

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

# 227

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with a Christian businessman named James Cash Penney. I have condensed his biography from Christianity.com. His favorite Bible verses were Ps. 26:1-2 which he memorized as a child: **"I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I will walk in faithfulness to you"**. These, of course, are valid thoughts for everyone to consider.

Penney's father pastored a small church in Hamilton, Missouri and struggled to make a living on the family farm. The family was so poor that at 8 years of age James had to earn his own money and buy his own clothes. As a teenager he worked on surrounding farms. At graduation his father, who was dying of tuberculosis, asked a friend to give his boy a steady job. His friend gave young James a job in his dry goods store for \$2.27 a month. James seemed to have a knack for merchandizing and within two years his salary had increased 12 times.

Then came the stunning news that he also had TB as his father did. The doctors recommended that he move to a dryer climate. Consequently he moved to Longmont, Colorado and bought a butcher shop. That business hit hard times when James refused to give free liquor to his biggest client. It was in Longmont, however, that James got back into the dry goods business and also met and married his wife Berta.

In 1902 James and Berta moved to Kemmerer, Wyoming and bought the Golden Rule dry goods store. That name, of course, resonated with his Christian heritage. James was only 26 at the time. The town had only about 1,000 people yet had 21 saloons. The saloons offered credit but J.C. Penney would not. As a matter of applying the Golden Rule he insisted on cash only. Within the next 10 years he opened 30 more stores. Treating others as he would want to be treated, he allowed his managers to become part owners and then to even purchase their own stores.

He incorporated in 1913 as "J.C. Penney and Company, Inc." God blessed his business and he launched more than a thousand stores during the Roaring Twenties. His business even continued to grow during the Great Depression. The bank failures, however, resulted in huge financial losses that plunged him into a deep depression. That's when he entered a sanatorium in Battle Creek, Michigan for rest and medical attention. One morning he awoke before breakfast and heard a hymn being sung in the chapel. He remembered it from his childhood. The words are: *"Be not dismayed what'er betide, God will take care of you. All you need He will provide, God will take care of you"*.

The promise of God embodied in this hymn literally transformed his life. During the next 12 hours he wrestled with God like Jacob did at Peniel (Gen. 32:22-32). At the end of that time he said: "I felt I was passing out of darkness into light". At that time J.C. Penney came to realize that hard work alone was not sufficient for success. Everyone of us, no matter how rich or poor, needs to depend upon God. After that "epiphany" the faith of his father returned and he was convinced that God could take care of him even in the midst of hardship.

His financial fortunes began to be restored in the mid-1930s. This enabled him to renew his support for various charities such as the Penney Retirement Community in Penny Farms, Fla, Christian Herald, and over 100 other charitable organizations.

His philosophy of business and religion is reflected in this following quotation: *“The assumption was that business is secular, and service is religious. I have never been able to accept that line of arbitrary demarcation . . . Is not service part and parcel of business? It seems to me so; business is therefore as much religious as it is secular. If we follow the admonition to love God, and our neighbors as ourselves, it will lead us to understand that first of all, success is a matter of the spirit”*

In spite of the diagnosis of TB during his youth, he lived and served God until he was 95 years of age!

One of the many lessons we can learn from J.C. Penney is to disregard the artificial distinction between the sacred and the secular. In Old Testament times worship was confined to certain times and special locations. Jesus did away with all of that. Jesus insisted that worship is now in “spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). In reality, nothing is secular to the child of God for **“whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:27).** May God help you to glorify Him in everything you do.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce