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TAKING CARE OF ANGER

Interview with Stella

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Celia: This is messages of hope and I'm Celia Fielke. Do you ever feel like your emotions are in charge of you rather than the other way around? Stella's anger was scaring her children and she was stuck in a cycle of holding in the anger and then exploding. Stella can you describe what that looked like for you?

Stella: Well, I had my own anger issues. I'd call myself a rageaholic, which means like an alcoholic, you can't pull it back once it begins. So once you start drinking, you can't stop. Once you start raging, you can't stop. That was because I did a lot of repressing. You're brought up in an environment where told, "Don't be angry, don't be angry." You're told off, you're shamed in it. So it's a very shame-based feeling that when you were angry as a kid, you got told off, you're bad, you're wrong. I won't love you if you do that.

Celia: So, if you show that you're angry, there's something wrong with you?

Stella: Yeah. You're bad. You're wrong.

Celia: So when did that change for you from having repressed anger to becoming a rage-aholic

Stella: Oh, I can definitely tell you the time. It was probably 20 years ago now. I was yelling at the kids. I would come home. I'd see the mess that they hadn't cleared up that I'd asked them to. I'd repress it and I'd repress it and I'd repress it. I'm very patient and then all of a sudden, it would be that one little thing and I would just start raging. Yelling loudly. "You never do anything. It's always left to me, blah blah." And I'd just go on and on and on until I was exhausted. Then I felt absolutely awful because now I'm the worst mother in the world.

Celia: So you've got all that guilt?

Stella: Absolutely! I just felt terrible because it was like, well, now I'm not being who I really want to be, which is a really good mum.

Celia: How was it affecting your family?

Stella: You have no idea the impact you're having on anyone. All you're doing is feeling sorry for yourself. You're in a pity party, "no one cares about me, I have to do everything!" So you're not conscious of how you're impacting on anyone. You have no idea of your own power.

All of a sudden, my daughter's standing in her doorway and she looks up and she goes, "Mummy, mummy, stop shouting, I'm scared." It was like someone slapped me and I woke up and it was like, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I never meant to. I never meant to frighten you."

It was like a slap in the face, like a cold bucket of water and for me, it was like my aha moment. I just woke up and went, "Oh my goodness. I don't want to be that. I don't want to be a scary parent."

Celia: What did you do about that?

Stella: First of all, you cannot change what you won't own. So that's the key. I could not change it because I did not own it. I would not own it because I was in denial about the impact I was having. As soon as I woke up to the impact I was having, I realized I don't want to scare my kids. I want to create a safe space. When you're yelling. No, one's safe. They're just surviving there.

So, for me, it was about who do I want to be? Well, I want to be someone that doesn't feel out of control because when you get to that point, when you are out of control, it's like you fall out of a plane. There's no way you're coming back into that plane. That's what happens when you repress repress, repress and then all of a sudden it's got all that energy behind it, just like a champagne cork. You kind of you blow. You couldn't stop even if you wanted to. And it's complicated because it wasn't just about what was happening here and now. It taps into all of that unexpressed anger, unexpressed resentment, and it kind of just triggers that huge bolt of agony inside your body.

I didn't want to be that anymore, right. I was reading a great book, Joyce Meyer, Yearning for Peace and it was like, I just want to feel a peace because I'd get angry and then I'd get all upset and then I'd hate myself and now it was a cycle for me. I realized what I wanted. I wanted to be able to manage my emotions. I did not want them managing me.

Celia: You're listening to messages of hope and I'm talking with Stella about the soul destroying cycle of repressing anger, and then exploding. But anger can also come out sideways.

Stella: See there's nothing wrong with anger, it's what you do with it. If you work out of it, you might be aggressive, violent, a rageaholic. If you repress it, you deny it or you push it down into your system. It doesn't go anywhere, it just comes out sideways.

Celia: What do you mean by that?

Stella: So that might look like I'm not going to talk to you. That might look like I'm going to bang cupboards. That might look like someone in the kitchen throwing pots and pans around. They're not obviously angry with you. It's tougher to deal with because you wonder, are you angry? "No, no, I'm not angry." I'm just slamming cupboards here or I'm not talking to you.

That's one way that we really punish others. We don't talk to them. We'll shut down, we'll stonewall. No, it's nothing wrong with me but you kind of know there is. The other party just feels like, I know they're angry, but they're not able to be honest about how angry, because underneath all anger is generally hurt. Actually I'm really hurt that when you came in, or you said this, or you didn't say that, and that's very vulnerable for people. People don't want to express their vulnerability. It's painful.

Celia: So if we don't acknowledge how we're feeling, it'll build up into resentment and ultimately anger, either full on or sideways.

Stella: So if you start to understand, okay, I feel angry, so let me think about what's that about? What's going on for me? So you examine the anger, you give it a voice, you let it speak. So you actually ask yourself what's going on, what's driving this anger?

Celia: But in the moment how do you stop and think that, like how do you control it?

Stella: Of course and in that sense, it's hard to do. You see, this is why it's a bigger conversation, isn't it? When I woke up to that, I realized I was angry about a lot of things. About the way I was treated, about the things that were done to me, about what I'd been through, that I hadn't really processed or talked about, or recovered from. So, you go back into your history and you realize, "Wow I'm still holding onto that, I'm still holding onto that. I'm still angry with that person."

And of course, so when I got triggered here, it kind of tapped into all of that wound. And then, of course I'm totally overreacting because the kids haven't cleared up their breakfast things and I'm acting like someone's just killed someone or something! It was so over the top. So you kind of recognize this isn't just what it's all about. It's all about much more than that.

Celia: So when you recognize that you're feeling like that, What are some practical ways to deal with it?

Stella: Well, the reason it pops out sideways or it gets repressed or expressed is because you're not managing it. It's got to be managed. You can't control anger, you manage your emotions. And this is why for me, I always use the analogy of, the emotions are the child in you. The mind is the parents, and that really gives you an understanding of, okay, so if a child comes to you and they're really sad and you say, "no, don't feel sad." The message that child hears is, I'm not okay cause I feel sad. They can't differentiate that what I'm doing isn't okay. They just say I'm bad. I'm wrong. So that's why we grow up with a lot of insecurities and feelings of low self worth. We've been told our feelings are wrong. Therefore we are wrong.

Celia: So control is like saying "I'm not going to feel angry."

Stella: Yes.

Celia: And managing is I'm going to get angry but what I do with that?

Stella: I'm going to come alongside it and manage it the best way I can, as opposed to working out of it or repressing it. So you're right, when you're trying to control anger, you're saying "Don't feel that feeling." We say to ourselves, "No, no, I shouldn't feel that way. I mustn't feel that way. I'm a terrible person because I think that."

Celia: So what do you say to yourself when your managing your emotions?

Stella: It's okay to feel that way. It's okay. You allow it. You see allowing it is not trying to control it. So, a kid comes up to you and they're really angry. Okay, so tell me what's going on? Why are you so angry? Like what happened? You allow them to express their anger.

I've worked with lots of people with addiction. They hate themselves because they can't control themselves, they lose the plot. They act badly, they lash out. I mean, I did, I hated myself constantly. It was a cycle, you know, and something had to shift. As soon as you change the hating of self for compassion to self, that's when everything changes.

Celia: Coming up we'll look at why accepting yourself can completely change the way you deal with feeling angry.

So when we were talking earlier that the anger is coming from that feeling of not having a sense of worth, where do you get your sense of worth from now?

Stella: Well, I think when you are constantly angry, acting out, you don't feel worthy. That kind of just compounds your sense of unworthiness. Look there I am this, you know, unacceptable human being that can't even manage her emotions. So for me, it was always about my relationship with Christ and that he had forgiven me.

A lot of people get really confused with that. What is forgiveness? It doesn't mean what I did was okay. I'm not okay with what I did, but I have stopped punishing myself for what I did. And that is what forgiveness is. It's not about anything other than that, I'm just going to give up my right to punish myself or another.

So forgiveness for me was something I hadn't really heard about until I became a Christian, which was fairly late in life. I was 36 when I became a Christian and it was like, God loved me and God loved me unconditionally! He still loved me even when I was angry! So, for me, that was acceptance, which I hadn't had. When he could accept me, I learned to accept me.

So when I acted badly and I acted out and I lashed out, instead of taking myself and going well, "You're just a useless pathetic human being." I actually went "It's okay Stella, it's okay." I learned to let God come through for me and then I came through for me. So even in my darkest hour, even in my most horrible moment, he's there going, "It's okay Stella, I'm here for you. I love you. I'm never going to leave you."

That for me was a fundamental part of my growing as a human being, as a woman, as an individual. For me, that was it. You know, someone loved me, all of me in a way that I had never been shown or revealed. And I certainly couldn't do it for myself.

Celia: You've been listening to messages of hope. For free PDFs, videos, and podcasts about positive ways to manage anger, go to messagesofhope.org.au. Or for a free booklet call 1800 353 350.

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