



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

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### All I Ever Needed to Know, I Learned in Youth Group

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By Dr. Matt Hook

Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

I'm going to let you in on one of the biggest secrets of life. Are you ready? Listen to me. Here it is: Wise people make important decisions early in life, and manage those decisions for the rest of their lives. From drugs and drinking and decisions, to how you're going to treat other people to living out your faith and following God. You don't have to wait until you're an adult. If you're smart, if you're really smart, you're paying attention to what's truly important right now. Listen. *So* many people wait and miss *out* on their teens and twenties because they're still trying figure out what in the world is important. You guys, this is your chance to change the world! If you're smart, you'll make good decisions now. And I mean now. Then, it's *much* easier later: you just manage these good decisions for the rest of your life, no matter what you face.

You know church wasn't originally for old people. When the church began, there weren't *any* buildings or committees. There weren't any elderly Christians who were baptized as babies in the church. It was all new, and it was growing. And I think the leaders of the early churches looked more like the kids in our student ministry than what we think of as church today. Listen to what Paul wrote the Christ-followers in Rome in Romans 12:1-2, 9-21:

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect...."*

*9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.' No, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Studies show that 90% of all Christians commit their lives to Christ by the age of 20. I'm *so* glad we've committed as a church to you guys. We treasure you! We've always had great youth volunteers. Now we've added Demo and Sara. And there's a bunch of people putting up a building just for you, so you can have a place to go and connect with Jesus and with your friends! It's important to connect with Jesus now, because if you do, you'll never be alone. You'll have God's strength in your life. You'll be able to live radically, like Paul wrote. Why such an emphasis on youth? Because I learned a few things through the years in youth group. As a matter of fact, just about all I needed to know, I learned in youth group, though this list is not as eloquent as the Apostle Paul's or Robert Fulgram's. Here's my list:

- Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship.

- The minute rowdy becomes obnoxious you have to stop.
- Whatever happens, pretend that it's working. (Especially on mission trips!)
- No put downs! Any idiot can put people down. It takes real character to build them up.
- Make decisions in advance. Parents, if you wait until Sunday *morning* to decide whether you and your teenager will go to church, you've lost the battle.
- When you or your kid gets in trouble, it's very difficult to "fall back" on a group you haven't been there for.
- Slip-n-slides are the best way to get jello off of your body.
- Don't put the list of what to bring to the retreat on the back of the return registration form.
- Parents, we make our kids brush their teeth and never worry about whether they'll reject it when they get older...how about going to church? Don't you want this to be a place where your kid can just be?
- If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself, you can do whatever you want!
- I noticed even all the alternative kids look alike.
- We're the church. If we don't talk about Jesus, who will?
- At church, always buy whatever the youth are selling.
- Always remember: God's crazy about you.
- Anybody can love their friends. Try something tough, and love your enemies. (See how long they remain enemies).
- You can be tough on kids if they know that you love them.
- Mission Trips look great on college applications.
- They really don't care how much you know, till they know how much you care.

I love confirmation/graduation. This is an important time for you. You are [graduating or confirming your faith] before the whole church body. Believe it or not, this is a major step for you. I just pray you'll make good decisions now. Then, when you're faced with tough situations later, you won't have to be deciding anything. You'll just be seeing yourself through the decision you made when you were younger. You have the power to decide what kind of person you will be. People will tell you otherwise. They'll say "You look like this kind of person." Or "You're into that, so you must be this." Or they'll try to get you into whatever *they're* into, to make themselves feel better.

Every where you go you hear the message: Think for yourself. Be an individual! Be unique! And the majority of people in our culture say "Yea – let's do that. Let's all think for ourselves. Okay. How about you – yea, me too!" Every generation thinks they're unique, new, and improved. But if you make right decisions early, and spend the rest of your time managing those decisions, you'll already be all set. You'll already be the most awesome person you can be, since God made you that way!

In youth group I've learned that following Jesus is not some spiritual mumbo jumbo. It's not theoretical. Our Bible passage gives practical advice about how to live. We follow Jesus because we believe that God entered history as Jesus and offers salvation to you and me. With His blood, He paid the penalty for the sins of every person, and offers a relationship to everyone who puts their faith in Him. *And when we get it right, youth group is a small slice of what it is like in the Kingdom of God.* It's more awesome than anything you've ever seen. The question is "What decisions *are* you to supposed to make today?" Look again at what Paul said...

*"I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"* Take your everyday, ordinary life—and hand it to God like an offering. Present your whole self to him, not just on an occasional Sunday morning.

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,*

It's an inside-out thing. When you live like that you'll actually see what God wants from you— *"the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* There is no other way to live. Is it easy? No. but it is good, and acceptable, and perfect. It doesn't get any better than that.

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.* Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good.

*Love one another. Outdo one another in showing honor.* Practice playing second fiddle.

*Do not lag in zeal. Don't give up 'cause it's too hard.  
Be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord. Be a cheerful servant to the people around you.  
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.  
Contribute to the needs of the people; extend hospitality to strangers.  
Bless those who persecute you; bless them and do not curse them. Don't hit back.  
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.  
Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; Don't be stuck up or status conscious.  
Don't claim to be wiser than you are.  
Don't repay anyone evil for evil. God says He'll take care of it.  
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peacefully with all...  
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

That's a lot. That's why you need God's Holy Spirit in you. And where do you go to make right decisions? Church. Youth Group. The Bible. *We exist for nothing more* than to help you find God's best for your life. And we'll still love you when you mess up. It's tough work. It takes all you've got, for the rest of your life. Settle for nothing less. Even if your parents struggle to get here, you get here. Learn how to tell the story of Jesus and live it. It's the kind of thing you probably won't hear anywhere else. So learn it early, let it impact you, and get ready for the adventure of your life! And you can do that today. Remember: Wise people make important decisions early, and manage those decisions for the rest of their lives.

I've invited somebody who's been worshipping here for the last few years. She made some significant decisions about how she was going to live her life, and now is managing those decisions. She's just graduated from the University of Michigan, and God's using her in a mighty way. [SAMANTHA WATSON]

Some of you have made important decisions in the last few months. Our prayer for you, as a church, is that those decisions will impact you for the rest of your life. Amen.