

The Fruits of the Spirit at Work

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Galatians

Galatians 5:22-23 encourages us to cultivate “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” We often think of the fruit of the Spirit in the context of church life. But when we apply these qualities to our work, it can give us a fresh perspective to bring God’s presence into our places of work.

Love can help us see our colleagues, customers, and managers as image bearers of God. All people do better at work when they are treated with love, dignity, and respect.

Joy can arise from accomplishing something meaningful. This is not to be confused with superficial joy, whipped up in an artificial way through cheers and slogans, but the deep satisfaction of doing what we are called to do every day in our work.

Peace creates an atmosphere conducive to creativity and teamwork. Peace does not suggest an absence of conflict, because new ideas often involve struggle and compromise. Rather, peace means supporting others and avoiding gossip so that intellectual conflict occurs within a context of shared objectives.

Patience recognizes the need to consider long term goals over short term gains. We have seen far too many examples of individuals looking for shortcuts, or simply leaving at the first sign of difficulty. A recent study asked 500 CEOs whether they would knowingly forgo long term opportunities in order to make quarterly results, and 80% said they would. Patience, on the other hand, builds success that represents lasting value.

Kindness is particularly meaningful when it is offered at work. Think of a boss cutting an employee some slack when he or she is dealing with a difficult personal situation, or a teacher who sees beyond the apparent rudeness of a student, and looks for ways to help that student overcome a learning disability. This is not to be confused with ignoring failure or having low expectations, but rather, carries out the words of Jude 22, “Have mercy on some who are wavering.”

Generosity seems to be at odds with the goal of most businesses — to maximize profit — and with the goal of individual career advancement. But when everyone is simply looking out for their own interests, the cutthroat environment at work stifles collaboration and creativity. Some businesses have demonstrated that generous return policies can actually improve the bottom line, and that employees produce better with generous benefits packages.

Faithfulness at work means sticking with the task to its completion, being a person of your word in delivering what you promised, or simply showing up when you don't feel like it. Melissa Rafoni, in the Harvard management

update said, “Strategic planning gets all the cachet and all the ink, but the most creative, visionary strategic planning is useless if it isn't translated into action.” Faithfulness is vital to any kind of work.

Gentleness is best used at work in hard conversations, such as during a sharp disagreement, a difficult performance review or a termination. When the person in power remains humble, allows for two-way communication, and avoids the degradation of the other person, their gentleness eases the tension of the situation. Like kindness, gentleness is not the same as reducing expectations or excusing a lack of excellence. Instead, gentleness is a means of correction that begins with humility and respect.

Self-Control is required in the face of the temptation at work to cut a corner, bend a rule or act dishonestly because of the opportunity for personal gain. Many executives formerly of great wealth and power are now in prison because of their lack of self-control. They needed more of fruit of the Spirit at work.

In agriculture, fruit is a delicious result of long-term growth and cultivation. The metaphor “fruit of the Spirit” signals that God cares about the kind of people we are becoming, rather than only what we are doing today. We are to cultivate these fruits over the course of a life-time, in all the work God calls us to do.