



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Vance Havner, sparky little pepper 'n salt preacher, once commented on the need for every man to take a vacation. He tied it in with Jesus' words, "come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile."

"If you can't 'come apart' for a rest," Havener quipped, "you'll come apart."

Last week our family of seven decided to come apart. We almost did—at the seams.

Leaving our 70-pound red-and-white collie with the in-laws and our cat (and five kittens) with friends, we headed for the outer banks of North Carolina—700 miles away. We loaded our six-year-old station wagon with people, suitcases, beach towels, fishing gear, food and assorted children's games and pulled out of the driveway for five days of glorious coming apart. But three blocks from home our car, overworked, overloaded and overheated, did its own "coming apart." It stalled in the middle lane of a busy thoroughfare.

"Everybody out and push," I shouted at the wife and five kids.

"Oh, Daddy," my teenage daughters moaned, their faces flushed red.

"Push!" I screamed as horns blared and people on the sidewalk stopped and stared.

Uncerimoniously we rolled to a stop on a side street while the children, mortified beyond words, crawled back into the car to await the arrival of a mechanic.

I know absolutely nothing about automobile engines and stand in awe of those who do. An hour later, when the cigar chewing mechanic pulled up, I promptly called him "sir" and asked permission to watch while he fixed the car. I had some kind of horrible premonition that this was just the first of a long series of events to dog us on our coming apart. I kept having daytime nightmares of the car stalling out again, probably in the toll gate on the interstate bridge or on the bow of the ferry while 30 cars behind us honked to get off.

Switching his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other he uttered a few guttural sounds, took his pliers and began to pound on the top of the carburetor. "Now try it," he said, wiping his greasy hands on his shirt. It started right up.

I put the car in reverse and it stalled again. My wife went running down the street hollering at the departing mechanic, "Hey mister, Sir, please . . ."

He returned, hit the carburetor with the pliers again and said, "now try it." Once again it worked beautifully. He set the idle so it sounded like it was going 40 miles an hour even while we were stopped, said to cut off the air conditioner at every stop light and concluded, "My advice is to keep it running until you get to where you're going."

"Where I'm going," I muttered in exasperation, "is back to the house to unpack."

"No, Daddy," the children began crying.

"Please, Honey," my wife begged. "Don't take it out on the children. You've been promising them this coming apart for months."

"I've already come apart," I said shaking my head. But I gave in, backed our rusting, creaking car out into the roaring traffic and headed north again. We were three hours late, everyone was hot, hungry and angry, and to top it off we discovered that one of the children had wandered away and we had to go round him up.

Next week, after I get back together again, I'll see if I can come up with some positive aspects of coming apart.