

Scott: Resurrection Year, this is Stay Happily Married Episode number 287.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Scott: I'm Scott Blair, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show.

Are your broken dreams affecting your relationship? From childhood to adulthood, we have all had hopes and dreams for our futures. As children, we dreamed of becoming presidents, police officers, astronauts, pilots, and firefighters. As we age into teenagers and young adults, our dreams consist of going to college to get our degrees, and traveling the world. As adults, we dream of things like having a family and climbing the corporate ladder.

When you get married, some of your hopes and dreams may become morphed together as both of you want each other to achieve your dreams. You may want to start a family or move to the other side of the country. But what happens when these dreams die or fail, how can this affect your relationship and how do you move on?

Earning his degrees in ministry and communication, Mr. Sheridan Voysey has been broadcasting for 18 years, as well as speaking professionally for 12 years. Mr. Voysey has interviewed over 2,000 people in his broadcasting career and won an award for services to Australian broadcasting in 2011. He is an author of five books, including the most recent, "Resurrection Year: Turning Broken Dreams Into New Beginnings."

Welcome to the show, Sheridan. I'm so glad that you could join us today.

Sheridan: Oh, it's great to be with you Scott. Thanks for your time.

Scott: Your new book is called "Resurrection Year: Turning Broken Dreams, Into New Beginnings." So let's dive right into this. What exactly is a resurrection year?

Sheridan: I would describe a resurrection year as a year of new life following the death of something. Now it's a lovely phrase, isn't it? I wish I could take some sort of credit for the phrase, but it's actually my friend, Adrian Plass, who's quite a well-known author here in the U.K., who mentioned to me one day, he said, "Look, after listening to what you and your wife have been through over the last ten years, I think what you guys need is a year of new life.

What you need is a resurrection year, and it was certainly a wonderful phrase that certainly caught our hearts, and boy, set us on a new direction that we hadn't contemplated before that.

Scott: what exactly does it mean for you guys?

Sheridan: Oh, I'll give you the context. I'll give you the background. It was the year 2000 that my wife, Merryn, walked into the kitchen and I think I was getting some wine together or something. And she said, "Honey, I think it's time," and I said, "It's time for what?" And she said, "I think it's time we started a family," and she was right.

We were married by that stage five years. We were in a stable situation. We weren't moving around the country as we had been before. We were still in Australia at this stage, and we decided, yes, that was the right time to start a family, and as any couple who makes that decision knows, every 28 days after that decision, you're looking for signs of success. You're looking for signs that you have got a baby on the way.

Scott: Sure.

Sheridan: And for many couples that happens the first month. For a lot of other couples there's a bit of disappointment. Maybe another month of disappointment, maybe a third month of disappointment. Well for us, the pattern went something along the lines of this: expectation, disappointment; expectation, disappointment; expectation, disappointment; expectation, disappointment; expectation disappointment; for nine months.

And after that we decided to get some tests done, and the tests revealed there was a problem, particularly on my side, and that without either a divine miracle or some sort of technological assistance, we were going to find conception very, very difficult.

And, Scott, from that point on that really started off what became a ten year journey to try and have a child. And you name it, we tried it, IVF, adoption, special diets. We're Christians so we tried healing prayer. You name it, we tried it. And ten years later, we still had nothing to show for it.

Scott: And is it this at the point that your friend mentioned to you that you guys were due for a resurrection year?

Sheridan: Sure was. I had Adrian on my radio show in Australia, and we got talking off air, and we've gotten to know each other over the years. And so I actually shared with him a little bit about where my wife and I were at. We're at the end of the ten year situation by that stage, and we're in a pretty bad state, particularly my wife, Merryn.

You can imagine just ten years of expectation followed by disappointment. She was in a pretty bad state. And Adrian listened very carefully, and he said, "You know that's exactly what you need. You need to take a year off to start again, to have a resurrection year."

Scott: Do you see any problems that couples might be experiencing in a relationship, that might not be the same as yours, but in which having a resurrection year for them might be beneficial as well?

Sheridan: I really do. I really do. In fact, just a few Friday nights ago, my wife and I were over and having dinner with a lovely couple who, I guess, only about six months ago were preparing to become aid workers in Africa. Now they were living in France at the time. They're now living here in the U.K., but they were living in France,

The husband of the couple went over to Africa to do some last minute final, reconnaissance tour type activities, just making sure he could arrange a place for them to live when they got over there to do their aid work. He had a very, very rare reaction to the malaria drugs that he was on, and he basically had what was a psychotic episode. As a result of that, he had to be airlifted back here to the U.K. His wife was still in France. She had to be brought to the U.K. Very suddenly their life was completely up in the air.

They hadn't experienced infertility like us, but as we were talking over dinner that night, it was fascinating to hear just the stress that that event, which, of course, was not her husband's responsibility or fault at all. The stress that it had put on the marriage, particularly the wife saying to us, "I feel angry with him all the time. I completely just keep getting real short and keep on angry, and it's really driving a huge wedge between their relationship and between each other.

That's the thing. It wasn't anybody's fault. There was no blame to be laid. There was nothing like that, but because of this huge unexpected event in their relationship, they were now struggling. And we were able to just encourage them a little bit and think about maybe you can set aside 2014 as a resurrection year.

It doesn't mean that you just stop doing all work and stop doing it well. If you have the finances, that'd be wonderful, but it does mean you just take things a bit little easier and start putting some other strategies in place. So you can kind of rebuild and start again.

Scott: Both the scenarios you're describing to me, Sheridan, I kind of see as definitely not the other person's fault. Your wife may have been having some issues, but we can't really lay the blame on you. This other wife, you said she was having issues with her husband. We can't really blame those issues on him for the malaria drugs and stuff. What about issues that are maybe somewhat our fault or our spouse's fault? Resurrection year beneficial for them is well, I'm assuming?

Sheridan: That's a brilliant, brilliant idea because, of course, many that are listening to this podcast would be in that situation where things are a little bit difficult between them and their spouse. I think that is a very, very good idea. I wrote the book, "Resurrection Year" as a memoir. It's not a how-to book, and everybody who has read it, or most of them to a "t", well certainly the people that have been making contact with us are thanking us for that.

But as I look back over that ten months that we had as our resurrection year, I can see that we really did four things and I wonder if I really just briefly go through those four things, whether it might just make a little bit of help and a little bit of sense to the people who are listening.

Scott: Sure.

Sheridan: We did four things. Number one, we took time to have some rest. People that have experienced a broken dream, people that are going through marital stress or some sort of difficulty whether it be blame -- blame can be attributed to one person or not. They're just tired,

and so we decided that this was going to be actually 2011 for us, that of 2011, our resurrection year was going to include more rest.

That meant that we pulled out of a whole heap of responsibilities that we had, responsibilities at church and all sorts of things. We would actually have some rest. Number two, we would get some recreation. I love the literal meaning of the word, recreation. It means to recreate. And so, we decided we would have a year where we would have more time doing those things that bring us life, that recreate us.

For my wife, Merryn, it's actually reading novels. She just finds them incredibly restorative. For me, it's photography, and I'd like to do photography, so I went back into those things. Number three, we found renewal. This is a spiritual component. When you're going through a difficult time, whether it be a broken dream like us, infertility, whether it be marital infidelity or something, there is a sense in which your identity is challenged, maybe even the meaning of your life, maybe even the big question of what the meaning of life is altogether.

And I think it can be really valuable for couples during their resurrection year to have an opportunity to find some sort of sense of spiritual renewal, whether it be taking a retreat, whether it be doing a pilgrimage. I did one of those last year, and it was just fantastic. Whether it be taking some seminars, reading some good books, meeting up with a mentor, connecting with a church.

Getting some sort of spiritual renewal, and really recognizing that there are some really significant questions that are raised in the season of life, and if you ask them well it can actually mean that the next season of your life is lived so much more richly than which you've previously lived.

And then the fourth thing was we found a bit of reinvention, if you like, so four R's, rest, recreation, renewal, and reinvention. And then reinvention was a certain sense of discovering a new us, a new identity after our broken dream of infertility, not being able to have a family, but also I would suggest maybe for the couple that are really wrestling with some sort of relational problem between themselves, who are we now? Who can we become individually and also as a couple?

Scott: Of course, the phrase, broken dreams, you've used that quite a bit, it's in the title of the book, "Turning Broken Dreams Into New Beginnings", and you're saying with these couples that are wrestling with this issue, at what point in time do you see that couples are becoming aware that they have a broken dream that might actually be affecting their relationship?

Sheridan: I think the issue of broken dreams is just so huge because when we go into a marriage, I don't know anybody, who goes in dreaming that they're going to get divorced, or dreaming that when the husband is over in Africa he's going to have some sort of allergic reaction to the malaria drugs, or dreaming that they're not going to be able to have a family.

Most couples, not all, but a lot of couples are going to expect that the way their life is going to work out and open up is that they're going to get married, they're going to have a family, they're going to have children.

None of us expect broken dreams, and I think what happens is that when it starts to get difficult, and when the dream starts to sully a little bit, if I can put it like that, the shine starts to come off it a bit, and we start to find that the road is difficult. That's when things can become really quite hard for us individually. That's when the little barriers can start to be raised up in between us and between our spouse.

And even though the broken dream may not be defined as such, that's when the life half, I guess, gets very very difficult. And I guess if we're speaking about this whole idea of marriage, in particular that's what we're talking about here today on this podcast, we are talking about a covenant. We're talking about an agreement, a sacred agreement, a sacred arrangement that was made between the two of us.

And I think it's really important when we start to kind of make our way through our broken dream, which we are all going to go through at some stage. Either we recognize that we originally had that 'til death do us part, or something like that in our marriage commitment to begin with. But it certainly can hit some couples very early.

I know a couple that within weeks of getting married, she came down with a very, very serious illness. That affected their marriage for probably the next three or four years after that. And, of course, many other couples, they experience something a little bit further down. Can I also give a note of hope with this as well, Scott?

Those couples that I have seen that have gone through a broken dream together, whether it be facing illness or infertility or infidelity or something, and have been able to get through the other side by clinging to each other and embracing those people around them that are there to support them, I would also believe in holding onto a higher power -- some of the strength greater than us, a personal God for me -- that they're able to have a richness in their relationship that can mean so much deeper, funnily enough, that even if they hadn't experienced that broken dream before.

Scott: Okay. So the light bulb is going off in my head, and I think I'm starting to really get what you're saying now, Sheridan. So for a lot of people you used the terminology, I think, the shine wears off in the marriage. I think at that point for a lot of us when we have that broken dream, a natural potential, I guess, is to start dreaming of another life which is escaping the life where the shine has worn off.

And that's probably how the door to affairs and a lot of other things open up in us, but you're saying the focus rather than dreaming of another life, is on resurrecting the one that we have built with our spouse.

Sheridan: And in that resurrection, you've summed it up perfectly, Scott. In that resurrection, can I also suggest that the quality of the relationship after the resurrection could be so much better than it was before the broken dream or before the crisis that happened. That is the promise.

The research in this whole area is really quite clear, isn't it? That those who run to an affair when things get difficult in the marriage, ultimately find a little bit of light again, but then they very soon find out that's because the issues that were not resolved in the first marriage, they're not resolved in the second relationship either. I

It really comes down to us resolving those things. If we can, and if we do, and if we both commit to doing that, we can be stronger than we were, even before the crisis.

Scott: Are there any patterns that you're noticing among couples that are having issues, that could be resolved by having a resurrection year. I mean, does it affect certain age groups or certain lengths to people being married or family structure?

Sheridan: You know, that's a very good question. I put it this way. Since we released "Resurrection Year" -- it came out mid last year -- It's almost as if my wife and I have been initiated into the tribe of the scarred, if you like. We have been kind of invited into this community of people that have been broken by a broken dream, whether it be infertility, or a divorce, or whether it be some sort of infidelity, or whether it be some sort of . . .

It might be a career dream that they had that never came to fruition. It might be a good career that they had that they lost. It might be a loved one that they lost, some sort of broken dream.

It's initiated us into this tribe of people that we otherwise would never have been invited into, and they're telling us all sorts of stories, horror stories, thankfully stories of hope as well, but you know some pretty difficult stuff as to what they're going through. Can I see a pattern amongst that, definitely broken dreams.

These kinds of crises can hit anybody at any time. This is a random world we live in unfortunately, and yet there does seem to be, as I just reflect over it now, particularly those couples that struggle with this, there does seem to be a quite a challenge for those couples, particularly from the 30s onwards.

And maybe that might be because we've heard from so many couples who haven't been able to have children, and the 30s onward seems to be that key time when so many couples are really trying to knuckle down and kind of develop a nest, build a nest, and build a family.

I think of a couple that came up at a book signing event, and the couple had been trying for 12 years, even more than Merryn and I, to have a family. They had tried IVF. They hadn't contemplated adoption yet, but that girl, I'll never forget her. She was in a mess, an utter mess, and I think the big thing with all of this is that for so many of the people there's a secondary dream to run to, if you like, but when it comes to, in our experience, particularly the woman who so wants to have a child, and she cannot have a child.

Then that really at a very basic level starts to challenge her sense of identity. She wants to become a mom, and that's an identity statement, she cannot become a mom. And this girl came

up and she said, "You know what? I read "Resurrection Year" and it brought tears to my eyes. It's so similar to my experience.

Unlike Merryn though, and just so you know, a bit of context, the whole story with us is that Merryn, the only other thing my wife Merryn wanted to do apart from becoming a mom, was to live and work overseas. And "Resurrection Year" is partly about us moving to the U.K. from Australia so she could have that dream fulfilled.

And this girl said, "You know what? I don't even have that. I don't even have a secondary dream. I don't even have a consolation prize." Now that couple were feeling it as a couple as well. They were feeling that sense of loss together, but what was great about that couple was that they were united in it. And that husband was already making sacrifices for his wife so that she could in some way learn to dream again, find out what it is that she loves, find out what it is that she does well.

And that was a wonderful story to see that it's not without pain. And that couple was in their 30s, and I'm seeing a lot of couples in their 30's that are struggling with these kinds of things.

Scott: So the couple that approaches you, like that, at a book signing, or the couple that sought out this episode to listen to in particular because they're unable to have a child or they're dealing with this broken dream, where do you start? What do you suggest that these couples do to help their relationship?

Sheridan: Yeah, well let's go back to those four R's. You set aside a year, and for Merryn and I, it wasn't actually a calendar year. It was a consecutive year. It was basically May, 2011, to May, 2012, but you set aside 12 months where you say okay from this point on, and once you've done the arrangements too.

For us that meant moving countries, And so, there was a lot of preparation to do, getting planes arranged, and selling up furniture and putting our house on the market, and all of those things. Now that wasn't part of the resurrection year. It was just too much work. So after you've done all the preparations that you need to do, it means you're going to have a little bit of a holiday or just going to take things differently in your daily life.

Once you've done the preparations, then plan in that rest, that recreation, that renewal. And that renewal can mean that you as a couple say okay, we're going to have a date night again like we used to have. We don't have that anymore. We're going to have that again, and it's going to be difficult for the first few weeks probably because we're going to deal with some stuff, but we're going to deal with it.

And then also that reinvention. Who can we become out of this? Is there a new us that can emerge? I heard of a really nice thing that a few couples have done where they write a vision statement out together: this is the couple we want to be. It's based on who they are. It's based on their current strengths. It's based on their abilities. It's based on their personalities.

But it also looks into the shadow side of the relationship, and it says okay, we're going to shine light into the shadows, and we're going to rewrite our story. We're going to write a vision statement based on the kind of couple we are going to become, the kind of people we are going to be, the kind of life we're going to live together. And that's really hope building, I think.

So I think that those four things, just keep on hammering away at those four things, and that could get you a good deal of the way down the track to having a good resurrection year and a good resurrected marriage.

Scott: Who can we become out of this? I love that. That is powerful. What are some of the changes that you see in the quality and interaction, maybe of your own relationship or other relationships after they go through this resurrection year together?

Sheridan: I have noticed a few things that have happened just from Merryn and me. Now, I have to confess that Merryn and I have always had a very strong relationship and a very strong marriage. I am so grateful and so thankful to God that we do because after all that we went through in those ten years, and it got pretty bad, Scott. It really, really did.

I don't know how, I just don't like to even imagine where things could have been if we weren't united from the beginning. I remember, let me give you a story as an anecdote. I remember when we first started looking into in vitro fertilization, and we sat down with an IVF counselor. And the counselor said, "Now you know that doing IVF can really bring a lot of stress into a relationship."

And we said, "Well, yes, we know. We've heard that the drugs can bring a lot of stress particularly to the woman because there's one drug that kind of stimulates egg production. There's another drug that almost puts her into like a false menopause. There's all these drugs that they take are along the IVF process. We understand that brings stress,"

And the counselor said to us, "Well yes, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm actually talking about the stress of decision making. The stress of recognizing that you're on different pages about this, maybe the wife wants to do another round of IVF and the husband doesn't. Maybe the husband does and wife doesn't.

At that conversation, my wife Merryn said to the counselor, "We've already decided that our marriage is more important than having a child, and, Scott, at that moment the counselor literally, she slumped in her chair and she lost her objective status, you know how counselors are supposed to be all objective. . .

Scott: Sure.

Sheridan: . . . and not get too involved. She lost her objective status, and she said, "Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that because just yesterday, a couple sat in the very same chairs that you're sitting in now, and in front of the husband said to me, "If this IVF doesn't work, if this round doesn't work, and doesn't result in a child, if we do not have a family as a result of doing IVF, this marriage is over.

Now that is tough, That is really, really tough, and I think the first thing would be that you just have that commitment, no matter what the crisis, no matter what the invasion into the relationship has been, no matter what the broken dream, that there is a commitment, we will walk through this together.

The worst thing that a broken dream is number one, a life defined by it, and number two, a marriage lost to it as well. So number one, be actually fully committed to each other, you'll walk through this together. If you do that, what Merryn and I found is that our relationship went so much deeper as a result because we had to draw deep within ourselves. We had to really talk about our feelings. We had to really talk about our emotions.

Like any guy, I find that hard to do sometimes, Scott, and there are times where it was all the strength that I could take just to stay in that lounge room sitting on that couch having that conversation with Merryn about IVF or about adoption. I wanted to run a million miles because I didn't want to deal with this, but boy, that took us so much deeper and stronger and brought us so much closer together as a result.

Scott: Well, Sheridan, the four R's sound like a great pattern to follow after. I'm sure this book, this memoir, is going to help a lot of people. On a final note, is there anything else you think our listeners should know, or you'd want to share with them?

Sheridan: Well, I would just love to leave on a note of hope that you really can get through. It can be really, really difficult. I mean, what does resurrection imply, if it doesn't imply a crucifixion before it? And I think that was really where my friend, Adrian, was beginning.

Speaking to me as a committed Christian, he was basically saying. "You know, Sheridan, that before the resurrection, there's a crucifixion. Before the new life, there's death. And so, yes, this life brings all sorts of horrific things into our lives and into our marriages, and into our relationships. And yet there is hope. There can be a new beginning.

I would have never expected, I never certainly planned to write a book about our experience going through infertility and broken dreams. That wasn't on my career plan at all, Scott, and yet the amount of people that have been making contact with us and sharing how much the book has changed their lives, changed their marriages, and put them onto a new path has been so incredibly fulfilling for us.

So that's something again that Merryn and I have been able to share together, albeit in completely different ways because she's a statistician, she's a mathematician. I'm the one who is a little more bit people oriented. We're different people, and yet we've been able to share in that together, so that is a bit encouraging.

Scott: Wow! Well, Sheridan, thank you so much for sharing your guys' hope with all of us and for taking the time to talk with us and being on the show today.

Sheridan: Great to talk to you, Scott. Thanks so much for your time.

Scott: To find out more about Sheridan Voysey, you can visit his website at www.sheridanvoysey.com. Thank you so much for joining us today, and I hope you will join us again next week. For more information about this show and previous episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Scott Blair. Until next time, stay happily married.

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