



Wellbeing Insights

The first person we may need to forgive is ourselves!

Finding forgiveness when one is suffering from the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' may be a seemingly impossible task especially when in the midst of the 'crisis'. As we ruminate over the cause of our suffering – the people and the events – we may experience a range of extreme emotions which immobilise us. If we remain trapped within these emotions - constantly re-energising the grievances with detailed memories which we tell ourselves over and over, or even share them with whomever wants to hear them, over and over - we are likely to open and deepen the wounds further.

We need to find a healthier way of dealing with this situation and counterintuitively, before we are able to find forgiveness for all the players involved, the first person whom we may need to forgive is ourselves! This is no small task. We may not have been able to ask ourselves the question, ***“And what part of this [situation] belongs to me?”*** We may have been so caught up in it, the emotions attached to it may run so deeply, that we were unable to own our share of the responsibility for it.

For I have found that often I will have had a part in it, small or great, consciously, or more often subconsciously, if I look closely enough. For instance, I may have allowed someone to say or do something which did not respect my values but because I had not set my boundaries well enough, or had insufficient courage to object, I allowed myself to be hit broadside.

When I recognise that I had a part to play in this situation which continues to cause me suffering, it is then that I need to find forgiveness for myself. I need to evoke my self-compassion and forgive myself for not knowing well enough what I should have done to protect my values, or for not having the courage to represent myself sufficiently.

Perhaps even if I had done this reflection, and asked myself the question, and my answer was “I have no responsibility for this situation.” What then? How do I move forward? How do I drop resentment?

When I cannot see myself in any way responsible, but know I am suffering because of the actions of others, I must find forgiveness for them. “Why (you may ask) if you are not to blame?” The short



answer is, I need to do this for my own sake because in forgiving them, I release myself from the crippling emotions which threaten to sink me in a mire of resentment. How do I do this? My answer came in the form of a book, *Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love* by the interfaith minister, Stephanie Dowrick. In this book I learned that I could view forgiveness as an act of love quite distinct from culpability. I could forgive others for their shortcomings without having to condone or accept their behaviours. In really understanding this, I was released and able to find forgiveness. I was greatly assisted in this task as love is one of my Signature Character Strengths from which I was able to leverage forgiveness.