

New Year's Day Weekend
You Are What You Do
January 3, 2016

PRELUDE – State Line Drive (SLD)
Welcome / Introduction of SLD – Shannon

Worship Songs – SLD

Announcements – Shannon
#FixThis Promo Video

Concert – SLD

Good morning everyone. I want to talk to you for just a few minutes and then the guys will come back to do one more song to close things out.

In the book of Galatians chapter 5 verse 7 we read:

Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. You will reap exactly what you plant.

If you plant in the field of your natural desires, from it you will gather the harvest of death; if you plant in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit you will gather the harvest of eternal life.

So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest.

Galatians 5:7-8 (GNT)

Echoing that last thought, the Apostle James writes:

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:4 (NIV)

A Memorable Memorial

A little over a month ago, I had the bittersweet privilege of speaking at the memorial service for

a guy I had known since he was a teenager; a guy who, along with his wife, had been an integral part of launching this church back in the early 1990s; and a guy who, for more Sundays than I can count, graced our stage with his wonderful singing voice and winsome personality.

I first met Michael Paden in 1987. He was part of the youth group when I became the youth pastor at Park Hill Baptist Church. Like most 13-year-old boys, the best word to describe him at that time was ... “squirrely.” He was awkward and he was goofy.

But, like most 13-year-old boys, he grew out of that and into a wonderful young man who became not only a great husband and father but also a great influence for Christ ... as evidenced by the number of people who attended his memorial. My guess is that at least 750 people were in attendance that day and possibly more. That’s a lot of mourners for a man barely in his 40s.

Some were present because they knew Michael from his day job as a dental technician. Some were students and their parents who had benefited from the music lessons he gave. Most who were there, however, were from the three churches that had been so much a part of his life ... *for all of his life.*

- Some had known Michael from his childhood and adolescence at Park Hill Baptist.
- Some knew him from his 15 years as part of this congregation, North Heartland.
- Others had come to know and appreciate him over the past several years at the Vineyard Church.

At the end of the service, as all of those folks stood together to sing one final worship song, I had the sense that I was experiencing something profound; one of those holy moments where you know that something greater than what's

happening is happening.

And in that moment, I felt like God said to me “this kind of influence is what you get when you keep doing the same good things for a long time. What you’re seeing today is the fruit of perseverance – of consistently and repeatedly applying yourself to the right things” ...

... which is what Michael had done. From his earliest days to his final day, he loved God, he loved people and he loved the church. And the overwhelming show of gratitude at the end of his life was the result (or, at least, part of it).

And for the rest of the day, I thought about that. A lot. And since that day, I’ve continued to think about it. A lot.

Recently, that observation crystallized into a little phrase that I’ve been saying to myself (a lot) and which you will be hearing from me (a lot – assuming this is your church). And the phrase

is ... *you are what you do* (and keep on doing for a long, long time).

You are what you do. That means that ...

- Whatever you are today is a direct result of whatever you have done again and again and again in your life to this point.
- And whatever you do over and over and over from this point forward, that's what you're going to be in the future.

You are what you do.

That was the lesson of Michael Paden's memorial service. To all of those people in that sanctuary, he was what he had been doing over and over and over for all of his too-short life.

And the same thing is true of you and me. I am today what I have been doing for all of my life. You are today what you have been doing for all

of your life. And the same will be true of us going forward.

We Don't Believe

Of course, I know that some of you are thinking right now “well, duh. Everybody knows that what you *do* over the long haul makes you what you *are*. This isn't some great new discovery you've just made.”

I would have to agree with that.

However, what I've seen and experienced in my own life says that even though we might *know* that the principle is true, most of us don't really *believe* it. Most of us don't really believe that we are what we do.

- We don't really believe in the law of the harvest: that whatever you plant is what is going to come up.

- And we don't really believe in the power of perseverance: that the longer and more consistently you plant, the more you'll get of what you've planted.

That's why we so quickly make excuses for those poor conditions and situations that are, in truth, the result of our own actions. That's why we so often play the victim when bad stuff germinates and grows in our lives that we could have prevented by taking the initiative.

For example, right now, I am the sad, sad bearer of a terrible, terrible condition known as Dunlap's Disease. How many of you know what Dunlap's Disease is? Dunlap's Disease is where your stomach has "done lapped over" your belt because you've been shoving far too much high-calorie food into your mouth ... and doing that over and over and over.

So, I've got Dunlap's Disease ... but I didn't mysteriously "catch it." I'm not the random

victim of an unpreventable illness. *I did this to myself.* I'm only reaping what I've persevered at planting in my body (quite literally) for the past six weeks.

You are what you do. And I am today what I have done over and over and over.

Now, I wish I could say that I contracted Dunlap's Disease on purpose to provide you all with a good object lesson, but that wouldn't be true. I am what I am today because I wasn't willing to do something else – like control what I put into my mouth – which would have produced a different and better result. I decided (over and over) that was too much trouble and much too difficult. That's why I am what I am.

You are what you do. There's just no getting away from the law of the harvest and the power of perseverance in your physical life, your relational life, and your emotional life. Those two principles are always at work financially,

vocationally, intellectually (and any other “-ly” you can think of). There’s no magical exemption granted to any of us *because this is how God designed our world to work.*

That’s why, just before Paul tells us “you will reap exactly what you plant,” he writes “no one makes a fool of God.”

In other words, Paul is saying, “This is God’s idea. This is how God set things up to work. You are whatever you do over and over and over” (which, we’ll see in a minute, is actually a good thing).

What about Grace?

Of course, someone would say, “now wait a minute, Rick. Aren’t you always telling us that God doesn’t judge us based on what we do but based on what Jesus has done (if we have faith in Him)? What about forgiveness and grace and all of that stuff?”

There's no conflict whatsoever between those ideas. When you put your faith and trust in what Jesus did on the cross and in His resurrection; when you trust in what He has done to atone for sin instead of what you do, you *are* forgiven for every sin – past, present *and* future. You *do* receive the grace that abounds greater than any and all sin you might ever commit. And you cannot fall from that grace.

But that doesn't change the law of the harvest and the power of perseverance in your everyday life. You still are what you do. Grace is a wonderful gift from God but it doesn't prevent – or cure – Dunlap's Disease or similar conditions we bring on ourselves.

Now, it *is* true that God sometimes intervenes and miraculously changes things when we ask Him to. But there's a reason why we call those interventions “miracles”: *they don't happen all the time!* They're not the way things normally work

nor are they the way things are *supposed* to work.

Positive Leverage

And that's actually a good thing.

You see, because God created for us a world of “cause and effect” – a world where what we plant is what grows and a world where the longer and more consistently we plant, the more we'll get of what we've planted – because that's the kind of world we have been blessed to live in, we actually have the power to improve our lives and the lives of others.

And I realize there are sometimes extenuating circumstances where things happen that produce a temporary break in the planting and harvest cycle. But, again, there is a reason why those circumstances are called “extenuating.” They're not the way things normally work in this world. The way things normally work is when you keep doing the same good things for a long

time, good things result. I'll give you a simple experiment to prove it.

Next time you meet a stranger, try smiling and see what response you get. You plant a smile, more often than not you get a smile in return. Keep doing that over and over and over and the world will begin to feel a lot different to you.

The obituary for Michael Paden had the most amazing compliments in it that I have ever read about a person: *he was said to be "the kindest man I ever met."* Wouldn't it be awesome if someone said something like that about you?

How does it happen? *You are what you do.* At some point early in Michael's life, he made the decision to show kindness to one person. Then he did it again. And again. And again until years later, he was said to be "the kindest man I ever met."

The law of the harvest and the power of

perseverance can work *for* you just as much as they can work *against* you.

And that's what I want for you (and for me). I want us to get on the positive side of this principle and to leverage it for good. Actually, that's what God wants, too.

So my question for you this morning as we enter into this New Year is this: *are you who and what you want to be physically, relationally, emotionally, vocationally, financially - and all the other -lys you can think of?*

If you're not, my challenge to you is to:

- Stop making excuses. You're only fooling yourself.
- Stop telling yourself that the law of the harvest doesn't apply to your everyday life because of grace. It does.
- Stop asking God for miracles in things you have the power to change. Most of us could

cure Dunlap's Disease (and a lot of other things) all by ourselves.

Instead, start asking God for the supernatural strength to do what naturally works.

But as you do that, don't forget that like everything else, strength comes from doing. Gaining strength is itself a function of the law of the harvest and the power of perseverance.

That's why James wrote:

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
James 1:4 (NIV)

You are what you do (and keep on doing for a long, long time). So let us not become tired of doing what is good.

Let's pray together.

<prayer>

Feature – “God is Able”

CLOSING COMMENTS – Rick

1. SLD merch in commons
2. One of the greatest planting and harvesting opportunities ever is giving.
 - a. Offering @door

Endnotes