

# Singleness and Recovery

*By John Austin, November 6, 2021*

In recovery circles, I often hear men speak of the challenges, rewards, and losses from the perspective of marriage and fatherhood. It seems that greater emphasis is placed on married men than on single men, especially *older* single men, which, interestingly enough, is a rising demographic. While there are varying circumstances and reasons for singleness

among older men (and women for that matter), I'm going to be speaking from the perspective of one who has *never* married or had children.

In other words, someone outside the societal orthodoxy of relationships.

I'm not sure how many men (or women) there are, caught in the trap of addictions, that have never married or bore children. What I do know is that there is often an unspoken stigma assigned to those of us who aren't married and childless beyond the threshold of middle age.

For men, it's acceptable in their twenties and maybe even our thirties, to be single and childless. By our forties that view begins to wane, wondering if we'll ever be fathers or husbands. By our fifties though, the dreaded slide towards senior citizenship begins to slope at a sharper angle as we pass the point-of-no-return, on our way past the precipice of the dreaded, 'best before' date.

At that point, we wonder if we'll *ever* have a soul mate. It's a similar status as it is for women after

forty, particularly when it comes to parenthood, since *their* reproductive clocks bear a shorter shelf life. As I write this article, I am approaching fifty-seven years of age by only a couple of months, and I must say that the stigma of failure is as palpable on my soul as the infamous Mark of Cain.

While married people may politely assure us older singles that we're not failures as many of us believe, *we know better*. When they say we still fit in and belong to a 'family' of sorts, be it the body of Christ or a congregation, the stinging reality of unfertilized hereditary seed hits home hard when we sit at a pew and look longingly at a happy family assembled near us and envision ourselves in that bucolic scene. I'm not saying that it's a depressing situation for all older singles; there are those who have embraced the single life and are filled with joy at their relationship with Christ, *sans* the spouse and kids. What I am saying though, is that for many addicts, who've often left a life trail of disillusionment, peppered with terrible choices, left in a bitter vacuum of bachelorhood, the single life can be anything but joyful.

The sad truth of society's view of marital status is the implicit bias towards the promotion of marriage permeating all aspects of culture, both in the secular world as well as Christendom. Podcast host and Christian writer Thane Marcus Ringler aptly points out the sinister message inadvertently communicated to singles *subconsciously*, whenever marriage is celebrated: marriage is wonderful and fulfilling and is the best thing that can happen to a person, therefore, if you're single, you're missing out in life.

One need not look far to see this. A cursory glance at an Internet search for anything on singleness will yield a plethora of articles and websites aimed at connecting singles to each other, almost as though singleness is something awful that needs to be ended or cured (like a disease). Everywhere one looks, there are perpetual messages by sociologists and psychologists (in the secular world) and pastors (in the Christian world) that communicate every aspect of life through the prism of marriage, forgetting that there may be single people listening to a lecture or a sermon. There is a sordid lack of understanding of

what it means to be an older, lifelong single. That shouldn't be surprising when you consider that most singles ministries are headed by married people.

People are always being told how to 'love their wives or husbands better or how to raise their children to be more Christlike. There are always 'family friendly' movies and programs or 'family gospel hours' at churches. We have *Focus on the Family* straddling the radio airwaves, but I've yet to see a program called 'Focus on Singles.'

If there's anything for singles, it's usually only aimed at *young* singles, expecting them to join the ranks of the married. The point Thane Marcus Ringler made is that, "a direct effect of hearing only one side of the story (marriage being good) is that singles subconsciously feel devalued."

I couldn't agree with him more, even though he's married and a lot younger than me. It seems there are *never* any sermons on the biblical passages that honor singleness and the important role that singles have played historically in the Kingdom of Christ. I

personally wish that pastors or teachers of the Word would preach sermons on some of God's great single people –who never married throughout their lives. To hear sermons on John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, the Prophet Daniel, Mary or Martha of Bethany or the Prophet Jeremiah would be a welcome message to my heart.

While I do believe that in God's grand design, that the vast majority of people should marry and procreate (see Genesis 1:28, 9:1) to perpetuate humanity's existence, I also believe there is a place of importance for singleness.

As the Apostle Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 7:8, he believed it was, "good to remain single," as he was, because, in 7:32-34, he explains that an unmarried man is free from the burdens of pleasing a wife and having to negotiate the challenges that come with marriage and need only concern himself with pleasing the Lord.

Our Lord Jesus drives home a cogent truth about singleness and childlessness in relation to whether or

not a person would want to marry, given the difficulties in marriage arising from the hardness of the human heart that can often lead to divorce, as we see in Matthew 19:8-12. For me it appears our Lord says to those of us who are single that if we *choose* to remain that way, this ‘eunuch lifestyle’ could be a blessed existence, patterned after someone like the prophet Daniel, whose life was utterly committed to God.

I love the irony of this passage in which Jesus uses the analogy of a eunuch—someone despised in ancient Jewish culture that would be prohibited from entering the temple because of his physical deformity—to convey the eunuch’s importance to God because of his undivided devotion. His use of the eunuch example is drawn from the ancient culture of using eunuchs in court service to kings because of their unimpeded loyalty.

When I read this passage of scripture, a healing truth satiates my scarred, confused heart like salve to a stubborn old wound.

To a man who has always felt like a social leper subsisting on the periphery of society, this divine axiom of relational living reveals a refreshing vista on the importance of the individual in the grand scheme of things. For me, being single (like being a eunuch) need not be seen as a failure. In Luke 20:34-36, Jesus further validates singleness in his discourse with the Sadducees, by telling us that in the Resurrection, those of us who belong to him will be like the angels and won't be married at all, except to Him.

Our importance—in God's view—is not gauged by our marital or parental status. I say this because, as followers of Christ, it really doesn't matter what anyone thinks about singleness or marriage if it's not validated by the Word of God.

As Psalms 119:105 tells us: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (NASB). In a sin-cursed world that mocks the sanctity of marriage and perverts the liberty of singleness, we desperately need the light of God's Word to clarify what it really means to be married or single. This is especially true for the

addict wrestling with multiple personal issues. When I see Christ's endorsement of the single life, it's like a reservoir of hope God has given to me, a former drug addict who struggles with the horrors of OCD, which is the primary reason for my singleness.

It tells me that I can actually lead a fulfilling existence without a wife and children if I'm willing to *live it for the glory of Christ*.

Christ's probing sword—His Word—cuts through layers of fallacy, exposing my toxic self-loathing that is fortified by lies from an ancient, celestial enemy who calls me a loser because I've never been married and have no children. Christ's Word can do this because it judges all thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12). It reminds me that I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

When I was living the old life of substance abuse, my mind was clouded by years of intoxication and the effects of a narcotic-saturated soul. I could ignore the harassing voice of the devil because I was right where

he wanted me –on the sidelines of life not serving Christ. The continual high from alcohol, cocaine and cannabis was a perpetual analgesic for my psychic pain of failure.

When I returned home to the Lord Jesus six years ago—as that prodigal son—my mind got cleansed from years of abuse. I had to face that pain without my metaphysical anaesthesia and be treated by the Great Physician –the One that died at Calvary. That has led me to realize that who I really am is defined by Christ Jesus, not by my marital status.

To conclude, the striking parallel between the irony of a eunuch’s place in ancient Jewish culture and the single’s place in the modern world (and the church for that matter), underscores a significant truth: that God views all of us—regardless of marital status—as individuals. He will judge us as individuals and He will grant mercy to us as individuals, just as it is echoed in scripture (Jeremiah 31:30, John 3:18).