The principles of self-forgiveness… some practical exercises

The power of storytelling

Grant Dewar here I would like to thank you for listening to this recording today or reading this blog is the case may be.

I've attached to material a series of exercises and a number of other references to assist you in this journey that we are about to embark on.

I'm sitting here in my office, which is the front room of my house, which is easy to access on Google maps. I see clients in this room, and here I've completed my PhD.

I am surrounded by good things and my dog Zara asleep in the chair behind, snoring slightly. She just been trimmed and washed and looks great.

So I have all the benefits of a beautiful home, a great family, my dream job, which I've worked very hard to attain and the ability to do things that genuinely assist others. And while the word privilege these days has many connotations, in the very old-fashioned sense of the word, I am greatly privileged to be able to assist people at that the point of their deepest need when they are extremely vulnerable and sometimes very near to death. I am greatly privileged that I've been able to obtain skills and I've been able to practice those skills in a way that I know that I can reach out to assist people in very real ways.

I've also been greatly blessed with this insight into what I know to be a universal truth about the power of self-forgiveness. Now the important thing about self-forgiveness is that while it is pretty simple, but the issue is, it is not easy. The importance of self-forgiveness is reinforced in both the work I have carried out in my a PhD and in a variety of work categories. My work has been focused on assisting people in areas such as gaining employment, overcoming disability, promoting work health and safety, helping people to return to work after injury and now my work as a health psychologist has helped reinforce the work that is supported by the principles of Self-forgiveness.

I'm doing podcasts and this blog to reveal the importance of a set of principles which, when we put them into action in a way that is appropriate to our needs and circumstances can provide a way in which we can genuinely forgive ourselves.

Genuine Self-Forgiveness unburdens ourselves from emotional and what turns out to be physical experiences that we no longer need to carry. Self-forgiveness provides a means by which to hit the reset button on our life.

And sometimes that means we have to do painful work of realigning ourselves and perhaps developing a new understanding stories that we adhere to. These stories might be useful in some circumstances, but can be very destructive and others. The principles that I will discuss with you helps you to understand how those stories have affected us. We can reflect on how we refer to those stories almost automatically. We can examine and how we use those stories to mould our lives.

In this principles-based work that we're going to go through together, we can begin the process of unburdening ourselves.

One of the principles is to tell our story. But we also need to stand back and observe the effect of that story upon us. We then to make alternative decisions about how we interact with that story and subsequently, how we behave in response to what actually faces us in our lives now. This can be a very confronting and sometimes extremely saddening and exhausting experience, but in the 1st instance, we are not here to feel any particular thing. For example, we are not here to feel calm, we are not here to feel happy or joyful.

Instead, we are here to do work that allows us to have a full, free, open and flexible response to life as it presents itself to us. This work enables us to live a life that is based on values and helps us to achieve what we understand to be the meaning and purpose for our life.

So I invite you to stick with me on this journey. To listen to this particular story that I'm going to tell you that it is a very recent one but also a very old one. And when I finished telling this story I'll ask you to engage with your own story and to start the process of stepping back and observing the important stories that for example, may provide burdens for you that you have to lay down but may also reveal to you important work that you have to pick up.

This year I've had some quite immense health challenges which have come out of the field. Some of you have read my blog previously will know that I have begun the process of losing weight in a way that is sustainable and I've dropped basically from 152 kg over the last 4 years to what is currently 115 kg. When I been hospitalised, I have got down as low as 110 kg. But now with certain heart medications, I'm on, my body seems to have stabilised around 115 kg or 253 pounds. For my best health as a person who is 180cm or 5 foot 11, I need to get down to something like 87 kg or 190 lbs.

That's a task that is ahead of me, and I just have to find the best way through that, given some restrictions, I’m on with regards to exercise and find the right diet that will help me to sustain useful weight loss.

I need to put the least possible adverse stress in my heart. I need to be able to live as freely as openly as possible so that I can do what I need to do in terms of vocation and calling I have around getting out this message about self-forgiveness.

The message of self-forgiveness is a universal and useful skill that basically everyone on this planet needs, if they have the capacity to be self-aware and self-correcting.

In my role as a health psychologist, I'm privileged to receive frequent referrals from a major unit in a hospital dealing with people with very severe chronic disease. With my own experience of now being the recipient of chronic disease, I have received a wake-up call on multiple levels. I've been diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, which is basically a weakening of the heart muscle. It's not quite sure what the precursor that has been whether is the excessive weight that I was carrying the weather I've had some sort of virus affected the heart muscle, and not quite sure, but nevertheless, I'm currently being treated in a way that is effective.

My heart muscle is currently in a place of stability and hopefully recovery but it means I'm on some pretty interesting medications that basically helps regulate the heartbeat and has driven down my heart rate and blood pressure significantly to some pretty low levels, which is very interesting but also has then a knock-on effect with my metabolism.

Having this new awareness of chronic disease has enlightened me about some of the challenges that people face who were also going through the transition of being faced with a new diagnosis of chronic disease. Further, just 10 days ago, I had a major health scare. As I was driving to an appointment in the city, I live about some about 40 minutes south of our state capital in South Australia, I was driving to a meeting at the University to see one of my former lecturers to discuss some work I'm doing some colleagues that involved a fellow PhD candidates.

I suddenly had an overwhelming feeling that I was completely unwell and that I was mortally ill. I was able to safely pull over my car into a side street, and after about 10 minutes, I was able to make a decision as to whether I could safely drive to the hospital. I was considering that I actually might need to park the car lock it up and call an ambulance. However, I was able to check that I was conscious, capable of driving and able to reach the emergency department that was about 3 km away from where I was parked. So I drove carefully back to the hospital parked the car in the car park nearest emergency department and was able to walk through to the triage desk.

I basically felt like I was going to die and it was that terrible gut sickness that one has where one feels that one is in pain but it's not pain, it's just a deep feeling of being utterly completely sick.

Triage asked me to wait in the waiting area, the symptoms I was having was basically feeling like I ever had some sort of bowel obstruction, A bladder infection or some sort of on urological or hepatological problem. I had a need to frequently go to the toilet, and I sat near the toilet and had to basically unbuckle my pants and unzip my flying - holding my pants up with my hand. I could not stand the pressure of the pants being done up at on my midriff because of the extreme discomfort that was experiencing. I had been able to call my wife and letter know that I was waiting our home was about 20 minutes away from the hospital, and she is able arrival is there, and I felt so uncomfortable. I found it unpleasant to be even touched. I had the embarrassing experience of being in a continuous cycle of returning back to the lavatories, and then I started retching because of the incredible discomfort was experiencing. At that point 1 of the charge nurses admitted me to emergency treatment and commenced the process of working out what was required. Over the next 12 hours I had 2 CT scans to identify what was going wrong and it was found that a kidney stone had pierced my urethra or caused some sort of damage as the CT scan was showing leakage of the contrast medium from outside of the kidney in a way that showed some sort of damage or lack of integrity in urological function. I was then prepared for an emergency operation for that evening and kept on the emergency waiting list. They were not able to perform the surgery.. my spasms had been managed with an anti spasmodic medication. Next day 1st thing I was admitted for emergency surgery. A stent was inserted through the urethra and that damaged was stabilised, and the kidney stone was evacuated

The symptoms that I was admitted with remitted and I was released next day relatively simple symptom-free

However The day after I was experiencing the quite odd feeling of feeling quite well overall, but then having sudden stabbing pains when needing to void my bladder and the pains were as if someone was violently punching my kidney. I was able to get to my local general practitioner provided me with a strong antibiotic that relieved what had become a kidney infection. Subsequently, those symptoms of those breakthrough stabbing pains did remit, and I've had an experience of feeling quite stable since.

Now, why go into this long story what relevance does this have to self-forgiveness?

Well, in going through this sort of experience, one easily blames oneself. People warn massive weight loss will lead to kidney stones or a gallstone (which I also have) One blames oneself for the process of gaining weight in the first place. One blames himself for being old and infirm. I had talked with a colleague who provides me with peer support. I told them how shameful I felt this experience to be fully to be in a hospital, yet again within 6 months of the experience of cardiomyopathy. I expressed how I felt useless as a man.

Through admission, I also had the really interesting experiences of meeting people with whom I have a professional relationship independently of these health issues which were part of the team that was providing my treatment. Very kindly, they approached me independently and asked me if I was comfortable with them providing treatment to me. I gladly gave my consent and told them I was honoured that they were involved in handling my care. So it's an interesting thing to be a professional in one setting and a patient in another setting.

And of course, dealing with urology, people are dealing with what are otherwise very private experiences now being made public in the context of examination and various health functions that have to be carried out in maintaining health care.

And this has caused me to think of the privilege that I have, and the care that I need to take in being able to treat people come to me wanting assistance in a context that they thought they may never experience.

In most recently it's been very interesting to deal with clients whose journey has been very much similar to my life experience with very similar setbacks. Very similar backgrounds and who have had very poor health outcomes that are completely unexpected and place them in the care of people such as myself. I have once again renewed my realisation of how important it is for those people to feel that they are being respected and cared for. It is a salient reminder of the need for a diligent and professional explanation of their care in a way that gives them the option to direct the resources they need for their health and recovery.

So the attached information I have provided is about how do we tell our story, as I just have to you.

So for example, I just outlined quite a complex story and I've been as descriptive as possible in the way I have laid that out.

So that's part 1 of the exercise that is attached below.

The 2nd part of the exercise is this: as I reflect on the story I reflect on how it teaches me

* Acknowledging
  + disgust with myself
  + Shame
  + Helplessness
  + Distress
  + Feeling belittled
  + The common experience of struggle in sickness with fellow patients
* Learning important principles about humility in the exercise of privilege.
* Getting in touch with the burdens of responsibility
* Deciding that we have to use our privilege for good,
* Rediscovering about the way in which all have dignity,
* Seeing that all have needs
* People wish to be cared for in a way which recognises their humanity in the midst of their distress when they are not able to communicate properly, when fear challenges, shame, and all sorts of distress may arise, including feelings of disgust and self blame and so forth.

And how I have experienced each of those in this journey through both chronic health issues and presentation at emergency

The 3rd part of the exercise is using that wisdom that tells me of the importance of sharing this process with you,

This process highlights the importance of outlining how this works for me as a practitioner. It gives me a way in which I can look people in the eye, sit beside them and provide an environment which gives them options to process the important experiences they are having,

These processes provide a way in which they can begin to unburden themselves from responses that don't help in the healing, that don't help in the recovery

Then I can assist in promoting responses that turn towards what will assist them to make better sense out of their experience and make better choices for recovery

So I commend this series of exercises to you. You'll find it in my Facebook feed as Grant Dewar and you also find it on my website www.vitallivingpsychology.com in the section called content and handouts.

Thank you so much