



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Greenwood, South Carolina, used to advertise itself as having the widest main street in the world. However, most North Carolina-bound tourists on U.S. Highway 25 probably remember it for the railroad tracks in the center of the street rather than its width. Although arrangements have finally been made to remove the tracks, a 100-car freight train still slowly snakes its way through the heart of the town twice a day, blocking all traffic for 15 minutes. And, twice a day, the Fire Department cranks up one of its big red trucks and moves it across the tracks in case there is an alarm while the train is in command of the town.

There are some signs of progress. Northern industry has been lured south since labor unions are still virtually unknown in this section of the world. The boys who have gone off to Clemson have returned with long hair, and the girls from Winthrop and the University have come back with short skirts and wire glasses. Yet, by and large, the town remains changeless.

It's been six years since I've been back, except for an occasional visit. Tonight I am back officially, to conduct a wedding in the church I used to pastor.

Last night after the rehearsal was over, I walked through the huge church building on South Main Street which for eight years was my life, my breath, my being. Nothing had changed. The floors were still immaculate, the chairs in the same positions. As I wandered through the semi-dark building I found myself automatically reaching out for familiar light switches and door knobs.

I paused and looked at a fire extinguisher on the wall, remembering a deacons' meeting that lasted past midnight as the men debated whether they could afford \$100 to protect the one million dollar building.

The last time I was inside the building was a night six years ago. We were leaving the next day to step out into an unknown ministry in Florida, and I was scared. I sat on the platform that night, in the darkness of the sanctuary with the soft glow of the street lights filtering through the expensive stained glass windows, and cried. I had never known God apart from the security of a building, and the future seemed frightful.

Last night, though, as I sat on that same carpeted platform, dangling my feet over the edge while the bridal party practiced the recessional, I laughed. Deeply. Inwardly. Even though the young lady before me, once a gangly kid in the youth choir, was now first runner-up in the Miss South Carolina contest, nothing seemed changed. It was as though I had blinked my eyes and was back where I had been six years before. The only difference was me. I was changed.

I have learned many things. Among them that the security of changelessness, the security of a building, are no longer needed as I worship. These last years have allowed me to say with the Apostle Paul (who also learned the same lesson) that "God . . . dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything . . ."