

REFLECTIONS

December 30, 2007

**I chose you and appointed you to go and
bear fruit — fruit that will last.**

John 15:16

Family Portraits

The photographer lined us up quickly, and on the count of three he snapped the shot. It was done. We have taken family portraits on other occasions, but they didn't work out too well. Perhaps everyone had time to tense up for those, but for this one there was little time for protest or for tension to build. And the portrait was just right.

The smiles range from broad to slight, but when the picture was snapped even the most solemn of faces is filled with happiness. And as I fix my eyes on each loving face one by one, another family portrait comes alive in my mind.

Though imaginary, I can see the faces of our parents standing among us. They have assumed the stately poses they always took before a camera, but the warmth of their love glows from their hearts as they stand among their legacies. And there is more.

Our grandparents and the great grandparents that we never knew stand in the background. They were the torch bearers that passed the light among the six generations found in my imaginary portrait. The blessings we enjoy today are easily traced to the way they lived their lives—ways that have grown to be the portrait of a family blessed.

Then, knowing there are still more generations that didn't fit in the camera's view finder, I pause to gaze into each ancestral face. Among them I discover traits that formed fruit that endures today. There is the face of love, expression of joy, countenance of peace, and the visage of patience. I see the features of kindness, conscience of goodness, strength of faithfulness, warmth of gentleness, and the discipline of self-control. These are fruits of the spirit composed in today's family portrait—a portrait of a family blessed.

As we place a bookend to mark the close of a year and ponder resolves that will begin a new one, the look into my imaginary family portrait makes me mindful of the responsibility that God entrusted to us all—to bear lasting fruit. It is one of modeling God's love for all to see. God's love is shared in the examples we set, not the words we speak. He blessed each one of us with spiritual gifts to nurture, inspire and support those that look to us for guidance. These are legacies received. They are legacies to leave.

Over the years the images in the family portrait will change. New faces will someday reflect fruits from the lives we have led. Those lives will be shaped by lessons we lived just as our lives have been shaped by the lessons lived before us. When our lives reveal God's love for all to see, our fruits will be displayed in family portraits yet to come. And those too will be portraits of a family blessed.

"You are the light of the world,"

Richard +

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