

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Nuts

(Chuck Swindoll)

As I write these words, I am at 35,000 feet. It's 5:45 p.m. Saturday. It should be 4:15. The airliner was an hour and a half late. People are grumpy. Some are downright mad. Flight attendants are apologizing, offering extra booze to take off the edge. To complicate matters, a Japanese gentleman across the aisle has a rather severe nose bleed and they're trying to instruct the poor chap...but he doesn't speak a word of English!

So, now the meal is late. The lady on my left has a cold and makes an enormous sound when she sneezes (about every ninety seconds—I've timed her). It's something like a dying calf in a hailstorm or a bull moose with one leg in a trap. Oh, one more thing. The sports video just broke down and so did the nervous system of half the men on board.

It's a flying zoo!

It all started with the delay. "Mechanical trouble," they said. "Inexcusable," responded a couple of passengers. Frankly, I'd rather they fix it before we leave than decided to do something about it at 35,000 feet. But we Americans don't like to wait. Delays are irritating. Aggravating. Nerve jangling. Faced with delay, we are consistently—and, I might add, obnoxiously—demanding. We want what we want when we want it. Nobody finds a delay easy to accept.

In the midst of this kind of situation, Paul's description of the "fruit of the Spirit," seems, well, a little nuts. I can imagine overflowing with those virtues when everything is running smoothly, when the world isn't handing me a raw deal. But when nothing is going right, how can I be expected to live like that? Let me apply this to my onboard chaos:

- Love . . . this lady is sneezing on me?
- Joy . . . when they took away our only means of entertainment?
- Peace . . . when everybody is in a panic?
- Patience . . . when we've been irreversibly delayed?
- Kindness . . . when we're all on the edge and hungry?
- Faithfulness . . . when everything in us tell us to take our cue from the majority?
- Gentleness . . . when the flight attendant scowls at me?
- Self-control . . . when I've already lost it inside?

Yes, the rubber of Christianity meets the road of proof at just such intersections in life, whether earthbound or airborne. As the expression goes, our faith gets "fleshed out" at times like these. The best test of my Christian character occurs not in the quietness of my study but in the everyday events of life. Anybody can walk in victory when surrounded by books, silence, a fresh cup of coffee, and warm waves of sunshine splashing through the window. But those late takeoffs, those grocery lines, those busy restaurants, those traffic jams! That's where the fruit of the Spirit faces the rude realities of life.

As we cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, we begin to gain the ability to accept delay or disappointment. The ability to smile back at the setbacks and respond with a pleasant, understanding spirit. The ability to cool it when others around you curse it.

For a change, I refused to be hassled by today's delay. I asked God to keep me calm and cheerful, relaxed and refreshed. And you know what? He did. He really did. No pills. No booze. No hocus-pocus. Just relying on and relaxing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I can't promise you that others will understand. In fact, when the expected response is "deeds of the flesh," the fruit of the Spirit looks a little weird. You see, I've got another problem now. Ever since takeoff I've been smiling at the flight attendants, hoping to encourage them. But just now I think I overheard one of them say, "Watch the guy wearing glasses. I think he's had too much to drink."

