

“U.P. (#1): COMMUNITY”  
 (Hebrews 10:24-25)  
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[PROP NEEDED: "UP" Video clip]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 10-6-24]

--I--

1. [WATCH VIDEOCLIP: "UP" (Disney-Pixar, Time: 0:39:52-0:42:29 = Total: 2:37)]

A--You know, it's been my observation that there are a lot of us who have great possibility that's never realized -- goals we never achieve, aspirations we never reach, and visions we never see accomplished, all because our *potential* never gets unleashed.

B--Yet, physics tell us that "*potential*" energy cannot become "*kinetic*" (actual) energy without *specific triggers* to activate the change -- that the "what ifs" of life can never become *reality* without *intentionality* put behind them.

C--That's why today we're beginning a new stewardship series called "U.P." in which we'll be talking about ways you & I as Christians can "*Unleash*" our "*Potential*" (U.P.) as we travel the journey called life.

D--We'll look at several specific things you and I can do to reach our fullest potential and become the people God wants us to be, and how doing so can enable Him to unlock ministry through us that we never thought possible.

--II--

2. Today's opening video actually introduced us to *one* of those tools that we'll also find in today's scripture that I'll read in a few minutes:... **the power of Christian community.**<sup>1</sup>

A--If you don't already know the movie, then let me explain that it's about... a senior adult widower named Carl Fredrickson who's on a quest to achieve a life goal that he and his wife never got to do when they were younger.

B--The problem is that since his wife is now gone, he thinks he can only achieve it by himself -- that he doesn't need help from anyone (or anything) else.

C--But along his journey, he meets some very strange, odd characters: a young Wilderness Explorer named Russell; a rare bird named Kevin, and a talking dog named Dug.

D--And through his very reluctant experiences with these characters, he discovers that he actually *does* need the help of *others* to achieve his aspirations -- I.E., that he needs *partners* in life (if you will) in order to find and unleash his full potential.

3. You know, there are a lot of people in our world today who seem to feel about *faith* what Carl felt about his *life quest*: we think we can make it perfectly fine either without *God*, or without being actively involved with a local community of disciples -- put in the way we usually hear it, "*I can be a good Christian without the church.*"

A--And on the surface, it seems to make good sense!

1--After all, most of us *think* that the best person to know how to achieve what's best for *our* lives is... *ourselves!* So, why *would* we want *other* people being involved with that, just "messaging it up"?

2--And since the church IS often filled with "rare, strange, odd characters" (like in the movie), why would we need *their* help to achieve our life's goals? (*Don't worry: I'm not going to try to relate the movie characters to specific church members!*)

B--But, you see, the problem with thinking we can do it all by ourselves, first of all, is that it places undue confidence in *ourselves* and in *our* own abilities -- it's actually rather arrogant and cocky!

1--Think about it: if "*we're all human*" and "*none of us is perfect*," then does it make logical sense to think that *imperfect* creatures can reach *perfection* all alone and by ourselves? **I** certainly can't do it!

2--And what's more is that if *we* think *others* are "odd," then what do you think they're thinking about *US*? Truth be told: we're ALL a bit "strange" and "odd" in some way, because we're all broken and imperfect human beings!

C--And as Carl discovers in that movie, more often than not (whether we like or agree with it or not), we actually *need* the "rare, strange characters" around us to fulfill God's calling in our lives -- i.e., to unleash our potential, we need *Christian community*.<sup>2</sup>

--III--

4. And this is precisely the challenge that we find in **today's scripture from Hebrews 10:24-25** -- listen to its words (CEB version):

*"24 And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. 25 Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near."*

A--In case you don't know it, let me remind us about the context for this passage:... while we didn't read it, what *precedes* this passage is really a message about *personal* salvation -- in Verses 19-23 it talks about how the blood of Jesus forgives us of our sin, and then enables us to approach God confidently and boldly in faith.

B--But then, notice how today's passage begins (Verse 24), "*And let us consider each other carefully*," and it goes on ... "*Don't stop meeting together with other believers...*"

C--The word "*And*" here indicates that what *follows* is something that should be done *in addition to* what precedes it, right? (i.e., "this" AND "that")

1--Well, what *precedes* it is a message about the importance of having a personal, one-on-one relationship with God, and the advantages that follow from that.

2--But what *follows* it is the fact that personal salvation is *not enough* -- that a private, individualistic relationship with God *by itself* will not enable us to achieve our fullest potential as Christian believers (it's a good start, but that's all)

3--Instead, what today's passage tells us is the importance of being regularly *connected* with other believers in both worship and fellowship --i.e., it's talking about the importance of "Christian community."

4--In today's context, I firmly believe that that today can mean "community" which is either in-person, virtual/online, or some combination of both!

D--And notice in Verse 25 that evidently some early disciples (like many Christians today) had gotten *out* of the habit of doing that.

1--They think that their *personal* relationship with God is so strong that they really don't need that connection any more (or at least not as often) -- so, like many people today, they thought that they could "*be a good Christian without the church*", or at least by participating in it *less and less*.

2--Yet, Verse 24 of today's text challenges this way of thinking, reminding us that one of the main purposes of Christian community is "*sparkling love and good deeds*" (another translation, NRSV, says that Christian community exists to "*motivate [us] to show love and to do good work*" -- the assumption here being that you and I tend NOT to do these things if left to do them *on our own*....

3--...That just as Carl *couldn't* achieve his life aspirations *until* he was active in community with Russell, Kevin and Dug, so WE can't reach our fullest potential in *faith* until we're active and *interactive* in community with other Christians.

E--Many years ago in my own life, there was an issue I struggled with that I didn't want anyone knowing about. I thought I could handle it with God *all by myself*.

1--But through a series of challenges, I discovered that I really *couldn't* handle it alone, and finally -- reluctantly at first -- I agreed that I needed to be in relationship with *other* Christians to help hold me accountable.

2--Consequently, to this day I participate in a weekly covenant tele-group with other pastors, and in that group, I find support and challenge for me to be the husband, father, pastor, friend that God wants me to be.

3--That group, in other words, helps me to "unleash" my "potential" for God!

--IV--

5. So let me wrap up by simply asking: **How connected are YOU in Christian community** (whether that's *virtually*, *in-person*, or some combination of those)?

A--For example: How regular are you in *worshipping* together with other believers? Is it just something you do when you have nothing better to do on a Sunday?

B--Or have you learned to make it a "holy habit," ...committing to worshipping either in-person or online *every* Sunday unless you're sick or out of town?

C--Yet, Christian community isn't ONLY about worship. No. Let's not forget the power and importance of *small group ministry* for the purpose of spiritual growth and fellowship, as well (that is: actively participating in a Sunday School class, a Bible study group, or some other small group for music, mission, men's/women's ministry).<sup>3</sup>  
(If you need help finding a group, see me or any of the staff & we'll help guide you)

D--My point here (and the point of today's scripture), is that "*you and I get out of something what we put into it!*"

E--If we want to achieve our dreams and fulfill our calling from God -- if we want to unleash our potential as disciples of Jesus Christ -- then we have to be intentional (or maybe I should say, "*more intentional*") about being connected in Christian community.

6. You see, when you and I do this, we're able to achieve so much more than if we try to "go it alone."

A--When we're connected in that way, lives are changed (mostly ours!) and our community and world are transformed, because God's people are working *together* to achieve what we could *never* do by ourselves.

B--When we're connected in Christian community, our *Potential* (individually and corporately) is *Unleashed*, and we -- along with the kingdom of God -- journey U.P.!

7. [PRAYER]

One of the ways we experience the power of community is through the receiving of the Lord's Supper. Today is World Communion Sunday, a day for us to focus on that shared experience with other Christians of all denominations and traditions around the world...

8. [WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY HOLY COMMUNION]

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The biblical concept and practice of this is known as "*koinonia*."

<sup>2</sup> Think about some biblical examples of this: (1) In the very first story of the Bible, *God says (in Genesis 2:18), "It is not good that the human is alone, so I will make him a helper as his partner"* -- reminding us that *imperfect* human relationships are God's way we fulfill our calling. (2) And what was the first thing Jesus did when he began his public ministry? ...He called twelve followers to be his "Disciples" (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11; and John 1:35-51) -- obviously even the son of God knew he needed Christian community if he was to be able to save the world! And (3) what about the apostle Paul, who -- far from being a "lone-ranger" evangelist -- never went anywhere without taking at least one partner to help out? Sometimes it was Barnabas (Acts 12, 13, 14 & 15), sometimes Silas (Acts 15, 16 & 17), and sometimes Timothy (Acts 16, 17, 18 & 19, Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 1:1 & 2:19; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1 & 3:2-6; 1 Timothy 1:1-18; 2 Timothy 1:1-2) -- these were his "portable" Christian community!

<sup>3</sup> I.E., Are you regularly participating in some kind of small group who's specific purpose is spiritual growth and fellowship: a Sunday School class; a weekly Bible study; a ministry or missions group; Adult Choir; Praise Team; or something else?