

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Jesus the Master Teacher



SESSION 5

What Do You Teach? Content that is Connected
and Relevant to the Life of the Adult Learner

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What Do You Teach? Content that is Connected and Relevant to the Life of the Adult Learner

SESSION OVERVIEW

What are the Needs of Adult Learners and How Do You Identify Them?

How Do You Connect Biblical Content to the Needs of Adult Learners?

**What Did Jesus Teach?
An Example**

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- list a hierarchy of needs and identify characteristics in your life that could fit at least three of the levels
- outline methods for connecting Bible content and the needs of the learner to illustrate its relevance
- select a situation from the Bible that illustrates an adult's need, identify the need giving your reasons for the identification, and discuss how Jesus or Paul or another teacher addressed the need

What Do You Teach? Content that is Connected and Relevant to the Life of the Adult Learner

INTRODUCTION

JOURNALING

In this lesson, you will be thinking about the needs of the adult learner. As you identify some of the needs of others, it will be helpful for you to think about your own needs and relate it to your situation. This will be a perfect time for you to write your thoughts in a journal. Your writings will be particularly helpful as you think of how the content of the Bible met your needs and the lives of people you know. Journal prompts are provided at the end of the lesson, but feel free to record your thoughts and share those with your mentor, your students, or your Christian friends. Reflect and write . . . It is important!

FOOTBALL AND TIM TEBOW

I am a retired university professor who taught for almost 20 years in a state institution in the College of Education. During that time, I was fortunate to serve as the chairperson in a large department composed mostly of men who talked football, a sport I know almost nothing about. About 10 years ago, I decided I needed to be able to relate to these men in my office life. However, I did not want to spend time watching football; instead I listened to one of the radio sports channels on my long commute into town. After listening to the radio (especially on Monday and Tuesday after the weekend games and Monday night football), I found I could keep up with the language and events of football and semi-converse with others without appearing too ignorant about the topic. I then could relate to them on other levels as necessary for work.

That knowledge served me well these past few years. I continue to write books and often travel with a team of authors who also talk football. I remember one dinner meeting after a presentation. We were all sitting around relaxing when the head author said, "Nita, as our 'resident Christian' and 'football person' do you think God really cares about football and Tim Tebow?" Suddenly, all eyes turned on me! What an opportunity to tell them about a personal God . . . a God who certainly cared about Tim Tebow but not particularly about football. I really can't remember what I said in this case, but I learned a long time ago that God uses my clumsy words to tell His story, and all I need to do is obey and take every opportunity to tell others about God's love.

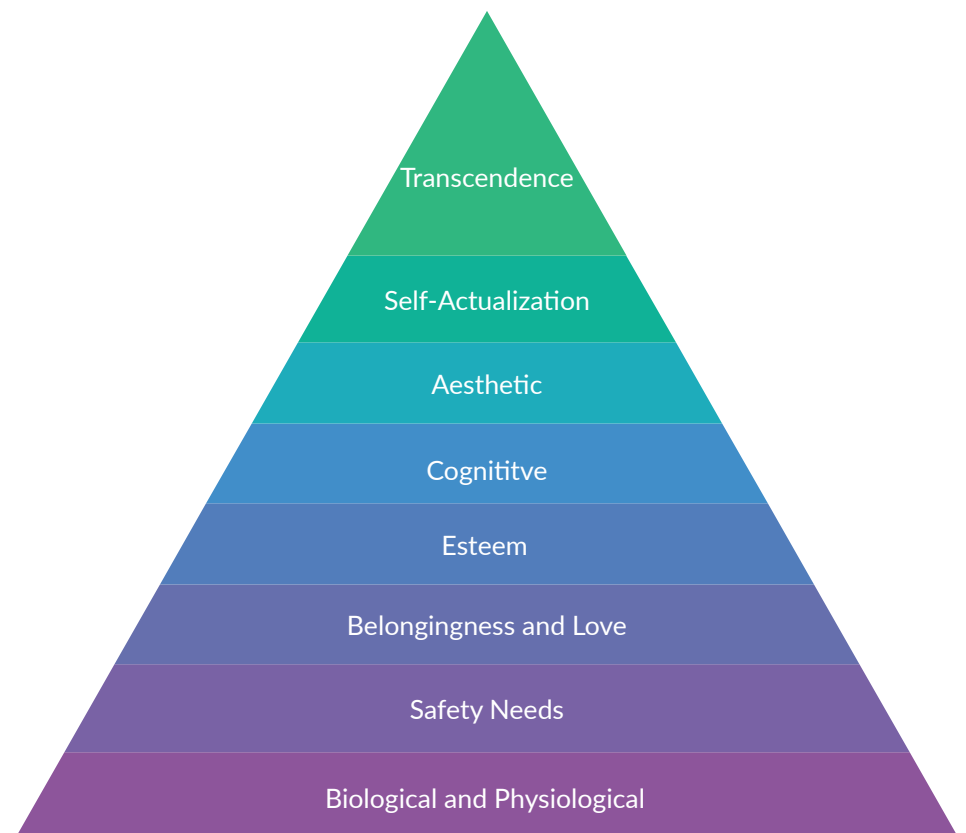
What does this story have to do with this topic, “What do you teach?” Simply this . . . you should teach the content of the Bible and especially connect the content to the needs of the learner. Because I was called a “football person” (note it was not a football expert), and more importantly a “resident Christian” by a group of non-believers, I had the opportunity to teach about God and His desire to have a relationship with us. In other words, God helped me connect the content that was important to the group (football) to the relevant Biblical content that emphasized God’s care and love for us.

WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF ADULT LEARNERS AND HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY THEM?

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Most importantly, all adult learners need God. As stated in previous lessons, our belief in a relational and loving God leads us to teach the Bible; it is why we tell others about God, and it is why we are believers in one God who is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:13). In fact, the spiritual needs of adult learners are primary and encompass all other needs. With that said, I do believe educational and psychological models can also teach us something about other adult needs; those needs can and should affect what we emphasize as we teach biblical content.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow created a five-level hierarchy of the needs of adults. Later in the 1960s and 70s, others identified three more levels that account for needs Maslow had not addressed. According to this hierarchy, an adult is motivated to achieve based on specific needs in one or two levels and often cannot go to the higher levels until the needs at the lower levels are met. Also, and most importantly, if adults go through traumatic life experiences, they may go back and forth between levels as they adjust to a new situation. (Huitt, W. 2007. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University).




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This model contains no spiritual needs (which we all would see as critical to any list of needs encompassing all levels), and it certainly is not “set in stone,” or based on scientific research. However, the descriptors of each level helped me see my students’ needs more clearly as categorized at one or two levels and gave me clues as to how I can best connect those needs to biblical content.

The model is conceptualized as a triangle with the lower levels being the largest (the ones most people experience) and the higher levels being the smallest (the ones few people experience). Let’s look at specific descriptors of each level beginning with the lowest levels first and on up to the highest levels.

- Physiological: air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sleep, rest
- Safety: protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear
- Love and Belonging: friendship, intimacy, affection and love from work groups, family, romantic relationships
- Esteem: achievement mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige
- Cognitive Needs: knowledge and meaning
- Aesthetic Needs: appreciation and search for beauty, finding balance in life
- Self-Actualization: self-fulfillment, personal growth, realizing personal potential
- Transcendence: helping others to achieve self-actualization

If you focus on each of these levels from a spiritual sense, the Word of God specifically addresses each of these needs. Here are just a few examples:

- Physiological: *Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty’ (John 6: 35). Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).*
- Safety: “I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me – just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father – and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15). “When I am afraid, I will trust in You” (Psalm 56:3).
- Love and Belonging: May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for


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you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8).

- Esteem: “For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are” (1 John 3:1)!
- Cognitive Needs: “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death” (Philippians 3:10). “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Aesthetic Needs: “However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hand” (Psalm 19:1).
- Self-Actualization: “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).
- Transcendence: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-7). “Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:16).

So, how do you identify your students’ needs? In my years of teaching, I never had a student approach me and tell me “I need to belong and be loved,” or “I now have reached the esteem level. What do I do to become ‘self-actualized?’” or “Since I am self-actualized, I would like to transcend to your level and help you!” Instead, as a teacher, I must listen to my students, their prayers, their questions, and their comments during discussions. Students who expresses their need for

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a new job may be at the esteem level because they experience disrespect at their job; perhaps they may be at the physiological level because their income will not feed or clothe their family. Students who want to sponsor a class nature climb may be expressing a need for love and belonging or perhaps an aesthetic need to get out of the city and reconnect with God's world. Students who want a more detailed list of the end times and suggest a study of Revelation may have a cognitive need or may even have a safety-level issue because they fear death. As you can see, there is no magic formula for discovering learners' needs. Ultimately, praying for your students is the method that works the best.

HOW DO YOU CONNECT BIBLICAL CONTENT TO THE NEEDS OF ADULT LEARNERS?



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For more than 30 years, I have taught an “ever-changing” adult Bible study or life group in different churches and in different settings. My students are my friends – people I admire, love, and respect. Their needs, jobs, backgrounds, spiritual life, and family culture are all different, and yet we have become a group that loves and cares for each other. Without identifying names or specific details, let me describe a few of the needs that were present in my groups and the methods I used to connect biblical content to their needs.

Seven Cancers: Over a three-year period, our group went through all aspects of serious cancer with our friends. We saw many different kinds of cancer (breast, pancreas, esophagus, colon, prostate, bladder), all types of treatment (surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, medication), all types of relationships (friends, husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandchildren), and a variety of diagnoses (chronic to life-threatening). So, what were their needs? Some members of our class were at the physiological level, needing food or funds to survive through the treatments; others were at the safety level, fearful of loss of life or travel to the hospital safely. Still other members were at the self-actualization level, at total peace with God’s plan in their life and willing to share with others.

So as a teacher, what did I do to connect Bible content to their needs? First, I did not teach about God’s healing power every week for three years! Rather, I taught the regular curriculum we selected to study. We addressed the needs in many different ways. First, we began presenting “joyful moments” we experienced. We acted on specific scriptures that talked about joy, sang songs of joy, and heard testimonies of joy. Second, we provided food, collected funds, and gave them anonymously to those with needs as the Scriptures taught. Third, we held specific prayer meetings for those with cancer and prayed together at the end of many sessions by laying hands on those with needs. Fourth, class members partnered with other class members or the teacher and met for breakfast, lunch, or supper to pray, laugh, and cry together. All in all, as a group, we tried to live the scripture found in Psalm 28:7, “The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song.”

A Midnight Call: It was late at night and I had been sleeping for a few hours when the phone rang. It was one of the single ladies in my class who I had been mentoring. She quickly explained she needed my advice very quickly since she had met the most “wonderful, handsome, and exciting” man that evening when she stopped into a bar and was now in his apartment while he was fixing dinner


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for her. She wondered if she could stay with him that evening since he seemed SO NICE! Oh my! (I admit I was worried about my mentoring at this moment.) My mentee had so many needs that evening. She was recently divorced and I knew she had some basic financial needs. She also had some belonging and love issues that are often the result of broken relationships. However, the need I was most concerned about that night was a safety issue. While I was sure she wanted security and feared for her ability to live by herself, I knew she should not be spending the night with a person she had met very recently and did not know much about.

So, as her teacher, how did I address her need with biblical content? First, I knew I had to address the needs at the safety level rather than at the love and belonging levels. I very strongly stressed she needed to leave the apartment as quickly as possible. I told her I needed to see her right away, and she was to tell the man about this emergency. After we met, we began a Bible study that talked about the security that only comes from God and the freedom from fear that comes only from a relationship with God. Much later, I am happy to say, she found a godly relationship with a fine Christian gentleman and her needs were more at the cognitive level and learning from God's Word.

Loud Drums: Loud Drums: A few years ago, our church was becoming a young healthy church, and I taught the "older" group of dedicated saints. This was a group that was forged with the two "oldest" groups in the church because room was needed for other groups; in addition, the teacher of the oldest group resigned. After about a two month transition, I heard complaints almost every Sunday about the loud drums in the church services, the use of choruses rather than hymns, the casual way the pastors dressed, the chairs that were changed every Sunday in our class, or the fact that our breakfast supplies were messed up or even used by other groups. In this case, I felt this was a group esteem need, a need I myself shared along with many of the students.

So, as a teacher, how did I connect our need for esteem or respect to biblical content? First, I asked a life group leader from one of those "younger" groups to meet with us for a series of discussions on "issues of the day." We met together for eight sessions and thoroughly enjoyed our time together. The teacher of the younger group and I presented the biblical content that addressed the issue, and then members of both groups discussed the issues from their perspectives. Students from both groups loved the interactions, and both groups came away wanting to meet together again. We offered respect for the younger groups' opinions, and they in turn respected us. Second, we brought the hymnals to our group meetings. Most weeks, we sang at least two hymns that matched the scripture from the lesson without drums. When appropriate, we talked about the

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author of the hymn and heard his or her testimony through the printed word. We respected their work just as we wanted our contributions to be respected. Third, we invited staff members to our group, and they were happy to attend periodically. In turn, they celebrated our decade birthdays, visited us in the hospital, brought flowers to individuals in our group, and generally listened to us. We began to feel respected and honored by their biblical care. Fourth, we continued our support for the youth group through funds, food, encouragement letters, and mentorship. Because of the youth groups' leadership, the teenagers began to thank us through snail mail and emails. Again, we felt honored, esteemed, and happy to be acknowledged for our small service. While this need has not been totally met, the frequent complaints have stopped; instead, I am hearing positive comments and an excitement about what God has done and is doing in our church. Praise God!

Please know these are just three examples of how I tried to address the needs of class members. I had some of the same needs (husband's cancer, life transitions, family deaths, and retirement), and these methods, as well as the support of class members, helped me in so many ways. I count it a rich privilege to teach and walk with each of them through life. In fact, my students have taught me something about God's plan and my life priorities. I treasure their teaching.

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH? AN EXAMPLE



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Jesus understood the needs of His disciples and followers and connected His words, teachings, and actions to their specific needs. While there are many examples of these connections throughout the Gospels, I have chosen to concentrate on the words from His prayer in John 17:6-26.

“Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You” (John 17:7). Think about all the miracles the disciples saw while following Jesus. Physiological needs (e.g., feeding of the five thousand) and safety needs (e.g., Jesus’ power as demonstrated by the cleansing of the temple) have all been met by Jesus during the previous three years. However, Jesus knew the fears they would soon encounter after He would be captured. He is praying they remember all they have seen are from God the Father.

“Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11b). Jesus understood the need for love and belonging and the unity they would need to have. He is praying for His disciples for the love that is necessary for them to be unified and accomplish the mission tasks He is expecting.

“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). True joy comes from knowing Jesus and His Kingdom. True joy is not based on circumstances; rather it is based on knowing your potential in Christ and being Christ-fulfilled rather than self-fulfilled (e.g., Christ-actualization).

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Jesus is talking about the safety need here. Because they know who God is, they can be free from fear. There is security in the fact that God will keep them from the evil one.

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus is praying that they may understand and live the truth (both cognitive needs as well as Christ-actualization) as they find their potential and grow personally.

“And the glory which you gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one; I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as



you have loved me” (John 17:22-23). What a prayer! Jesus is praying here for all their needs including a need to help others achieve Christ-actualization, “and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20a).

CLOSING THOUGHT

I hope as you read this session, you thought about more than the needs of your students and how you can make the connections between their needs and biblical content. I pray you will see how knowing the Word of God meets all your needs at any level. The Word of God is always relevant, life-giving, and light-producing! Praise His Name!

APPLICATION



NOTES

Be prepared to share your three application activities with your mentor.

1. List a hierarchy of needs and identify characteristics in your life that could fit into at least three of the levels. Explain why you identified them as you did.
2. Outline some methods for connecting Bible content to the needs of adults and illustrate its relevance to the learner. As needed, use methods described in this session or methods you have seen used in previous teaching sessions, perhaps even the methods Jesus used.
3. Select a situation from the Bible that illustrates an adult's need, identify the need giving your reasons for the identification, and discuss how Jesus or Paul or another teacher addressed the need. Use specific Bible verses to support your responses.

JOURNALING

Consider some of the following when journaling:

- One idea, Bible verse, or story that made an impression on me today . . .
- A new idea I encountered today is . . .
- One thing that made me uncomfortable today was . . .
- The prayer I most want to pray right now is . . .

EXAM



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1. According to Abraham Maslow's five-level hierarchy of the needs, an adult is motivated to achieve based on specific needs in one or two of the levels and cannot go to the higher levels until those needs are met.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Which one is NOT one of the hierarchy of needs identified by Abraham Maslow?
 - A. Safety
 - B. Love and Belonging
 - C. Adventure
 - D. None of the above
 - E. All of the above
3. Which of the following is a good ways to gain insight into the need(s) of a student?
 - A. Listen to their comments.
 - B. Listen to their prayers.
 - C. Listen to their questions.
 - D. All of the above.
4. Effectively connecting Scripture to the needs of adult learners means living it out with them in daily life.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Jesus understood the needs of His disciples but did not find it necessary to connect his words, teaching, and actions to their specific needs.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Give a copy of your responses to the first and second application activities to your mentor before you meet.
2. Share your ideas for the third application activity with your mentor and discuss your answer.
3. Tell how you plan to connect learners' needs with God's Word. Ask your mentor to tell what he or she teaches that makes those connections.