

MADE NEW

“During the Human Rights Day long weekend I was participating in a walking race in the colors of the Elim Clinic Athletic Club. I passed a couple who were competing in the same age group as I. The lady asked me how I was involved with the Clinic and I answered: “As a former patient and a present director.” A short discussion ensued on the remarkable work the Clinic was doing. The couple remarked on my good fortune to be able to participate in a road race after having been addicted to * Ativan and alcohol.

As I continued toward the finish I reflected on the fact that 24 years earlier, to the day, I had been in Elim Clinic as a patient struggling with nasty withdrawal symptoms, but suffering much more from the humiliation of having to be treated at all. I was overwhelmed by the spectacular fashion in which my entire life had crashed: Substance abuse, a depression so deep that I had taken preparatory steps to commit suicide; broken relationships with my friends and family; running a severe risk of permanent damage to my health; facing the danger of losing my advocate’s practice and feeling rejected by the world and God alike. I was shattered, at the end of my tether, my spirit broken.

For days I could not come to terms with my condition, with the fact that I was an alcoholic and drug (prescription medication) addict, with my failure as husband, father and as individual, with the fact that the Lord seemed distant and unresponsive to my plight and my prayers.

And then, about ten days after having been admitted, sitting in chapel I was guided to the Scripture of the paralyzed man in Luke 5, 17 – 25. With sudden clarity I recognized myself in this man. He was brought to Jesus by his friends; as I had been brought back from the brink of demise by two wonderful colleagues; a man whose faith had been as low as mine and who was supported by the faith of others like I was; a man who could do nothing and was paralyzed until the Lord told him “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

This forgiveness was mine, too – throughout the dark and terrible days and nights of addiction and sin the Lord had continued to love

me and – as I now realized – protected and carried me. At the same time the way in which I would have to live from that day onward became crystal clear: I had to go home and resume my life praising God – but that could only be done if I told those I met where I had been, where I came from and that I was healed because of His grace and love. And I knew from that moment that Elim would become a permanent beacon and symbol of His power and forgiveness.

And so I was discharged on the 11th April 1986. I was back on the 14th April 1986 to book in a friend who was in need of the same healing that had been bestowed upon me. I told everybody who knew me, every client, every instructing attorney, every casual acquaintance that I was an addict who had been healed by His intervention.

Of course I was concerned that my practice might suffer once I broadcast the fact that I was an “ex-student” of the Clinic. The opposite was the case. My practice grew, I was granted the status of senior counsel and I experienced the privilege of being elected chairman of the Pretoria Bar and to representative positions in other national and international legal bodies. Since the 14th February 2000 I am a judge of the High Court in Pretoria. Everyone who trusted me with these appointments knew that I was a former patient at the Elim Clinic. But they also knew of the most important appointment that was bestowed upon me. I am serving my seventeenth term as a director of the clinic, involved in many of its activities and able to pass on a little of the grace I have received.

As I approached the finish of the race I was deeply under the impression how often the Lord turns the words of Revelations 21 verse 5 into practical reality in the lives of those who come to Elim because they have run into a brick wall: “And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”” And every breath we who have been healed, take, is living proof of the Lord’s power and grace at work in those who are new persons in Christ Jesus.”

**Ativan is in a group of drugs called benzodiazepam. It has a tranquilizing effect and is used to treat anxiety disorders.*

Eberhard Bertelsmann