

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22–23

She burst out of the Chestnut Quick Mart, hurling expletives into the universe, most of them landing squarely on the clerk she had just confronted. I stood beside my car, genuinely stunned. Others glanced her way as she smacked the gas pump, her car door, and anything else within reach. A minute earlier, I had been at that same counter, chatting with the cashier about how to join their rewards club. Then she flew in, a young woman who, by outward appearances, looked put together, but carried a storm cloud of hostility that filled the room.

She slammed her purse and phone onto the counter as I moved to leave, nearly pushing me aside in the process. The clerk's eyes said what I didn't: this would not be a pleasant conversation. I slipped out before hearing what followed, but I wish I'd been long gone before she exploded back through those doors into the parking lot. I felt terrible for the clerk, someone who has always been unfailingly kind whenever I stop in.

Humans are messy. We carry burdens we don't speak of, and sometimes they leak out in toxic ways. I don't know what that young woman brought into the store with her, but whatever it was, she poured it onto that poor clerk and didn't help anyone. And truth be told, this sort of harshness is becoming more common. Impatience. Abrasiveness. Malice. A growing tendency to let our worst impulses do the talking.

Patience, gentleness, kindness ... which of these is **your** kryptonite? Every one of us has weak spots. We live in a culture conditioned for instant gratification. As young Violet Beauregarde says in the old *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*: "I don't care how — I want it now." It's hardly a new sentiment, but it feels like it has finally ripened into full fruit.

Paul reminds us that the life of the Spirit looks different. It is visible, tangible, and unmistakable in how we treat the people around us. Followers of Christ are called to bear fruit that stands in stark contrast to the world's quick temper and brittle spirit.

As this new year begins, may we pause long enough to consider how we might respond with greater compassion and empathy. God did not come into the world for God's sake but for ours, to redeem humanity through the lived example of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" made flesh in Jesus Christ.

May that fruit grow in us in the year ahead.

Yours in Christ, Kregg