrong impression that most people give up when the going gets tough. My parents were together 53 years, my wife's 52 years. Both had trouble and fought through it. So my wife and I thought of divorce as just not an option.

When we would have trouble, I would say: My wife is not my enemy. My wife is my partner. Satan is the enemy. It wasn't fighting to "win," it was fighting for my marriage.

I know couples who come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, and have gone through terrible periods and God has redeemed their marriages. But here's what I realized: The difference between our marriage and their marriages has been entirely about perspective.

When my wife and I fight, there's no fear this is going to end us. But for these couples, it was bad. They had seen things end. So they really worried it could end. And because that was their perspective, I really think they handled things a certain way because of it.

But they made it through, and now, today, their stories show others they can make it through.

**Shaunti:** When you say that people handle things differently because they think things could actually end, can you give me an example?

**Pastor Scott:** There are a lot of things. For example, these couples are more quick to jump to the negative assumptions. And that only adds into this broad problem of focusing on the negative anyway. Like this belief that we have that most marriages aren't happy, that you're saying isn't true.

When guys or girls get together socially, I think the first instinct is often to complain about their significant other. It could be minor; 'It drives me crazy that he didn't put dishes in dishwasher.' And that doesn't mean they are unhappy. But because everyone hears that kind of complaining regularly, it seems that most people might be unhappy.

With one of these couples, the husband was a friend. And during the time he was having these massive problems in his marriage, we would meet regularly for fellowship and prayer. And I would mention stuff too. I would say, "Lisa and I had a big argument about something with our son last night."

And he was being raw about these huge trust issues he was having. So he told me, “I look at your problems and think, ‘Dude, you don’t even know what problems are.’”.

Once he and his wife got through their crisis and out the other side, some years later he came to me and said, “I have to apologize to you. Now that we’re through the awful stuff and we have a normal marriage, a good marriage, but still have our issues, I realize that when you’re in the middle of it, yes, even those ‘little’ problems seem big because they are what you are living in at the time.”

**Shaunti:** That is so true. And like you were saying earlier, it is so easy to lose perspective.

**Pastor Scott:** Here’s the key: I tell couples, “You find what you’re looking for.” If I look for issues with Lisa, I can find them because they are there somewhere. And with me, if she looks for issues with me, she can find them, because they certainly are there.

The key to marital happiness is to change our expectations... because we’re human. And to laugh about it when we make mistakes and the other person makes mistakes instead of getting our nose bent out of joint. You find what you’re looking for.

**Shaunti:** That is a great way of putting it. I know I certainly do that. The stuff I focus on, is what becomes more and more apparent to me. I see it more.

**Pastor Scott:** Its human nature. Just as it is human nature to see fault in others and miss it in ourselves! [Rueful laugh] It’s amazing how much I demand grace and give judgment.

**Shaunti:** Do you mind if I come back to something you said about *The Good News About Marriage* research?

**Pastor Scott:** Please.

**Shaunti:** What would a pastor do differently, knowing the good news? What difference might it make?

**Pastor Scott:** We probably should change our approach to creating awareness of the need to work on marriage. I hate to say it, but I have quoted every one of those bad statistics you just mentioned.

**Shaunti:** I have too. I think most of us have.

**Pastor Scott:** I think as pastors, we sometimes feel like we have to create a crisis of awareness to draw attention to something. Just a few weeks ago when we started this current marriage series, I asked people, ‘Think right now of your friends having trouble in their marriage. They need this upcoming message. Look around you... Half of us are struggling. We have to take this seriously.’

We try very hard here to instill hope in every other area, but in talking about marriages, we are putting a seed of doubt into people. And that isn’t something we should be doing. Hope is what you want to give as a leader. We say God is a redeemer. He takes what is broken, fallen, and seems unfixable and makes all things new.

**Shaunti:** What difference will it make to you, personally, knowing the real data?

**Pastor Scott:** Well, I can't use my old stats, that's for sure! But more than that, we own up to things here, and I think I will want to own up to this one—to tell the congregation we were wrong and didn't realize it. We would actually say, 'This may have had a negative effect on you or discouraged you, and we're sorry. Because the truth is better than fiction. Even if your marriage isn't in a happy place, realize happy doesn't mean perfect. Happy means you put the marriage in front of the issue, and the commitment overrides everything.'

When it comes to addressing problems, I live on the solution side, not the problem side. I want people to know, "We've gone through other things and I can get through this." And speaking of solutions...when it comes to encouraging my folks to invite friends to come to church, it helps to know that church helps!

**Shaunti:** I like what you said about living on the solution side, not the problem side?

**Pastor Scott:** Did you know I had vertigo badly? Well, I had vertigo for more than a year, and during that time I journaled for the first time ever. I realized I was journaling problems not solutions – with my family, with my work, with my posture toward life ('I'm so tired. People always and only want things from me.')

So at the bottom of my journal every day I started to write this:

Lord, help me to adore and cherish my wife and kids.

Help me to lead with moral character.

Help me to be generous to someone today.

I realized: I'll fight this with generosity. And the vertigo left and hasn't come back. It was stress. My frame of mind was literally making me sick. Not just with being generous instead of resentful, but in every area.

At work, I was stressed about making all the right decisions. But I realized: character matters more than being perfect. When it came to marriage and family, I realized 'love' was not the right word I needed – it seemed too vague. I used 'adore and cherish.'

A generous frame of mind, a hopeful frame of mind, is so necessary for us as individuals, as churches, as a culture. That commitment, that hope, today drives me the right way. Others need this hope as well.