



What does MODESTY mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the signs and actions that the Holy Spirit is alive within us and helping us live by faith in our daily lives.

“What does MODESTY mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?”

Mike Passilla, the former CEO of JPMorgan Chase & Company Merchant Services, shared thoughts and discussed this with those present during the BELIEVES session held on Tuesday, September 13, 2022.



Passilla, originally from Orlando, Florida, went to Notre Dame as a student athlete on the baseball team, and then later went to Northwestern to earn an MBA. After starting his professional career at IBM, he later went on to lead Inforte’s North American business, served as the CEO of Elavon for close to 6 years, and then joined the leadership team of JPM Morgan Chase as the CEO of its Merchant Services business.

“I’m a transparent person and will overshare,” Passilla stated when beginning to share about a joy moment. “My mom died last March. My dad is still grieving – being afraid when he’s still alone. Part of the conversations I’ve had with him is to get him to re-enter his joy. I’m now giving him homework assignments, and telling him, ‘Dad, outside of family and grandkids, what’s a list of things that give you joy? We’ll discuss on Friday.’”

Eric Maust, who was moderating the discussion, and has known for Passilla for years, shared a reflection on Passilla.

“Someone, perhaps someone here, once said, modesty isn’t minimalizing your accomplishments, but through your achievements recognizing the humanity along the way and carving out time for people,” said Maust. “When I was working for Mike in years past, it was always amazing when people would get in the elevator and say, ‘Who was that?’ referring to Mike after he had taken time to visit with them. He just took the time for people and sometimes people didn’t realize he was the boss.”

How does Passilla keep perspective on a personal level?

He said a core set of values are important, as well as connections.

“My greatest moment in life was through my grandfather’s passing,” Passilla mentioned. “I gave the eulogy, so I went to Meadville, PA, where he lived, to get stories from those that knew him. He was 14 when his 16-year-old brother died. He was next in line to work for the railroad to be the sole breadwinner for the family. So, at 14, it then became what he did. That sacrifice, that story, galvanized things for him.”

Passilla continued, remarking that with this as a foundation point, a mother and father who did the right thing, and the understanding not to think you're better than the person next to you, life will be rewarding.

"Success also comes from this," said Passilla, who serves on boards and advises a number of businesses. "This is how modesty speaks to me. I also get satisfaction from seeing others succeed."

Lastly, as a galvanizing point, Passilla spoke of the message in 1 Samuel 16:7 – *The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

"It's compelling and motivating to discern why am I doing what I'm doing," Passilla said when reflecting. "If it is so people will see it, it's not it. The focus is on what's truly in the heart. What do I get if I gain the whole world but lose my soul?"



Someone present then asked Passilla if there was a time when this has been difficult to maintain, and how does he avoid the temptation of letting that pride creep in and get to you.

"It's a real struggle, and people will always have their opinions on what your motivations are," he answered. "As CEO of Elavon, we were expanding into 42 countries, and I was excited about the opportunities this made for employees but struggled with some decisions around overpricing customers to make a number. The JP Morgan opportunity offered a chance away from this pressure, but there was cost to my family having to be uprooted from Atlanta to Dallas."

While in Dallas with JP Morgan, Passilla shared his wife contracted cancer.

"She had sacrificed," he said. "It's my turn. I need to sacrifice. Dallas worked great for me, but my wife wasn't flourishing. God was telling me to do something. I didn't act fast enough."

All this led to Passilla doing what he does now – being retired, serving through non-profits, and doing missions.

"I got work ethic from my father and grandfather, and heart from my mom. I also, think connecting and networking is so important. There are so many moments where I reflect and realize if I didn't have a conversation nothing would later happen in some other moment or way."

One of the most prominent "God whisper" situations he recalled had to do with the recently launched Global Center for Health Innovation in Atlanta.

"Clark Dean approached me a few years ago and told me of the efforts to start the Global Center for Health Innovation," stated Passilla. "The differentiator for Atlanta is that it has the CDC. To be a center for global health and innovation you have to have logistics – Atlanta has UPS; transportation – Atlanta has Hartsfield Jackson Airport; a medical collaborator – Atlanta has the CDC; and clean water distribution throughout the world – Atlanta has Coke, one of the two who can do this throughout the world."

He added, "Clark said, 'We need to get a building.'"

Soon thereafter, Passilla joined the Governance Committee, and then the Board, for the Global Center for Health Innovation. Now the building next to the Fox Theater has been chosen to be occupied by collaborators for the Center.

After hearing the story Passilla had just told, a member of the audience asked Passilla for his thoughts on a question of a different nature.

“Modesty never comes up in corporate assessments,” the attendee stated. “Why do you think that is? It’s implicit in the culture.”

Before answering the question, Passilla commented, “At JP Morgan, you see every type of leadership and personality. I prayed a lot before taking the job, wondering if I could maintain my soul while in the role and more.”

Adding on to this, Passilla stated his belief that the reason people are chasing a goal of financial security is at the core of Bible – chasing a false God.

“Pride is certainly a motivator in all this.”

Having given this context, Passilla then spoke of how he believes it’s important that leaders in organizations be storytellers.

“It sets culture. It’s always ‘we’ not ‘I,’” he said. “It’s also why I would write ‘Your fellow teammate’ in my signature line.”

Then Passilla told of an anecdote from his dad’s professional career that he felt also touched on the question.

“My dad was the head of HR for Disney globally. Every year between Christmas and New Year’s, Disney would shut down the park to provide a celebratory time for employees to enjoy time together at the park and bring their families. The executives would be the ones working. It helped create the culture.”

Additionally, Passilla spoke about having an open-door policy, but with a question to consider.

“When people come to you, are you really listening, and acknowledging you heard them?”