

Gazing upon the Father

About six years ago, my youngest son Kyler brought home a class assignment he couldn't wait to show me. He was bursting with pride.

The assignment: draw a physical feature of his that reminds him of a family member and write about it. Kyler had drawn his hand — fingernails bitten in excess — with a caption explaining that his hands reminded him of his dad's, "...because we both bite our fingernails."

Of all the traits we share that he could have chosen, he picked the one I'm most embarrassed by. My first thought was "*what does his teacher think of me?*" But that concern vanished the moment he asked his mom and I to put it on the fridge. And there it stayed — not because the drawing was flattering, but because my son made it while thinking of me, his father. To me, it was a masterpiece.

That image has stuck with me, like a magnet on the side of a fridge. As I have been gazing upon the Father, His word, and contemplating how He is changing me, it has prompted me to ask hard questions about my own character. Questions like: If the Father searches the heart of a man (**Jer. 17**), and "weighs his intentions" (**Prov. 16**), how is my character being weighed? Am I gracious to my wife and my children, or am I overbearing with unrealistic expectations? Am I being generous with the blessings God has given me? Do I demonstrate love or criticism most? Do I serve for my glory, or do I point others to His? And many more.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says we're being transformed into Christ's image "with ever-increasing glory" as we contemplate and follow Him. Am I being transformed? I believe that I was made in His likeness (Gen. 1:26–27), but do I produce the fruit that comes from His Spirit dwelling within me? Do I exhibit the characteristics God used to describe Himself in **Exodus 34** — compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness?

Honestly, I tend to grade myself on intentions, not actions. That always yields a high score for me personally, but isn't always the reality my family experiences. At Focused Living, we encourage men to ask this hard question to their loved ones: "*What's it like living on the other side of me?*" Do my actions align with my intentions and His command to love my neighbor?

Jesus said, "**Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me**" (**Jn. 15:4**). Any fruit I bear — love, joy, kindness, gentleness, self-control — comes only from saying "no" to myself and "yes" to Him, daily. Remaining in the vine (Christ) is what makes any fruit possible.

Here's the point. I'm not, you're not, asked to have it all figured out. His expectation is for us to actively remain in Him — and trust Him, expecting that the fruit will come in the right season. Jesus is charging us to focus on Him, resting in the reality that He will produce fruit in our lives. The fruit that family, friends, and neighbors benefit from.

So ask someone who you love: *What's it like living on the other side of me?* Then listen — not to defend yourself, but to see where you need to ask the Father for His guidance and to stay closer to the vine.

Because someone is always watching how you live. Whatever they remember, whatever they'd draw — I pray it points back to the good, good Father.