

**June 18, 2018**  
**By Jim Mathis**

## CLARIFYING THE CONFUSION OVER LEADERSHIP

An intriguing discussion topic these days is leadership, whether within the context of the marketplace, politics, the culture, sports, even the home. Many people seem eager to attain positions of leadership, but sometimes when we take an objective look at our world, it seems there is either a lot of confusion about what it takes to be a true leader, or a serious shortage of quality leaders.

What exactly is leadership? The best definition of leadership I have heard is one word: Influence. If you have influence over somebody, you are a leader. It may be as a parent with influence over children; a teacher with influence over students; or a business person that influences employees or customers. The ability we have for exerting that influence is called leadership.

We often think of leadership in terms of a position, such as a boss, CEO, or president. In reality, leadership has to be earned through respect, a history of good judgment, and the willingness of those you are assigned to lead to follow you. No matter what your title may be, if those under you do not respect you, or do not have a desire to be influenced by you, you will not be their leader.

So how do we know what it requires to be a good leader? What are the traits necessary for effective leadership? The apostle Paul, in *Galatians 5:22-23*, lists what he calls the fruit of the Spirit which are available to any follower of the greatest leader of all, Jesus Christ. These qualities also happen to be the characteristics of a good leader: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* Let's take a look at each of these, within the context of leadership.

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For the leader, “love” involves compassion, understanding, and seeking to know the other person’s story. Joy makes itself known through a positive attitude, being an encourager. Leaders are peacemakers. They work to resolve and smooth over conflict in productive ways. Parents show peacemaking skills when they help their children get along with one another. Business leaders strive to keep the workplace free of conflict and encourage friendly competition, not bitterness, with their competitors. Leaders also are patient; they do not jump to hasty conclusions or make rash statements.

True leaders cannot be influential without being kind. Kindness and gentleness are essential ingredients for any relationship where we want to influence somebody’s behavior in meaningful ways. Faithfulness is similar to integrity, displaying honesty, reliability and consistency. Finally, we have self-control. If we cannot control our own negative habits, we will not be able to effectively influence others. Overeating, overdrinking, foul and abusive language, or any other bad habits that show lack of self-control, minimize a person’s ability to lead.

All of us are in some position of leadership, whether we know it or not. Somebody is looking to each of us for guidance, whether by observing and copying our actions, or by verbally asking for some understanding or insight from us.

This list of qualities outlined in Galatians, the fruit of God’s Spirit, is instructive. We would be wise not only to learn and live them ourselves, but also to use them as a guide for considering and choosing what leaders we will follow. Ultimately, we can seek to demonstrate these traits by our own effort, but only through the power of Jesus Christ can they be fully manifested in our lives.

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## Reflection/Discussion Question

1. How would you define “leadership”? Or what it requires to be a good leader?
2. From an overall perspective, what is your opinion of the quality and caliber of leadership you have observed – both in person, at work and in your community, as well as what you see presented through the mass media?
3. What do you think of the suggestion about following the biblical listing of “the fruit of the Spirit” as a guide for effective leadership?
4. Which of the items included on that list seem most important for effective leadership, from your point of view?

## NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

*Proverbs 20:28, 22:4, 27:23-27, 28:2; Mark 10:45; John 10:1-16; 1 Corinthians 13:13*

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