



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

I'm tired. I was up most of last night re-arranging my travel schedule so I could make this stopover in Durham on my way to Philadelphia. Now sitting in the ominous silence of the hospital room at the Duke Medical Center I wait—and pray.

The prone form of my friend, Ed Seymour, lies quietly on the bed in front of me. His face is covered with a clear mask with a tube extending to the oxygen outlet in the wall. Another tube runs from a hole in his throat to a suction machine. Two other tubes dangle from suspended bottles, one filled with a clear liquid, the other bright red. A final tube disappears mysteriously under the starched bed sheets.

Mr. Ed, at 62, is a saint. For 33 years he was the town drunk in Greenwood, South Carolina. But at the age of 49 he had a life-shattering experience known as "salvation" and his life was totally transformed. He was an Army BT instructor back during World War II, and when he learned I was interested he taught me how to fly. Later we owned an airplane together. Not only did he teach me flying, but he taught me more theology than I ever learned at the seminary. Having no children he sort of adopted my five, and no children could love any man more than mine love Mr. Ed.

I look at him now. His body has been half cut open to remove a cancerous kidney. Previously the doctors had suspected the other kidney, severely damaged by heavy drinking, was not working.

"Shriveled up like a prune" was the report.

There may be some question about God answering some of our selfish adult prayers, but you'll never convince me He doesn't hear the prayers of little children. So when the surgeon sliced Mr. Ed open he could hardly believe his eyes. The other kidney, once believed dead, was now functioning.

He moves his head, opens his eyes and sees me beside the bed. He nods slightly and smiles in recognition before drifting back to sleep. I sit looking at his familiar face. The top half of his left ear is missing, snapped off one night many years ago when he rolled off the sofa in a drunken stupor and landed on his pet bulldog who was asleep on the floor.

"Dear God, please don't let him die!" I bury my face in my hands so his wife, standing beside the bed won't see my tears.

Outside the room I hear the irreverent chatter and laughter of the afternoon nurses as they wait for the elevator to take them home. How can they just walk out of this house of sickness and death and forget about those who just moments before depended on them for life. I want to cry out, "How dare you be happy. Don't you know my friend is hovering between life and death?"

The elevator door slides shut on their laughter. Now only the soft hiss of the oxygen, the whirl of the suction machines, and the thumping of my own heart in my neck. I sit. And wait. And pray. And God answers.