

Dealing With Stress

Discussion with Celia and Ali

Life seems to be going along 100 miles an hour. People all around us seem to be suffering from burnout and stress. This isn't something new, but what is it that causes us to feel like it's all just getting too much?

Celia: Ali, you've known me a long time. We've worked together and been friends for over 10 years now I reckon. You've seen me when life gets all too much. You've seen me stressed. But you seem to be in control. Do you get stressed, or do I just not see it?

Ali: Of course I get stressed. I think it's in everybody's gene pool - stress. Everyone has probably different stress triggers and different levels of ability of coping with different scenarios. But particularly, my stress triggers are around family. If my kids are unwell, or they get hurt, my stress levels go up. It's that protection factor.

Celia: Yeah, so stuff from your family stresses you.

Ali: Stuff from family, especially immediate family, but extended family as well.

Celia: For me, I reckon I get stressed when I get to that stage of being over committed.

Ali: Oh yes.

Celia: ...and that *feeling*! I know it!. ... When I say yes to something, because I've got so caught up in it and it sounds really exciting, and I don't want to miss out, and I want to be part of it, and I get home and I go, 'What was I thinking?'

Ali: Exactly. It's self-reflection.

Celia: What does this actually mean for me time-wise and commitment-wise? I can physically feel it in my stomach, it's just my whole stomach muscles just start to tighten. I feel clenched up and it feels such a heavy feeling.

Ali: But your first response isn't to go, 'I need to back out of that.' You just keep pushing on, and pushing on.

Celia: You do. You think 'Okay, how am I going to make this work?' Like... there's a difference I guess to being busy, and being over committed, isn't there? I don't think there's anything wrong with being busy, but when you start to have too much on your plate and it starts affecting other people and ...

Ali: ...My responses to other people. When a child comes and just says, 'Can you sign this note?' And you go, 'No, I'm busy, do you not read the signals? Is there a better time for you to approach me?'

Celia: I just, I say 'Just ask your father.'

But when I get to that feeling, it's like I'm actually just surviving each day, and just not feeling like I'm ever on top of something. When I'm feeling like that every day, that's not living, and that's not how God has made or God wanted us to be.

Ali: Just surviving isn't how we should be feeling every day of our lives.

Celia: What are some of the things that we can do about that?

Ali: We have a daughter who can't stand being late. In fact, she's often said, 'We're not the Hoopmans, we're the Latemans, we're changing our name. I'm so sick of being late.' Now her idea of being late is walking in a minute before it starts. That's not late to me.

And I'm a just in time kind of person. We'll get there just in time.

Celia: 'I'm just putting one more piece of washing on, and I'll just get this done.'

Ali: Yeah, this will happen, I'll just type out this email, or I've got to reply to this if somebody sent me a message about that.

Celia: Yeah, I'm a bit the same.

Ali: I have to appreciate that that puts her under pressure if I'm late because it's something for her.

Celia: But she needs to understand also, that there's so much on your plate that you are trying to cram everything in, plus do this for her. Do you know what I mean?

Ali: Yes. We've talked about that. You know, if a boy comes over to visit and he's a bit late, I say, 'Oh there's a deal breaker.' Just to stir her up a little bit, but knowing that we've got to work through some of these things. Yep, it's alright to have her call me the late woman, or whatever I am in her life, but there's going to be other people that she won't be able to say that to, and she will still feel frustrated, so how does she handle that stress?

Celia: It's about being aware, isn't it? Of your and other people's personalities...

Ali: Yeah.

Celia: And your reaction to it.

Ali: Because you can diffuse it. I can choose to sing Humphrey B Bear and diffuse the situation and just be a little bit wacky, and somehow get her out the door with half a smile.

And then, the car trip to netball with telling me to hurry.. 'If you help more, I wouldn't be in this situation..' We end up in an argument. We've tried both!

Celia: What works? What's best? A nicer car trip?

Ali: A lovely car trip where I'm connecting with my daughter, not butting heads because of my opinion versus her opinion, or our personality clash, or our different standards of earliness versus lateness.

Celia: How do you get to be in that place where you bring that calm, or the humour, and don't bite back, especially if you're feeling a little stressed yourself?

Ali: That's a really good question. It's tricky and I think sometimes it depends on the day and the moment, and how you're coping, and if you can rise above the situation, or if you can anticipate it coming.

Celia: Yeah.

Ali: Often I know that it's coming and how am I going to respond. I do try and be more organised and get out the door on time. I don't do it to exasperate her, not on purpose.

Celia: I suppose it's the intention.

Ali: Yeah, and sometimes just taking a little bit of a breath before I respond. You know, before you jump into the, 'Why haven't you handed the assignment in on time?', or 'I told you this would happen!' That's just making it all negative, all of the time.

Celia: How we can prepare ourselves for dealing with stress before it hits, rather than just dealing with it in the heat of the moment?

Ali: Have you ever heard of people say, 'Well I've just got to let it go. Just let it go Celia, don't carry it, just let it go.'
How do we actually ever do that? How do we let things go? What does that look like?

Celia: I know when my dad got sick, I let everything go. I didn't go to my meetings. I didn't go to this because I said, 'My dad is sick. I'm spending time with him.'
Did the world stop because I didn't go to the parents and friends meeting? No.

Ali: That's right.

Celia: You can remember that moment that puts that into perspective, but as soon as that big crisis is over, or that time has passed, how come the little things keep going?

Ali: That's right.

Celia: I think that for me is still a tough thing in my walk with God, that letting go of control, and letting him take control.

Ali: Exactly, and often the things that you're worried about, or that are bothering you - the time that you spend worrying about those particular stress points in your life actually can't affect any change. Finding a way to be mindfully aware of what is causing an issue and giving it to God is a much better strategy than hanging on to it.

Celia: One of my favourite Bible verses is Jeremiah 29:11. It's one where God says, 'I know the plans I have for you, plans not for your harm, but for your good, to give you hope and a future.' I truly believe that. That makes me feel better!

Ali: If he's got the plans all sorted, why do we try and always take control, or take a different road?

Celia: Yeah and it makes you realise, if he has got it under control, some of the stuff that I worry about or stress over, or try to please people about, is maybe because I feel like I *should* do it and take on too much. There's this weight of expectation that people are judging me for it.

Ali: Often people aren't thinking about us at all.

Celia: I know. Why do I have to feel like I need to do that because I'm worried about what other people think of me?

Ali: It's almost *self-validation*. We need to go to God for validation, not to others. It's important to know who you are in God and that your identity rests with him. He created you for a purpose, just as you said in that Jeremiah verse, and he has a plan for you. If you're aligned with his plan, and you know that, your identity rests with him ...

Celia: I shouldn't have to keep trying to prove myself.

Ali: That's right and other things fall away. Those little stressors don't become the big things. So little ones that can blow up into big things, if we can just know 'I'm with God', he's going to help me be calm. He's going to see me through this storm. He calms the storms. He does all of those sort of things. There's lots of wonderful stories about how his acting in life can anchor us, centre us, help us to know that we're truly connected to him, and that's a beautiful thing.

Thank you for downloading a script of *Messages of hope*. We pray that it is of benefit to you and gives you hope. You are free to share this with other people and offer them hope.

Messages of hope radio messages, scripts, and booklets are also available for you at www.messagesofhope.org.au

If you would like to support us to reach out to more people with *Messages of hope*, or you would like more information about us, please go to www.lutheranmedia.org.au, call FREECALL 1800 353 350, or write to us at Reply Paid 65735 Lutheran Media, Box 731, North Adelaide SA 5006.

Thank you for your interest and support of *Messages of hope*.

LUTHERAN.MEDIA)))