

**LETTERS FROM GRANDPA**  
**# 273**

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will be about the late John Wooden. Some believe he was the greatest basketball coach of all time. The reason for telling you about him is that he correctly placed his relationship with Christ before basketball or anything else. He said: *"I have always tried to make it clear that basketball is not the ultimate. It is of small importance in comparison to the total life we live. There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is the one that places faith in the hands of the Savior."* Wooden's faith was central in his life. He read the Bible every day and regularly attended the First Christian Church. He said that he hoped his faith was apparent to others: *"If I were ever prosecuted for my religion, I truly hope there would be enough evidence to convict me."*

As a diminutive 5'10" guard, Wooden was the first player in history to be named Basketball All-American three different times. Wooden was also first to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame both as a player (1960) and as also a coach (1973).

Another admirable thing about Wooden is that he was a family man. He met his future wife, Nellie, when they were both freshmen in high school. They married several years later when both were 21. Sadly, Nellie passed away with cancer March 21, 1985 at the age of 73. For the next 25 years John demonstrated his undying love for her by faithfully visiting her grave and writing her a letter every month. John himself passed away June 4, 1910 at the age of 99.

UCLA hired Wooden during the 1948-1949 season. He was only the fourth basketball coach in UCLA history. His salary for the first year was a mere \$6,000. He was, however, an instant success. They finished the season as Southern Division Champions with a 22-7 record. This was the most wins UCLA had experienced since their basketball program began in 1919. By the 1955-56 season, Wooden had established a record of sustained success. That year, he guided the team to its first undefeated PCC conference title with a 17-game winning streak. By the time of his retirement he gained lasting fame with UCLA by winning 620 games in 27 seasons. This included 10 NCAA titles during his last 12 seasons, including seven in a row from 1967 to 1973. His UCLA teams also established a then-record winning streak of 88 games and four perfect 30-0 seasons. They also won 38 straight games in NCAA tournaments and 98 straight home wins at Pauley Pavilion. Wooden was not in it for the money. In spite of his amazing coaching skills his top salary was only \$35,000 a year.

Among many admirable standards, Coach Wooden rigidly stressed three rules in particular. He expected every player to be on time, neatly dressed, and not to use profanity. He meant it! On one occasion one of his top players was not allowed to travel with the team because he was not neatly dressed. John's own personal creed came from his father: (1) Be true to yourself. (2) Make each day your masterpiece. (3) Help others. (4) Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible. (5) Make friendship of fine art. (6) Build a shelter against a rainy day. (7) Pray for guidance and give thanks for your blessings every day.

The Bible teaches: **"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev. 13:10).**

How beautiful! John Wooden is gone, but not forgotten. His "deeds" are following him! His righteous life continues to inspire others. It is not uncommon for dead people to have influence. In

fact, first person to experience physical death still speaks. He was an obscure shepherd named Abel. We know almost nothing about him. We don't know where he lived, what he looked like, how old he was, or where he is buried. Yet he still speaks. The book of Hebrews puts it like this: **“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead” (Heb. 11:4).**

Interestingly, death has a way of finalizing the way we will be remembered. Abel will forever be remembered as a righteous man and his brother Cain will forever be remembered as the murderer who killed him. John the apostle is remembered for loving Jesus, and Judas the apostle is remembered for betraying Jesus. They are dead, but they still speak. Neither is Hitler's memory contained in a coffin. His evil influence reaches out of the grave to inspire others to do evil. In 1999, for example, two deranged high school students chose to celebrate Hitler's birthday by killing 13 fellow students and then committing suicide. This happened, as you know, at the Columbine High School in Colorado. The birthday of Abraham Lincoln, by contrast, inspires high school students to be honest and to value the lives of those who are disadvantaged.

If you should die today, how will you be remembered? The good news is that as long as you are alive you still have a choice. If you do not like the way you will be remembered, you can pray that God will give you time to enhance your resume. Interestingly, while we can't take our money with us to heaven, we can take people with us to heaven! That is something that Coach John Wooden would want you to think about.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce