

SINGLE BUT NOT LONELY

Interview with Emma

'I call it the society blueprint. You finish school, you get a job, you get a partner, you buy a house, children, retire. If you don't fit the blueprint, where do you fit in society?'

Celia: This is Messages of hope and I'm talking with Emma. Almost 40, with no partner or children, she's constantly faced questions like 'why aren't you married' 'you better hurry up if you want children', 'are you on Tinder?' She's also been given plenty of unwanted advice! How do you navigate society's expectations as a single person, and thrive?

Celia: There's so many reality TV shows, *Married at First Sight*, *The Bachelor*, *Love Island* and all of those things that are geared towards finding somebody and finding love and being part of a couple. How do you feel about all of that sort of stuff?

Emma: Oh, I've heard so many people say to me, 'Oh, so are you signing up for *Farmer Wants a Wife*? You'd be an amazing farmer's wife.' And you go, 'Oh really? Like, why do you feel that you have this need to tell me that I should go on a reality TV show? With all the emphasis on what it means to be a couple and all of the dynamics of relationships. And you just go, that is so distorted in what is going on in our reality, but also I don't want to have that pressure on me that I'm forced to have to do something that everyone else thinks is normal.'

Celia: So, when people say that to you, 'Why don't you go on those sorts of things?' What's your response to them?

Emma: My first initial responses are no, I probably don't have the right credentials or I'm probably not the right image for what they're looking for, or probably not dramatic enough. But internally my reaction is, 'Why do you feel you have to put that pressure on me to find someone.' Like, yes, reality TV shows are a very public sphere, but it's even in the dating world of 'Why aren't you on Tinder' or 'Why aren't you swiping left or swiping, right.' 'What about going to a dating club?' People feel there's this - and it's out of good nature - but they feel that they've got this duty to find me someone because I must be lonely.

Celia: Are they trying to solve something?

Emma: Maybe they're trying to solve it or make me fit into something that then they can relate to. Because I think one of the things I've found over time is - I call it

the society blueprint. There's this expectation that throughout life you're going to hit some milestones. So, you finish school, you get a job, you get a partner, you get married, you buy a house, you have children, your children go through school, you retire. And so, there's this lovely little blueprint, but not everyone fits the blueprint.

So, if you don't fit the blueprint, where do you fit in society? And so, for people feeling like they're solving a problem is helping you sort of hit the milestone. So, they feel like you've achieved things in your life, but not really realising that I'm actually achieving stuff in my life that doesn't have to have those milestones attached to it.

Celia: Some people would say single equals loneliness. What do you say to that?

Emma: I can't speak for everyone because for some people being single is lonely. For me, singleness is my current situation of not being married, but I am not lonely because I have people in my life that I engage with - friends or family or work colleagues. There are days when you go to the movies or whatever, and you think, 'Oh, it'd be really lovely to have someone come and join me on this.' But I've really embraced going to movies by myself. I just love it. I love getting my snacks and my coffee and sitting at the back of the movie theatre. Realistically you're sitting in a movie theatre for two and a half hours anyway, without talking, like, it doesn't matter if I'm not talking to someone because I'm actually watching the movie.

Celia: Did that take a while to become okay with that?

Emma: Oh, I think, so. Absolutely.

Celia: Is it a confidence thing for you, do you think, or is it a time thing or is it a mindset?

Emma: I think it's become both a confidence and a mindset. So, it's okay for me to go out and enjoy the things that other people would do with a partner. I shouldn't deny myself the opportunities to do that, just because I haven't got someone to come with me. So, then that's the change of the mindset as well of, you know, I want to go see this movie, my friends aren't available, or it's not their kind of movie - go by myself, you know? So, I've learned to embrace the things I love. Without having to have someone else with me.

Celia: As a single person, where do you feel loved? How do you feel that you belong?

Emma: Yeah, that is one area that I've had to become really comfortable with myself in understanding that I receive love from others in a way that needs to meet my needs. Yes, I don't have a partner who gives me that intimate love, the love that comes with marriage and partnership but I've got family and friends that now understand that serving me or supporting me is a way that they show love. So, my best friend in Queensland, when I go and spend time with her, she just loves cooking me a meal and getting me coffees and serving me.

I just come back from there feeling so loved because she has met me where I'm at because she knows that as a single person I don't have that person in my house to come home to and say 'Hey, honey, I'm home. Oh, great. You've got dinner on. That's awesome. Or you took the washing off the line. Thank you so much. That's great.' I have to do all of that myself. That's the reality of my situation. But when I go up there to be able to sit on the couch and go, 'how can I help?' And she's like, 'No, stay where you are. I'll make dinner or I'll get you a coffee.'

When my friends understand how to support me, that's how I feel loved. I can't remember the last time she asked me if I had met anybody or if I'm dating anybody. Not because she doesn't care, but because she also doesn't care! Like, she cares enough about me to not ask because she knows if someone comes along, I'll tell her.

And so, the contentment is also relying on those around you to understand who you are and to not keep questioning you about why you haven't got a partner.

Celia: Yeah, it's great when people accept you just as you are, without judgement. We often get caught up in trying to be the person that we think we should be, or the person that others think we should be. My guest today, Emma, has spent time coming to terms with the fact that her life has not necessarily unfolded according to society's blueprint.

Emma, has your life turned out how you had planned?

Emma: I think up until about oh, probably my late twenties, I assumed that I would find somebody. I was quite happy to be a little bit free with what I was doing and travel and just enjoy what the opportunities were in front of me. And then around the 27, 28 mark, I thought, well, that's a good time to get married. Yep. I'm happy to have a guy, settle down, young enough to still have children. That would be perfect. And then all of a sudden everything changed in terms of this is not happening!

Celia: So, I guess there was a bit of realisation here on your part, and maybe a bit more awareness of what people were saying to you. Were there times when people's words hurt you?

Emma: Oh yeah and being invited to different events where some days you just mentally didn't want to be in that space. Like, a baby shower, you know, people are like, 'Oh come to the baby shower' and you just sometimes had that feeling of 'I actually don't want to be here because this is a reminder for myself that I'm not in that position and I might not have an opportunity to have children.' Weddings are great because a lot of people will come as partners, but you get put on the singles table with people that you almost have no connection with. Like, I'd rather just sit with my couple friends because at least you've got conversation that you can have.

And so, before I had started to understand, it's okay to be single, or I was struggling with that, I did have those times where you want to rejoice with them, but it's just a tough day. A tough day to be in that and to be happy for them. Now, I'm really at

peace about being single. I'm not in a desperation search. I'm not looking for somebody actively, but I'm not closed to the idea of finding someone if it happens. If God opens up that door, that's amazing!

Celia: So that's been important to you? That trusting that God is somehow in this?

Emma: Immensely. Regardless of what happens in your life, having that constant support, the person that you know is never going to fail. Don't worry, I've had plenty of times where I've cried and given to God some of my very inner thoughts about why haven't I found a guy and woe is me and all of that type of stuff. But it is also knowing that he wants to hear it all, has been so reassuring. He's journeyed with me in every part of my life. I can completely rely on him. I also know that he's put people in my life that have also supported me.

My family have always been there for me, and yes, they probably would have loved me to be married and have children but they don't constantly barrage me with 'Why haven't you.....?' They've actually just gone, 'This is Emma, this is who she is and loves them.' And so, I know God places those people in my life. My friends, they're all people who've just actually accepted me for who I am and have not asked for anything more than that.

One of my passions is helping people understand that we are more than our circumstances. That we are more than whether we're married, single, our jobs, whether we're employed or not, but actually digging deeper to find out who we are and how we are created. So, for me, if someone said, 'Who are you?' I would say first off, 'I'm a child of God, but I'm also someone who has been blessed with children in my life and nephews and nieces and godchildren.' I'm single but that's given me opportunities to travel.

One of the big ones that I love is working with camp leaders and youth leaders and helping them to feel more confident in what they do in their role. I love the idea of mentoring and inspiring young people to be the best that they can, knowing that the gifts they've been given is exactly what they need to use. Helping them understand that they don't have to keep trying to achieve certain things that other people put on them, but to actually go, what have I got now that I can use, and I can keep building on.

I think a lot of young people, especially those that are coming out of high school, need to be reassured and affirmed that God's got you and God's got some great plans for you. So, you know, let him be part of the journey and let that ride happen.

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