

YOU-NIQUE

Will Penner

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for March 9–15, 2015.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“I am always amazed by how much we feel we need, for example, more money, fame, power, or leisure. Most often, our need is motivated by what we don’t have rather than what we do have. If we’re different from others, we want to fit in; if we’re just like everyone else, we want to stand out from the crowd. Then there’s the perpetual problem of how much is enough; and of course, the answer is: more. People were the same 2,000 years ago; and Jesus clearly expected his disciples to battle those natural human tendencies and to rely on God to supply all their needs and to be their source of self-esteem.” —Will

MEET THE WRITER

Will Penner has been in ministry with young people for more than two decades in Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, in public and private schools, and as a popular speaker at youth retreats, camps, and conferences. He has served as the editor of both leading professional journals of youth ministry and has authored or edited numerous youth ministry curricula and books, the latest of which is *It Happens: True Tales from the Trenches of Youth Ministry* (<http://www.amazon.com/It-Happens-Tales-Trenches-Ministry/dp/1937734048>). But most important, he is the husband of his amazing wife, Christine, and father of five fantastic children ranging in age from five to twenty-three.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- markers
- copies of Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” (see “Plugged In”)
- Bibles
- copies of the closing prayer

PLUGGED IN

- + As students enter the room, play “Jehovah” by Amy Grant (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3KS8kkC1U8>). This song is primarily about God’s goodness, but also refers to several biblical texts that describe God’s love for us.

- + *Simply Psychology* offers a discussion of “Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs” (<http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>) as does *Wikipedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs). Included in the *Wikipedia* article is a printable copy of Maslow’s pyramid of needs that you may use with this session (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs#mediaviewer/File:MaslowsHierarchyOfNeeds.svg).

CHECKING IN

Post two sheets of newsprint. Ask two volunteers to record the group’s answers to these questions:

Imagine that you are stranded on a desert island all by yourself. What are your five greatest fears?

What are the three things you miss most about your previous life?

Distribute copies of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Explain by reading or saying in your own words the following:

“Years ago, a social psychologist named Abraham Maslow identified several levels of human need. He believed some needs are more basic than others and must be met before people begin to seriously care about the next level of needs. If people haven’t satisfied the first level of needs for food, water, and shelter, then they don’t much care about the next levels of needs—for safety, belonging, and so on. They are also willing to forego some of the upper-level needs in order to satisfy more basic needs. Once the first level of needs is met, however, people tend to look for ways to satisfy their needs at the next level.”

“This theory has been widely accepted by the educational system for several decades, which is why the federal government sponsors free meals for students whose families make below a certain income threshold. The idea is that if kids are hungry, they’re not going to care about learning to read or count; they’re going to want food. If the need for food is satisfied, maybe they’ll start to care about needs further up the hierarchy. Similarly, if kids don’t feel safe, physically and emotionally, they’re unlikely to care about science or social studies. So more school resource officers are on public school campuses than ever before, and a number of regional and nationwide initiatives are trying to decrease bullying on school campuses. The hope is that once kids feel safe, they’ll care more about learning.”

After providing this brief description of the Hierarchy of Needs, ask group members to look at their list of fears. Ask:

What level of needs does each fear exemplify?

At what level are most of our fears centered?

“Interestingly, belonging comes right after basic needs (food and water) and safety (physical shelter and emotional safety). Of course, if people feel bullied, they are no longer emotionally safe; and the need for safety begins to overshadow the need for belonging. Most of us, especially in the throes of adolescence, vacillate back and forth between belonging and self-actualization.”

If we don't fit in, we will change ourselves in order to do so. Yet once we feel like we belong, we start looking for ways to stand out. We desire community; it is part of our spiritual makeup. But we also want to know that we are unique, that we have some way to stand out from others."

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Matthew 10:7–20, 26–31

Jesus prepares the twelve disciples for what will be a rather difficult job. He warns them that some people will turn against them, ridiculing and even hurting them as they try to proclaim the good news. In addition to practical advice about how they should travel and how they should respond to those who don't believe them, he also reminds them of God's love for them. We could provide one another with a lot of tricks and tips for navigating a world that can sometimes be hostile, but often what helps us more than anything is simply remembering where our self-esteem should originate.

If you look back at the Hierarchy of Needs, notice that Jesus recognizes that the disciples are concerned with what they'll eat, where they'll stay, whether or not people will hurt them, whether or not people will respond favorably to them. In essence, he flips the hierarchy upside down and says that their belonging comes from being linked to God and that Jesus has chosen them for a specific task.

Where does our self-esteem come from?

Do we recognize that we are children of God?

Do we recognize that we were made in the image of God?

Do we understand that God has a specific purpose for each of us?

If we believe that we are God's children, how would our needs change?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite group members to pray with you:

"Gracious God, thank you for making us in your image. Help us to understand and appreciate what that can mean for our lives and for the lives of people around us. We want to center all of our hope, trust, and self-worth in our relationship with you because we know you will never fail. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

TAKING IT FURTHER

1. For the next week, every time you find yourself anxious or afraid, consider where on the hierarchy your need falls and remember Jesus' admonition to his disciples to recognize their worth as God's people.
2. Commit Matthew 10:29–31 to memory.