



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

We've just received word that old friends of ours — the kind you take camping trips with — have decided to separate. The news settled in over our home much as the news of a death. Death and divorce are first cousins, you know. Both spring from the same family stock — separation. In fact, in some ways death is easier to face than divorce, for at least it is a natural process. Divorce is unnatural. And always tragic.

Otis was an attorney. In fact, he specialized in handling divorce cases. An elder in his church, he used to testify how he had been used to bringing widely separated partners back together. "I talked myself out of a handsome fee," he used to joke. But he felt called to make every effort to bring reconciliation before he took a case to court. He was that kind of man.

Marge enjoyed Otis' financial and social success. She enjoyed driving her Mercedes through town, eating lunch at the country club and chairing the woman's organization at the church. Like Otis, she was warm and affable. Like I said, the kind of folks we enjoyed camping with.

Over the last several years we haven't seen a great deal of them. They live in another state and our contacts have been limited to summer visits. But we knew things weren't going well. Last spring I was through their community and they met me at the airport for a quick lunch and some serious conversation. They were separated at the time on a "trial" basis. It didn't make sense and I came down hard, as an old friend should do,

as I heard them sit there and cut each other to pieces over minor things.

"She listens in on my phone conversations, and I'm sick of it."

"He bought himself a new set of golf clubs but raised holy terror when I took the kids to dinner and a movie."

"She told my friends I was a skinflint."

"He told the preacher I was nagging him to death."

Like death from disease, most divorces begin this way as the germs of distrust and separation are allowed to breed in the mind. I left that meeting after taking both their hands and standing in the middle of the airport praying for them. They both had tears in their eyes, but neither of them was willing to give ground.

Now they are divorced. Letters from each say they still love one another. But they can't return unless the other "repents." And how can you repent when you think you're right?

His law practice is ruined. The children are torn to pieces emotionally. Their Christian witness in the community badly tarnished. They've lost their beautiful home. All because neither one would say, "I'm sorry."

My old friend T. B. Maston used to say, "Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. That just brings you to an encounter. Marriage is a 60-60 proposition. Each partner going the second mile."