

The Upside-Down Psychological Hierarchy of Heaven

When I was around 10-14 years of age adults had a way of asking, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Do you remember people asking that? What was your answer?

I never knew, so I needed to make up an answer. I said "A jet fighter pilot!" It always satisfied them, and they left me in peace. I never actually wanted to fly jets.

A better question would have been "What do you want out of life?" This one doesn't just belong to adolescents. What did you want out of life, back then? What do you want out of life, right now?

I always wanted to have enough. I was raised by people who grew up in the Depression in the north of England. They knew first hand what the fear of being homeless and hungry was about. I picked it up in my mother's milk! So I have always wanted that degree of safety.

In early adulthood Lucy and I became immigrants to Canada. Many of us are immigrants, or the children of immigrants. What did you, or your family, want out of life that made that immigration worth the great loss of leaving home?

For most people it is to do with the opportunity to get work, earn money, make progress and maybe also to give possible children a better future. Canada offers so much more than the countries we came from.

So, what we want out of life is a place to live in which is safe and we can call home. We want enough money to be comfortable, and some extra for fun! We want to find friends and a community in which we can be useful, respected and loved. We want to wake up with a sense of happiness and go to bed with a smile. We Christians want the freedom to worship, and the opportunity to be disciples in our lives.

None of this is unreasonable. Actually I would say that Canada as a whole thinks that this is what we all should be able to do. It's not our "right", but it is the hope of our nation that we should all be able to aspire to this, and have a good chance of finding it. Yes?

But Jesus says.....

Woe to you who are rich. Woe to you who are full now. Woe to you who are laughing now.
Woe to you when all speak well of you.

Should we then be emigrating to Somalia perhaps? I hope not!

Abraham Maslow, in the 1940's, devised a hierarchy of needs.

1. We need Survival things like food, water and sleep.
2. We need Safety. To be safe from bodily attack, we need steady employment to be safe from poverty, we need resources, morality, family, health
3. We need Love and Belonging; friendship, family, intimacy.
4. We need Esteem, self esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of others and by others.
5. We need Self-Actualisation. This is creativity, spirituality, openness to others, wonder and delight, selflessness, deep inner worth.



Generally you don't move up a step until you have the lower one sorted out. Jesus, a good psychologist, knows this and understands our automatic tendency to follow this rule. But he turns the rules upside down. He says you only get to the very top level of being, by climbing down, rung by rung, and letting go of all the neediness below. You have to stop grasping.

Don't fear Poverty! Because you are blessed if you are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
 And Hunger? Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
 And Happiness? Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
 And the Respect of friends and colleagues? Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;"

Paul says we are all "called to be saints" and that we're already sanctified by God's utter love for us. We are saints already! But actually moving into that saintliness requires this.

Seek first, before you make sure of anything else,
 seek first that you live today as if you were living in the Kingdom of God.
 Seek first, as a meter of behaviour,
 that everything you do and say would feel right if God was standing next to you.

Then, says Jesus, actually, everything else that you need will be given to you. Don't fret about it! It will work out.

In psychological language that means,

"Before anything else, take care of your creativity, spirituality, openness to others, your wonder and delight, your selflessness, your deep inner worth!

Then, if you like, you can worry about your self-image at work, or your house and your family, or your cash-flow, or your health."

No psychologist or career counselor, no teacher in school or politician on TV, no financial manager or wealth guru will tell you this. But if you want to be a saint, then turn your priorities upside down.

Give the *first* of yourself to life with God, not the last bit before you run out.

Tithe the *first* of your income.

Pray in the *early* part of the day.

Reach out to others *before* you protect yourself, and make them happy as a *priority*.

Make sure to praise someone else *each day*

And the angels of God will open the doors you need, before you even touch the handles!

And you will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. You will have lived your sainthood!