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LIVING WITH CONFIDENCE

Interview with Peta Soorkia

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Celia: This is messages of hope and I'm Celia Fielke. Finding our way and our purpose in life can be a long and winding journey. And sometimes our sense of self and sense of worth can take a battering along the way. We listen to the voices that tell us we can't or we shouldn't or we aren't good enough. Today I'm talking with Peta, a Christian life coach and speaker, founder of "Empowering You", who is passionate about helping women build self-esteem and purpose.

My guest today, Peta, has had a colourful life. I first met her at a Christian women's conference where she was the main speaker, helping women to find empowerment through God. But her life started out very differently, not Christian and not knowing the power of God in her life.

You were originally involved in the fashion industry, is that right?

Peta: I was trained in fashion design, worked as a designer in all facets of the design area, from yarn production right through to sales. Then I did some production myself and then some retail. So children's wear, some men's wear and women's wear. I taught 12 years of design and communication skills. So I've loved fashion, but the world is so cutthroat. And after a while I just thought this facade world is just not for me.

Having gone through a sort of a burnout breakdown in my teens, I'd been searching for what is out there. So I was into Eastern religions and trying to find my way through, and looking and looking and looking for the answer to life.

Celia: So you're searching for something - something that you're missing. I'm curious - what was your childhood like?

Peta: I grew up in a female dominated household. My father was a sailor, so he wasn't home very much. My mother was in charge and I have a sister, so we were female oriented. My father would come home every three or four months for a couple of days, and my mother was still in charge, so I come from that sort of background. Her mother, my mother's mother, my grandmother was also in charge.

Celia: Strong women!

Peta: Too strong, unfortunately. That controlling issue in my matriarchal line I've had to deal with, and it's been quite painful

Celia: So not really having a father present - did that affect you at all?

Peta: I think the first time in my teens, I think was a feeling of rejection. So that was just going through being a sailor's daughter and feeling that daddy was never coming home. He died very suddenly in my early twenties, so there was a lot of pain there. I was seeking love. My father loved me, but he wasn't there, number one. Number two, when I went through puberty, as a lot of women my age, perhaps born in the fifties sixties and the men who were post world war II - they didn't know how to show love to their growing girls. And they didn't have that free expression that men have today. Men today push prams and all that sort of stuff. You wouldn't have seen my father pushing a pram. He didn't know how to deal with a teenage girl. So he actually put me at arm's length and I just felt this disconnect. So I was seeking love from men for the rest of my time until I became a Christian.

Celia: Did you not feel beautiful?

Peta: I think I was trying to be beautiful and be loved.

Celia: And needing that feedback?

Peta: And that attention. Yes. Yes. I think I always knew I was attractive and so I played on that a bit. I had many boyfriends. I could have whatever boyfriend I wanted and I would drop them a lot. But the ones that I liked, the first sign of rejection, I would just leave. So it was quite a tumultuous time in my twenties.

Celia: Peta, you mentioned earlier that you had become a Christian, how did that come about?

Peta: I was on holiday in Queensland and a young man that I'd met in the hotel visited me when I came back to Melbourne and asked me to go to church. I just said, "no." This guy - what sort of a date is a church, visit? But he was so nice and I just thought, well, what's the harm? I can go to this church. So he took me to this big 1000 strong church in Richmond and I could not believe what I saw there. There were young people with piercings and tattoos and colored hair, and then there were older people. So there were the full gamut of age, seasons, and yet they all had this thing that I'd been looking for all my life.

Celia: And what was that thing?

Peta: They had connection. They had hope. They had faith, they had peace, they had love. They were radiant.

Celia: How did you see it in them?

Peta: I was conscious of everybody and how I looked - being from the rag trade - and nobody cared a hoot how I looked. They didn't necessarily not care for me. They were friendly, but they were involved in a worship time of just connecting. There was peace all over their faces.

Celia: That's amazing... So what was the moment that you just went, I've got to do something completely different?

Peta: It was gradual. I think God knows that I take a while to take up what he's asking me to do. I was teaching and it was getting stale in the fashion industry where it was more skin than fabric and fashion design. I thought "What am I doing?" I was volunteering at church

and then part time in fashion, and I was just pulled, pulled towards church. I was very passionate about evangelism and I saw cell ministry as very powerful. So I was a cell leader.

Celia: What's a cell?

Peta: A cell is like a small group, a home group. In fact, Peter the apostle started church in his home. And so that's where we get that model from, where we can have church at home and invite our friends to become believers. And then God called me out of that and he called me to be itinerant.

Celia: Meaning?

Peta: Itinerant is when you wander around and you get booked by different churches or groups. And they have me come and speak. I guess my main passion is women. And coaching them and helping them become unstuck from wherever they're stuck. It's the most wonderful thing I do in my life.

Celia: So you say God calls you. How do you know that he's calling you to a particular thing?

Peta: Look, with every woman or person, it's different. A lot of women particularly say to me, "I don't know what I'm called to do." And I generally say, "well if you listen, and if you get rid of some of the noise in your life and sit back and rest, you might be able to hear the voice of the Lord." God can speak to you through the Bible. God can speak to you through the messages on Sunday. God can speak to you through a person who you're talking with. And then it becomes a confirmation in your spirit.

I was talking to this 73-year-old woman the other day, and I said, "you love to speak". And she said, "I do love to speak." And then she said, "but I love to pray." And I said, "you love to pray." And she said, "And I really want to help people" I said, "you really want to help people". So I said, "then that's what's in your hand". So the calling is often in your hand. For me, I love women, and I had been through stress and burnout, and I can write workshops. So that's what was in my hand when I started ministry. I started writing workshops for stressed women. Okay. So the calling was there. It was in my hands, through my pain, through my struggle. People's struggle becomes their calling.

Celia: So Peta, you've found your purpose in life to be helping women to find their own purpose, their own sense of self.

Peta: It's all about that for me, touching lives, particularly women, and helping women be all that they've been created to be. So many women are lacking in self-confidence, lacking self esteem. They think they're just surviving and they're so stressed. If they can just move aside from that and find some peace, find some answers in the Lord, recognize that who they are is beautiful and created for a special purpose and then start to walk in that - then I'm their girl to help them.

Celia: So how do you do that?

Peta: People say to me, I'm real. They say to me, they can tell me anything. And the reason is that I don't judge them because I've probably been there or felt it, I know where they're coming from. I'm quite upfront about my struggles and how I still struggle in my early sixties. I'm still struggling.

Celia: How do you still struggle? What do you struggle with?

Peta: Well control is the biggie and surrender. Surrendering control and rejection. Most of us feel rejected. All of us will be rejected. Jesus was rejected

Celia: And we're frightened of that.

Peta: We fear rejection. So we do all sorts of things like people pleasing, don't set boundaries. Many other things come from a fear of rejection. Once we recognize that's rejection - and I'm going to speak to that thing and get it off my back - and do that, the freedom and the liberty that one gets is fantastic. So I have struggled with that, and from time to time that will come and hit me in the face.

Celia: Why do you think it takes so long for us to accept ourselves as we are or to believe that we can be beautiful. That's your message to women, isn't it? You are beautiful.

Peta: You are called. You are beautiful. You have a purpose and you're able. So there's a lot of pressure in our society to be a certain way and act a certain way and we all feel that. I think there's a lot of voices at us from the world and in our own heads. So, perhaps I would say our own self talk is our undoing. When we think about the voices that we hear in our head, it's often telling us that, "We can't do this. We shouldn't do that. We're not good enough. I need to do that." And again, the underlying root is often fear of something and fear of rejection is often a big one. So then it then plays out in our life in, I have to do this, so I'll be accepted, I'll be beautiful, I'll be loved, I'll be free. But we're never free until we hear from God that, "Hey, I love you anyway." God says, "you are mine. You are my child. I accept you. You will be rejected by the world, but I will never reject you." God says, "I'm loved. I'm whole." God made me for a purpose.

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