



A short story by Leo Schoof, Kelmscott, Western Australia

Healed Relationships

My name is Albert and I am a salesman. One day I had an appointment with a general manager of a large company and I was hoping to make a big sale that morning. The name of this General Manager was Hilbert and he was also my friend even though we did not see each other very often. Understandably I was a little nervous because I had never attempted such big business and such large contracts. I turned up at the arranged time and the secretary of this very important person showed me into Hilbert's office and announced my arrival. This very important man, however, did not even acknowledge his secretary's words and, believe it or not, he also totally ignored my entrance into his lavishly decorated office. It was a very impressive office with admirable décor, an expensive carpet, and a really magnificent desk. I was very impressed and waited until Hilbert looked up to greet me.



But Hilbert was so absorbed in the letter he was reading that he obviously had not even noticed that I had arrived. And there I stood. Secretly I was quite proud for being on time which is something I always tried as much as possible. But in this case it was even more important to be on time because this was a very important man and high up in this business. And because of that I was hoping to make a big sale. But this man still did not appear to notice or perhaps he did not want to acknowledge me. After a while I became quite annoyed and I coughed softly. This did not seem to work and I tried again, this time a little louder. I just stood there nailed to the ground while Hilbert's eyes were glued to the letter.

Then.....I noticed some tears dropping from Hilbert's eyes onto the letter he was reading. And after some time he looked up from his letter and by that time the tears were running down his face. Perhaps he noticed me for the first time. He was obviously embarrassed for showing his emotions. I was also slightly embarrassed and didn't know what to say and Hilbert was not able to speak either. He just sat there and cried his eyes out. Naturally I felt very uncomfortable and perhaps Hilbert behind the desk did too. Men don't cry like that, do they? But this important man in the leather chair was obviously disturbed by what he had just read in that letter. So I plucked up some courage and asked him what the matter was. He did not immediately respond but his face looked friendlier now which gave me the courage to press on. And again I asked him:



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“What’s the matter, Hilbert? Did you receive some bad news?”

“Yes and no”, answered the general manager. “I will read a few lines from this letter that my secretary brought in just before you came. Perhaps I should have read it after you had left or maybe it was meant to be this way. This letter is from my very old mother. I lost my father many years ago and my mother now lives in a retirement village. Anyway, this is what she wrote”, and he started to read a few lines:

“I have been in this retirement village for several years now. You and your wife Alice dropped me off, kissed me goodbye and I never saw either of you again. You have acted against everything that your parents taught you. For all these years I have been hoping you would suddenly turn up one day. Each time I heard footsteps in the passage I was hoping it would be you. But unfortunately this was not the case. It was either a cleaner or one of the carers. And so it happened day after day. The footsteps I heard near my door in the passage were always someone else’s and never yours. You have no idea, Hilbert, how I have longed to see both of you. I cry myself to sleep every night and when I wake up in the morning my first thought is: perhaps Hilbert and Alice will suddenly turn up today.

Unfortunately it was not to be. But I want you to know one thing, Hilbert, and that is that I pray for you and Alice every day. I know you have been very busy making a lot of money but don’t forget that the worldly goods will one day be worthless. So the main thing I want you to know is that I will continue to pray for you until my last breath. I will continue to pray that you will repent from your selfish lifestyle and return to the Lord and His service. Remember that God’s grace is bigger than your sins”.

This is when he paused and swallowed. Then he wiped away another tear from his face and continued reading:

*“I also want you to remember, Hilbert, that I continue to **love you with all my heart**”.*

At this point Hilbert could not control himself any longer. He cried and cried uncontrollably. His mother had touched some dormant feelings in his heart. She still loved him after all that he had done to her, after these years of neglect? She still loved him and Alice after they had both deserted her for so many years? That was incredible. How could he have been so loveless, so cold and selfish all that time? How could he for all those years only think of himself and his nice mansion and beautiful black Mercedes? He was utterly ashamed of himself for being so callous and cold hearted.





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How is it possible that he neglected his own mother for so long, his mother who for many years cared for him so lovingly? Nothing was ever too much for her.

He had buried his face in his hands and sobbed his heart out, but now he looked up again and looking at me as if to ask what he should do now. He was visibly upset. And no wonder. For who would drop his mother off at a retirement village and turn his back on her? He felt guilty and just like the jailer in Philippi asked Paul and Silas many centuries ago: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* he now asked me:

“What must I do? How can I still be saved at my age? Surely I am too bad and too selfish. I am too great a sinner. I have neglected my own mother for so many years. How could she ever forgive me? Or how could God ever forgive me that gross sin?”

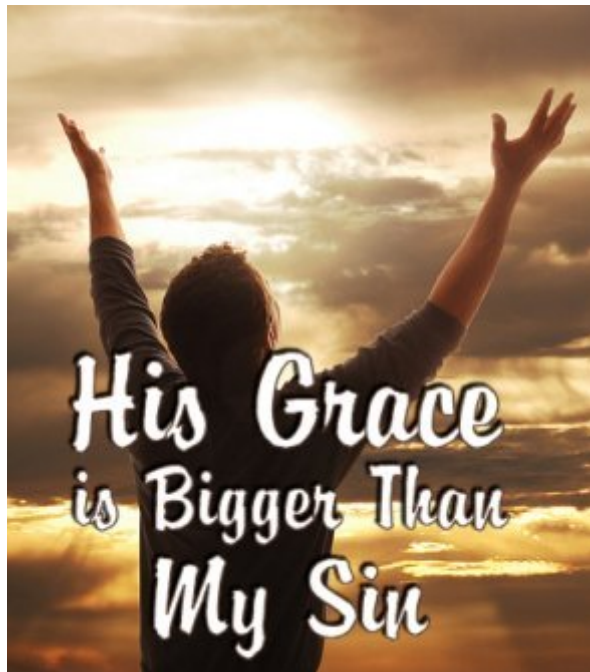
I could only give him the same answer as Paul and Silas gave to the jailer, and I said *“Repent and believe. You and your wife ought to go to your mother and make things right again”*. And then I saw a change come over Hilbert. Just like the lame man who was healed by Peter and John he suddenly stood up, his face glowing with joy, and he shook my hands. He praised the Lord expressing gratitude that the Lord had not forgotten him. He had forgotten the Lord and turned his back on Him. He had even tried to ban Him out of His thoughts, but the Lord remembered the baptismal promise. He, the Lord, was faithful to His covenant. He had put this salesman, this friend, on his path, who showed him the way back to God.

I had entered this wealthy and impressive looking office with the intention of making a big sale, or at least I hoped so. But that day we never even got around to talking business.

But both of us were the richer for it, not materially but spiritually. For it turned out to be a most blessed, enjoyable and above all God honouring meeting. Who would have thought that these two men would open their hearts to one another and be such a blessing to each other? They had not seen each other for quite a long time and the Lord used this opportunity to bring about repentance. He changed Hilbert’s cold and selfish heart to one of love and thankfulness. They reminded one another of God’s grace which is as wide as the ocean and that God’s grace is bigger than our sins.



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As soon as I had left the general manager picked up his phone and instructed his secretary to cancel all appointments for the rest of the day. Then he picked up his brief case and went to the carpark, found his car and drove straight home. His wife was, of course, most surprised to see him come home so early and asked him if he was alright. “Yes, I am fine” he told her. “As a matter of fact I am happier than I have ever been. A big load has been taken off my shoulders”.

“Tell me what happened”, Alice asked him.

So he told her about the letter he had received from his mother at the office that morning and also about his friend Albert the salesman, who had an appointment with him that morning and that they did not even get around to talking business.

“Alice”, he said, “we have been very cruel, selfish and unchristian to my mother”.

“Oh Hilbert, I am so glad I hear you say that” Alice reacted, “because it has been bothering me too for a long time already”. And she gave him a spontaneous hug.

“Well”, said Hilbert, “let’s go to Mum’s retirement village right now and make up with her. I’m sure she will be so glad to see us. We will tell her that we have sinned against her and against the Lord and we will ask her to forgive us”.

And that is exactly what they did. They drove to the retirement village which is about half an hour’s drive from their home and walked into his mother’s room. His mother reached out her arms to greet them and her face was glowing with joy. She was overwhelmed because of her emotions and for a while she wasn’t even able to say a word. She shed tears of joy.



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“I am so glad and thankful that you both came”, she finally managed to say. “It is an answer to my many prayers. Every day I have prayed that you would come and see me. The Lord is good and I am so very, very happy”.

Both Hilbert and Alice embraced their mother and apologised profusely for neglecting her for so long. They were very happy that all is well now. Hilbert had been so busy working very hard and long hours for his business that he hardly had time to pray or to even think about the Lord. Making lots of money was his top priority and therefore he had not prayed for a long time but now his heart was so full of thankfulness that he suggested that all three of them should bow their heads in prayer and together they thanked the Lord for His numerous blessings. They promised his mother that from now on they would both visit her very often and somehow try to make up for the many years of neglect. Tears of joy were running down their faces and their hearts were overflowing with joy and thankfulness.

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