



April 1, 2005

# Gleanings

By Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

## Hard Lesson Teaches Profound Truth

The year was 1883. Eight-year-old Jim woke early as usual to do his morning chores on the family farm. It was a rainy, cold morning. Once in the barn, Jim's father noticed that Jim was barefooted. Jim made the journey from the house to the barn in homemade cardboard shoes. The cardboard quickly disintegrated in the wet conditions. His dad told Jim to come to his study after breakfast. Such words normally meant that Jim was in trouble. On this day, however, Jim's father didn't reprimand his son, but conveyed a sober message. Things were very tough for the family; the church Jim's father pastored paid a meager stipend and the family farm was not doing well. Hence, from now on, Jim would have to take responsibility for buying his own shoes and clothes.

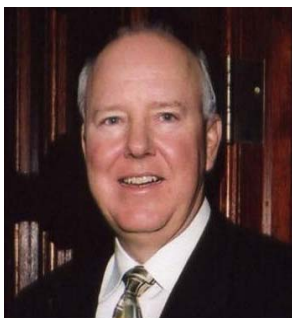
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Despite his young age, Jim began to evaluate his options. There was a county fair coming up, so he decided to sell some produce. The day of the fair came and Jim loaded his wagon and headed for the fair. Upon arriving he discovered that to sell his produce at the fair he had to buy a permit. He didn't have the money, so he parked his wagon outside of the fair grounds and began to sell. Soon a wagon came by. The driver angrily yelled at Jim—it was Jim's father. His father told him that since he had not paid the permit fee to sell his produce, he should not be selling. Jim's father quickly pointed out that Jim should always treat others the way that he wanted to be treated; hence, if others had to pay a fee to sell products, shouldn't Jim? And if he couldn't pay the fee, he shouldn't sell.



Jim's father passionately believed in the golden rule—treat others the way you want to be treated. He took every opportunity to impart this principle to Jim. As a result, this lesson was indelibly imprinted in Jim's mind and became a guiding principle for him throughout his life.

The principle was so ingrained in Jim that he even named his first retail store, "The Golden Rule Store." Using the golden rule as a guiding principle, by 1927 Jim built the largest chain of retail stores in the world. Though the name was changed to the J. C. Penney Company, the principle of the golden rule remained a guiding philosophy that blessed many customers, associates, and business partners.

It is truly amazing to see the power of this simple principle. Many organizations today recognize and practice this maxim. Why is it so powerful? Perhaps because the presupposition of the golden rule is that God values people and creates each of us with intent and purpose. When any organization embraces this reality and values people accordingly, the organization enjoys favor from the Creator. Now that is a blessing!

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