

# JAM'S PLAYGROUND

## THE EMAIL FILE

### **I Won't, Ever**

I saw him in the church building for the first time on Wednesday. He was in his mid-70s, with thinning hair and a neat brown suit. Many times in the past I had invited him to come. Several other Christian friends had talked to him about the Lord and had tried to share the good news with him. He was a well-respected, honest man with so many of the characteristics a Christian should have; but he had never put on Christ.

"Have you ever been to a church service in your life?" I asked him several years ago. We had just finished a pleasant day of visiting and talking. He hesitated. Then, with a bitter smile, he told me of a childhood experience over sixty years ago.

He was one of many children in a large, impoverished family. His parents had struggled to provide food, with little left for housing and clothing. When he was about ten, some neighbors had invited him to worship with them. The Bible class had been very exciting. He had never heard such songs and stories before. He had never even heard anyone read from the Bible. After class was over, the teacher took him aside and said, "Son, please don't come again dressed as you are now. We want to look our best when we come to worship the Lord."

He stood in his ragged, un-patched overalls, looked at his dirty, bare feet, and said, "No, Ma'am, I won't, ever." "And I never did," he said, abruptly ending our conversation.

There must have been other factors to have hardened him so, but this experience formed a significant part of the bitterness in his heart. I'm sure that Bible teacher meant well. But what if she had really understood the love of Christ? What if she had studied and accepted the teachings found in the second chapter of James? What if she had put her arms around that dirty, ragged little boy and said, "Son, I am so glad you are here, and I hope you will come every chance you get to hear more about Jesus?" I reflected on the awesome responsibility a teacher has to welcome little ones in His name. How far-reaching her influence is! I prayed that I might ever be open to the tenderness of a child's heart, and that I might never fail to see beyond the appearance and behavior of a child to the eternal possibilities within.

Yes, I saw him in the church house for the first time Wednesday. And as I looked at that immaculately dressed old gentleman lying in his casket, I thought of the little boy of long ago. I could almost hear him say, "No, Ma'am, I won't, ever." And I wept.