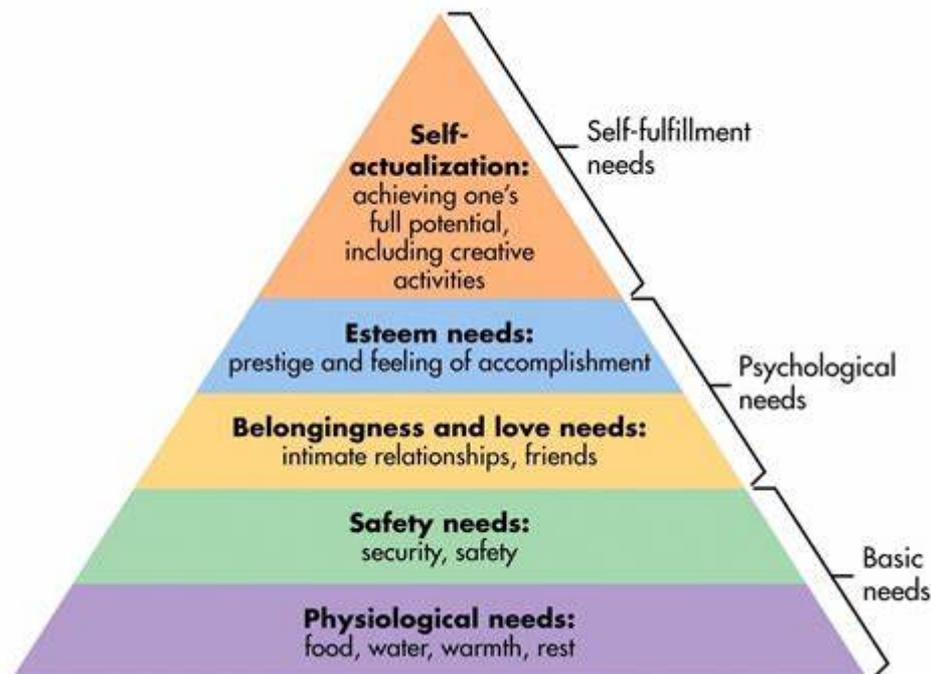


**Psalm 127****Fully Human**

What is it to be fully human?

Abraham Maslow was one of the world's most famous psychologists and he came up with the theory that there is a hierarchy of needs for human beings.

**He constructed a pyramid about human needs.**

At the base of the pyramid, is basic physiological needs. This includes things such as breathing, food, water, and sleep – The basic necessities of life. Survival! Every human being needs these to survive.

Then the next human building block in his pyramid is safety needs. This includes things such as feeling physically safe in your environment. It includes feeling healthy. It includes feeling that you have enough money and supplies to keep you alive and well.

Then next stage on the pyramid of human needs is love and belonging. People need to feel loved, and they need to feel that they belong in society. Partners, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends, Christian fellowship. We thrive in love.

Then the next stage on the pyramid is esteem. To have self-esteem, to be confident in yourself. To value who you are.

Then at the top of the pyramid is self-actualization. This level is about a person having the opportunity to be confident to use their talent, and a chance to go where those talents might lead.

So, Maslow constructs a pyramid of human needs.

As I read Psalm 127, this pyramid of human needs came into my mind and I asked the question what is it to be a human being in the sight of God?

In Psalm 127, we see the psalmist creating his own pyramid of needs.

It begins with the basics - a house – v1 “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.” This verse in fact is the motto of Edinburgh.

Yes, this is a basic human need, a roof over our heads, a shelter from the storm. A place where we can have those basic human needs met – a place to be, to breath, to eat, to drink and to sleep. What a blessing it is to have a roof over our heads.

The psalmist stresses the importance of this basic fundamental need of life. This is what we would want all people to have. These needs being positioned at the bottom of the pyramid signifies that they are fundamental to human wellbeing and will always take priority over other needs.

But notice he brings another dimension into this, “Unless the Lord builds the house”. The Psalmist brings a spiritual dimension into this basic human need.

So, as God's people we are thankful to all that God gives to us and coming to church is an opportunity to say to God – Thank you Lord for all our basic needs!

**Next in the hierarchy of this psalm is safety needs.**

The psalmist writes in verse 2, “Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.” This whole notion of security is of primary importance to the psalmist. He is saying we can have as many security devices as we like, we can even have guards outside our property, but if we don't have the knowledge that God is watching over us, then ultimately, we are defenceless. We will be watching in vain!

If a person does not feel safe in their environment, they are unlikely to try to meet higher-order needs. In particular, safety needs includes personal and emotional security, safety from abuse, financial security, and general wellbeing.

A house becomes a home when we feel secure.

And for us today, we can thank God that he watches over us. What a blessing to know this!

So, we are progressing up the pyramid of this psalm, from the basics of a house provided by the Lord, to the protection over the house and over the city by the Lord. This is a great foundation for us as human beings to know that God provides for our basic human needs and that He protects against evil. The Lord is our provider and protector.

Having that sure foundation allows us to move onto the next important stage of what it is to be fully human in God's sight and that is belongingness and love needs; intimate relationships and friendships – The need for love and belonging through family connections, friendship, and intimacy.

Humans are wired for connection, meaning that we seek acceptance and support from others, either one-on-one or in groups, such as clubs, organisations, or online communities. In the absence of these connections, we fall susceptible to states of ill-being, such as clinical depression. In verse 3, the psalmist brings people into the equation. He speaks **of children being a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.**

The psalmist has moved from provision to protection and now to people. People are important for our human needs, but not just any people, because we can be very lonely in a city, we can be very lonely surrounded by people we don't know, but when we are in company of people who love us and care for us, then another human need is being met. The need to be loved and to give love.

A house is not just a building, a house needs more than protection, a house – a home needs love. That love may not necessarily be people living in our house with us, it may well be people whom we know and who care for us, photos on the wall, gifts from other people, all reminding us that we are truly loved. It might even be neighbours next door, it might be friends on email or even facebook. We all need to be loved.

In the context of this psalm, he points out that children are a blessing because when the parent is old, then they have someone to protect them and love them. In the words of the Psalmist, to defend them in court. But we don't all

have children or grandchildren, but we all have people who love us and who support us and who fulfil this basic human need in our life.

The next step in the pyramid is esteem – self-worth, loving oneself.

Now, there are many signs written on walls around the city at the moment – I saw a banner yesterday, “the future is not what it used to be”. But there is one that always catches my eye and that is – “the best love is self-love” and I believe that there is truth in this statement, for when we learn to love ourselves not in a narcissistic type of way, but a genuine understanding of who we are as Christians, loved by the Eternal God, loved by His Son Jesus, loved by the Holy Spirit - that we were created in love, that He knew us before we were born, that the eternal arms of God are around us, when we engage with this love and work this through, that God is Love, and that his love abides in our heart, then we may experience what the psalmist writes in v2, “He grants sleep to those he loves.” There is that sense of us resting and sleeping in God's love.

When we have this knowledge of God's love for us in our hearts, then we can truly say, that we are completely human. However, when our esteem needs are thwarted, feelings of inferiority, weakness, or helplessness are likely to arise.

Returning to the psychologist Maslow, there is the top of the pyramid and that is the stage of self-actualisation, as he calls it, achieving one's full potential. He wrote, “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualisation.”

For Christians, it is becoming the people that God intended us to be. To be people who reach out to others, confident in who we are, not being bullish or feeling self-important, but rather the opposite, because we are loved, we are not frightened to serve, and to love others and to help others to self-fulfilment.

Towards the end of his career, Maslow identified a sixth need above self-actualization. He called this need self-transcendence, defined as a person's desire to “further a cause beyond the self and to experience a communion beyond the boundaries of the self through peak experience”. This for a Christian is engagement with God.

Psalm 127, is a wonderful psalm, that speaks about human fulfilment, and now we come to share together in communion.

We gather in God's house today to share in the life of the most extraordinary human being that has ever lived.

Jesus said I have come to give you life and life in all its fullness.

As we know, he had no place to call home, but yet he was secure in the knowledge that this world wasn't his home but that his home was in heaven with his Father.

He knew the security of God, he experienced God in his daily walk, he was tempted in the desert and yet he trusted in the security of his Father.

He felt abandoned on the night before his death in the garden of Gethsemane, and yet he prayed *not my will but yours be done*.

Yes, he knew the security of God.

Yes, He knew the love of His Father, he heard God say, *"You are my Son whom I love."* He never doubted this. This kept him focused.

So today our focus is on Jesus, the most fulfilled human being ever.

He was the real thing, the most complete human being that has walked on this planet. We come to him today, and we thank him that his death is our life, that his sacrifice is his gift to us, and we enter into this deep mystery as we participate in the sacrament of Christ. This is in the words of Maslow, transcendence – as we meet with the eternal God.

The wine reminds us of Jesus' blood shed for us, and the bread reminds us of Jesus' body broken for us.

Of course, Jesus was fully human, but he was also fully God and this is the great mystery of communion. That God meets us in the life of this human being that we have come to put our faith in.

So, let us come to Christ now, and share together in this sacrament. But before we do let us sing – Hymn 685 "For everyone born a place at the table".