

BCL ep308 Boundaries, Bravery, and Belovedness, with Noah Brink

From the moment we're born, we crave a sense of belonging, a place for something bigger than ourselves. We're hardwired for connection, and it's not just a nice-to-have, it is a lifeline, especially for our children. A healthy sense of community keeps them grounded and frees them from the restless search for meaning on their own terms.

Today, we're diving into the power of belonging, arguably the one thing children need most to grow into thriving, healthy adults. Join us as we explore how we, as parents and educators, can nurture that sense of belonging in our homes and in our schools, creating spaces where our children feel connected and truly known. All this and more on this episode of Basecamp Live.

Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation. Get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation.

Welcome to Basecamp Live, now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Basecamp Live. Davies Owens here, so glad to have you joining us for yet another weekly podcast.

Please share the great opportunities at Basecamp Live with your friends and other schools. You know, we're part of a incredible movement of really, I think, revival that's happening in different places around the world. Sometimes it's easy to look at the headlines and the news and think it's all bad news, but it's interesting.

I actually came across a statistic just this week that says Bible sales are up 22% in the U.S. through the end of October, compared with the same period last year, 22%. That's an amazing number. U.S. print sales were up less than 1% in the same period.

So there's something going on. The writer of this article definitely puts a finger on the fact that today in our world with so many challenges and anxieties that people are experiencing, they're looking for connection and belonging and purpose, and they're looking to God's Word. And I think we're seeing some similar interest with many coming to look at better ways to educate the next generation through Christian education, classical Christian education in particular.

And I'm really excited to be a part of that and that you're a part of it as well. We're making huge decisions each day to raise the next generation. And the topic today on how do we help them find that sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose is at the deepest level, really what it means to be human in our world today.

And so we're gonna get into all that in just a moment, but first I wanna do a quick shout out to Jason Carr, headmaster of Riverbend Academy in Ormond Beach, Florida. Jason, thanks for being a part of the Base Camp Live family, Zipcast family as well. Amanda Miller, founder and

head of school of Ordo Amoris Classical Academy in Fairhope, Alabama.

We are so glad to have you listening along with your families as well. It's a joy to get to sit down with my good friend, Dr. Noah Brink. He has spent his entire life in Christian education for more than two decades.

He's been in various roles. He's been a teacher, a coach, an administrator. He's a new head of school this coming school year.

He's also worked for many years as a Christian school consultant working with various schools around the country. And he believes deeply in the opportunity to connect the next generation and help them find their meaning in life, ultimately in Christ, but in their communities and to grow and a love for what is true, good, and beautiful. Noah and his wife, Katie, they have three children and they're a part of the blessing of a Christian school.

So look forward to your hearing this interview with Noah. Before we jump into it, just as always, a quick thank you to those who partner with us and our organizations that we believe in that have great resources that I would encourage you to check out on our partners page on the Base Camp Live website, Wilson Hill Academy, Classical Academic Press, America's Christian Credit Union, the Classic Learning Test, and Life Architects Coaching. We're so grateful for your partnership.

Without further ado, here's my conversation with Noah Brink. Well, Noah, welcome to Base Camp Live. Thank you so much, Dave.

He's thrilled to be here. It's good to be with you. To be with another podcaster is always good and I've enjoyed getting to know you through some shared work we do with the Herzog Foundation and love your vision for education.

For folks who don't know, share a little bit of the Noah story. Yeah, I sort of pride myself as being what I would call a Christian school junkie. I love everything about Christian schooling.

I'm a product of a Christian school, have worked in Christian schools as a teacher and a coach. And currently I run a nonprofit for Christian schooling called Renew Education. And our sole focus is to help schools become more aligned with the gospel of Jesus.

That is our passion and that's what drives us day in and day out. Yeah, and that world that we're both in is obviously critical to trying to keep one hand on what's happening in the world of the culture around us and what is kind of the biblical underpinnings of what does it look like to raise the next generation with a strong spiritual foundation and collaborating with parents. So a lot of the things are sort of around us, but this topic we're gonna jump in today is this importance really of belonging, which I love.

Talk a little bit, why is that such an important topic for you? Obviously it's from watching students over the years. I got the pleasure of working with students as a teacher and a coach

for almost a full 20 years and increasingly seeing students feeling isolated. You look at the data in terms of students' mental health and then even from people of faith we see it, but you also, even in secular studies, you see probably one of the most recent national bestsellers, *The Anxious Generation*, where it's talking about the increase in mental health issues.

And you see students, children, and now even as a dad, I see my own children wondering where do they fit? And the more I work with schools, the more I talk with my own children, and this is something, it's part of just what it means to be human. We need to belong from a position of faith to belong to our Heavenly Father, to belong to the people of faith, the community of faith. But even in the life of a school, to have that place where we fit, it grounds us, it grounds us in the learning, it grounds us in our relationships.

And so to me it seems like this catch-all word. It's that thing that all of us are seeking. And so I think that's the challenge of any of us working with today's kids.

How do we help them belong? Well, and it seems like the kind of thing too that, I mean, we're all swimming in this cultural moment, so it's hard to see otherwise, but certainly I think one can make the case throughout most of human history, this would have probably even seemed like a little bit of a bizarre problem, like belonging, like what are you talking about? You grew up in this community. These are sort of the rules and norms of living in this community or village or wherever you might be. These are the kinds of jobs that you're probably gonna naturally fall into.

So it doesn't seem as if, I mean, this age of individualism and discovering yourself and be the real you or whatever the typical college commencement speech is trying to tell you to go out and discover yourself or something. I mean, we've created this problem in a way that probably wasn't even here 50 years ago for sure. Sure, yeah, I mean, obviously, I mean, we can only go by what we see from historical studies, but I mean, typically the way that people became, the way they matured is within the tribe.

It's like you said, it's sitting around the fire in the evenings, listening to the stories of the people, the elders of the tribe. And increasingly, we've said that what it means to be a mature individual is to you be you, tell your truth. Like you said, exactly, go find your way.

And that's what we're continually told that that's where you're going to be free. Social media seeks that like, and once again, kids or adults, we're running to social media because even there we're trying to belong. And yet, I think that what most struck me, and I think I read it most profoundly in Alan Noble's book, where he says, you are not your own, and he's basing it on the Heidelberg Catechism.

But to me, it's this fascinating thing that we're like, the way you're gonna feel most fulfilled is to, I had two paths, Robert Frost, I chose the one less traveled. And yet, there's that great promise of that's where freedom is gonna be. But in seeking that, what we're, generations having gone down that other road, we're realizing that it's got a bunch of people that are, they're isolated

from one another, they don't have community, students don't have a community, church is even marketed towards kind of like segmenting people out, the youth group is segmented from, I mean, everywhere we go, we see fragmentation, and yet what we're longing for is wholeness.

And that comes through belonging, belonging to each other, belonging to God, belonging to a people. So it is a bit of a paradox. What is it? And I think even in, for those listening and most of us listening, or I'm listening too, would be inclined to say, well, we certainly wanna adhere to kind of a biblical Christianity, but we also sort of absorb a lot of the world's notions of I want my child to be who they are called to be, we might use that terminology, but really, it's such a push towards self-discovery and individualism that, again, has a lot of bankruptcy, to your point, when you get to the reality of what are you anchoring your life to? And you wonder, even in education, 20 years ago, the whole self-esteem movement was very popular, where it was even more intentionally built into secular school curriculum to just really be about self-discovery.

And that seems, again, to have been left wanting, and to your point, so often then students are left just sort of cobbling together their identity based on whoever their latest heroes are. I was reading a study that was talking about the heroes today are not even the, quote, movie stars of old. It's now, number one is social media influence, and that's actually one of the most desirable jobs that children are envisioning themselves to be someday.

So it's all so skewed around, I'm gonna go start my own thing and make all this money and be successful, which is so often, again, an empty, dead-end path, I think. Yeah. Yeah, Davies, this became most apparent to me several years ago, working with some students, and I noticed this trend where students were just obsessed with horror movies.

And to me, I was aware of them when I was a kid, but I wasn't, I wanted to go see the most recent action-adventure movie or comedy. I wanted to laugh. And I was fascinated by, here are 15 and 16-year-olds that they are flocking to go see the most current horror movie.

And it's odd that parents were letting them do this, but I finally asked a student in my class, why are y'all so hell-bent on watching horror movies and really nothing else? And one of these young girls, sophomore in high school, says, well, I need something to thrill me. And I just thought, we've created a culture where students don't know where to go. And to me, I even connected that with sort of this void of belonging.

They don't know where they fit. They don't know where they're going to feel connected, and so they're left with, I need to find the next big thing, and in that case, I need to find something that's going to shock me out of my boredom. Like, what is happening with our kids, where that's where the only place they feel like they can find something that thrills them.

And that's really dangerous when you combine belonging with high-risk thrill stuff. So you see that, again, a lot of social media is like, let's all go jump off a bridge. It's like, okay, well, and then you've got group pressure and all of that.

It's just interesting. There's so many examples of this, but I think, I did a little Google search on just music today and the word belonging, and it's amazing the number of, I mean, countless songs where belonging appears. I mean, from Taylor Swift to Mariah Carey's, I mean, their most popular songs.

You know, music becomes this medium to just declare this is what's burdening modern people. They want to belong, they want to connect, and we see it today with families, moms and dads in a lot of our schools that are, again, outwardly connected, but inwardly isolated from one another. Everyone goes in their homes and garage doors come down, they cocoon themselves away, and they don't have that sense of active community.

Church isn't the centerpiece, like maybe it was for when I grew up, I was there twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday, so, you know, those things have shifted as well, leaving some real challenges. We'll share, yeah, this is, again, just kind of setting out, this is a real need that I think we all experience, we all know about. You've done, you've thought a lot about this, even from just a biblical standpoint, kind of the undergirding of what does it mean to be human biblically is so tied to our sense of belonging.

Sure, yeah, I mean, that's, I go back to the statement from the Heidelberg Catechism, it starts with, and it's the first question, I grew up with a different catechism. I tell people sort of in jest, but it's true, I was not allowed to get my driver's license until I could recite the entire Westminster Catechism in one sitting. Did you do it, I guess? Yes, I can drive.

You can drive, I just, yeah, that's impressive. So that was one of the, I guess you could say one of the boundaries around the boys, you know, I'm one of three boys in my home that we're going to, you're going to do this, all 116 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. So I grew up with Westminster, but as I've grown, I've come to appreciate the other catechisms, the other creeds and confessions of the faith.

You know, but the first catechism of the Westminster says what's man's chief end, but the first question of the Heidelberg asked the question, what's your only comfort in life and in death? And it's such a wonderful, I mean, essentially the question saying, what's the only way you're ever going to find meaning? I mean, and you quote these songs, but at the end of the day, that's what people want. They want to find meaning. And paradoxically, the writers of this catechism said that the only comfort you're gonna find life and death is that I'm not my own, but I belong to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ.

And, you know, to me, that's almost like earth shattering. It blows up the statement of the day because it says the only way you're ever gonna find real meaning is to realize that you were made for someone else and you belong to someone else that, you know, to say I belong to anyone seems like that's infringing upon me, that's limiting me. But then you look at scripture and it's like, that's actually where we begin to be set free.

I, yeah, I belong to my wife and that could seem restrictive, but that's the only way I'm gonna

find real relationship with my wife, to belong to another. That's where freedom begins. And it is a paradox, but it's beautiful.

It is the losing yourself to find yourself. So there's that at a basic level. And yeah, and so if everything is about you, there's no place for the authority of, you know, God's authority to rule over someone if you're the authority.

I mean, sort of the, I remember years ago in church, youth group world is always like, you know, you'd take the Bible and hand it to a child or a young person and say, okay, you know, or is the Bible over you or under you? Are you standing on top of the Bible or are you holding it over your head? And it's directing you downward in your identity and your purpose and your belonging. So that's a great way to look at it. I wanna take a break.

We're gonna come back in a moment, but I wanna just, you know, we think about, as you're describing, I'm really thinking, what we're talking about at a theological level is a sense of we're surrendering ourselves in a practical way. It's kind of the rules of engagement. And I think about it, it really covers everything.

It's like, well, how do you dress? How do you behave? What do you, you know, James K. Smith, you are what you love. I mean, what do you love is really born out of, that's the rules of belonging. So if you're in an inner city gang, there's probably some different rules of engagement than maybe in a different setting just based on who sets those standards.

So really important questions that's at the heart of really what it means to be human. So why don't we take a quick break? We'll jump back in and get into some more practical ways we can help our families set healthy boundaries. We're all here because we love classical Christian education, and we chose it for well-thought-out reasons.

But have you ever thought much about where you bank? Wouldn't it be awesome to work with a bank that shares your love of goodness and truth and beauty? The folks over at America's Christian Credit Union are proud supporters of classical Christian education and this podcast, and they have been serving the financial needs of Christian ministries and schools and families for over 65 years. Find out more about America's Christian Credit Union and how they can help your family or school with funding and banking needs by visiting americaschristiancu.com, or you can find out more in the show notes for this episode. So Noah, thinking about this idea of belonging, where do we start with this? This is such a huge topic, but in the practical everyday life of running our families and our own personal worlds, there's a lot of things that are calling for our time and attention.

What is the best way we can look at this important topic? Yeah, so the best way I've begun to think about this and walk alongside school communities or church communities, parents, in the area of belonging, and it's kind of an alliteration that marries alongside the idea of belonging. So it's three B words. And the three that I use to sort of nurture a sense of belongingness, if such a thing as a word, is boundaries, bravery, and belovedness.

And the reason I find those words all to be an important part of what's necessary for someone to feel like they belong. So if you think about like boundaries, I know once again, that kind of pushes against the message of the day, like boundaries, they restrict you. But actually, if you're going to ever feel like you belong to a people or to another, there have to be boundaries.

There are boundaries to my marriage to my wife. You know, there's do's and don'ts that come with that. Those are actually good things.

And I think that we are scared sometimes of boundaries, but actually boundaries are necessary and we should embrace them. You know, if I'm working with students in a school context, boundaries are there to nurture belongingness. You think about, you know, even in my own home, we have sort of kind of the rules of the day.

There are things that we do and things we don't do. Some of the words that I use with my kids often are grit and grace. That's kind of like some of our family values.

I talk often with my kids about that. So it's not just boundaries in terms of rules, but it's also kind of like, what are your core values? What are the things you hold most dearly that sort of define you as a group? And, you know, I think from a parenting standpoint, parents often are scared to ask their kids this question, what are our family's core values? Like, what's most important to us? Have you ever asked your kids that question or when they're younger? Like, what do you think is most important to me as your father? That's a great question. You probably get a variety of answers on that, but I think you would find, I think you're right.

You know, students or children really are looking for those structures. And I think about, you know, stories of people throughout the years that I've heard of, you know, that grew up in very kind of woodstock, free spirit homes. You know, you can do whatever you want, be whatever you want and swing from the trees.

And, you know, those kids really struggle because they're just constantly looking for something that's gonna provide that anchor point. I remember, to your point in taking a psychology class in college, they talked about a study that was done years ago where they took a school play yard and they had a chain link fence around it. There's a big highway on the other side of it.

And they observed the kids that would just go play with the fence up. And then the theory was, well, if we take the fence down, you know, they could all sprint towards the highway and get run over. Are they gonna, you know, what are they gonna do? Well, fence comes down and kind of as you, fortunately they didn't sprint towards the highway.

Hopefully somebody would have stopped them. But they actually all clustered there at the school door. They wouldn't even go out into the play yard sort of without a sense of where are the boundaries is exactly what you're saying.

Yeah, and that actually blends perfectly. So with these three words, it's almost difficult to talk about where one ends and the other begins because I think that healthy boundaries nurture a

sense of bravery. You need, like in order for us to feel a sense of belonging and it's kind of weird, but I believe it's true.

That bravery is a big part of belonging because fear, like in, you know, Jonathan Haidt, you know, in his work, not just *The Anxious Generation*, but preceding that, he uses that word safetyism. That we've turned safety into a worldview where we're so scared of risk. We're so scared of critique or confrontation or disagreement and that actually stifles.

It's kind of weird because you would think, well, safety, that's a good thing. That makes me feel safe and so now may I belong. Actually, it works against belonging because you don't ever feel like, you know, people say this isn't a safe space.

And yet, like we need to have a sense of bravery. Like the only way we're ever gonna belong and to the analogy, you know, the study you give, once kids know where the boundaries are, they can be brave. They can play hard.

It's the same with like a sports field. If you know where the boundaries of the field are, you can play with reckless abandon because you know where the boundaries are. So to nurture a sense of risk-taking, of bravery, do we encourage them to do hard things? That that also helps you belong to one another, to a community, to ground you, which is a big part of that belonging.

And it's really sad when you, you know, parents so often mean well, so let's bubble wrap our kids, but then we inadvertently create the very thing we don't want, which is a anxious, ridden child who's fearful of everything. And I've heard you talk about the book, *The Blessing of a Skinny*, which really gets into that. That notion.

Absolutely, yeah, I mean, and that's, these are things that Davies, we know they're true. Like we know that growth happens through stretching and conflict and, you know, as adults. And yet we just, that bubble wrapping that you talk about, and then even, you know, from a standpoint of belovedness, that's the third of these Bs, that students and children, that they realize they're deeply beloved by their parents or their coach or their, and, you know, from a standpoint of like grace, like unmerited favor, I love you deeply because you're mine.

That's the belongingness, like, that's why I love you. Because you're part of this thing, that that also maybe helps children accept the boundaries that we put in front of them because they know that it's coming from a position of belovedness. They're more willing to be brave because they know those boundaries are secure, it grounds them, but also the one who set those boundaries is for them, so they're like, okay, I actually can try hard things because I'm coming from a position of belovedness.

Like, it's those three words, they just, they do everything that's necessary for us to arrive at that place where we feel like we belong to each other. And it really is, it's just downstream of the gospel. I mean, that's the whole, I mean, if you are, if you know you are fully forgiven and you are fully loved and you have eternal life in front of you, you can live the most, you know, bold

and even reckless in the right kind of a way life because you are, you know, it's like you've got the, whatever it may be, the bungee jump cord around you.

Like, you can jump off that cliff. You know you're gonna be okay. There's a confidence and durability about that being a part of the beloved, which is profound.

But, you know, and so the question becomes how does that play out and what can we do, what do we do sometimes inadvertently, like we talked about the problem of the bubble wrapping, well-intended, but bad outcome, and then what are the things we can do? We'll get into more of that here in just a moment. But, you know, other thoughts on this, because I think you're right. I think there's such a freedom that can come when we realize how we release ourselves and our children for belonging.

Yeah, I mean, I think that, and it seems so counter-cultural. I just even read recently about a woman in Georgia who got in trouble for, you know, letting her kid walk to the store, you know, unsupervised. I think I heard about that, yeah.

And we now as parents feel like, you know, we also live in fear of I can't actually try to nurture bravery among my kids because what could happen to me? What retribution would I suffer? And yet we have to start thinking like what are the ways that I can A, establish greater clarity in terms of what do I expect from my kids without apology, like that's good for them. You know, this sort of stuff really is like a counter-reformation. Like we're pushing against, you know, the culture of the day.

And, you know, to Flannery O'Connor's perspective, you have to push harder than the culture of the day is pushing against you. And so that we are pushing harder with defining with clarity, know these boundaries, they're actually kind of absolute, but they're there because you need them. I'm pushing you to do hard things, knowing full well as a parent that, because I believe in you from that position of belovedness.

When I think about it from a school standpoint, I mean, you know, as educators, how often, not often, well, it is more often than it should be, but you know, a child that's struggling because to really mature, you have to work through difficult things. And there are points academically where it's not gonna come easy and you're gonna have to really work at it. I can remember times, you know, our children would be in tears and it wasn't that the school gave too much homework, it just, they were having to mature a bit.

And it's real easy, both for your own weariness, just to make the problem go away and either blame the school or say, well, we're just not gonna do that. I mean, there's a point where things can get out of kilter, but more often than not, I think we rescue our children prematurely. And again, it hurts them when they're right at the verge of actually some breakthroughs.

It's like going to the gym and tearing down muscles to then build stronger muscles. I mean, that's sort of how the world works, right? Mm-hmm, yep. Yeah, and along that way to, you

know, people talk about like in order to nurture clarity, you have to over communicate and then over communicate some more.

You know, our kids need to hear overwhelmingly the message that we are proud of them. You know, it's so easy to think, well, I told that my child, I love him. I needed to say it again, that that also helps them.

I think that that does ground them. It's not merely a statement of affection. It helps them belong to you, to each other, to belong to the family, to belong to the school.

For a child to hear, I am deeply proud of you. And especially, I would say, especially when you may actually need to be bringing a student back or a child back to those boundaries, you know, where you're holding accountable and to say, and I am deeply proud of you. You are mine and I am your father and you are my son.

You are my daughter and I am deeply proud of you. You know, those statements over and over and over again. And I know that we sometimes think that we've said it enough.

I wonder if it's possible to say that enough. Well, or to say it and then to reinforce it with actions because I think it's often said and then the actions are, you know, I love you conditionally or it comes across that way based on performance or goals or whatever it may be. And that's, again, confusing to them.

Yeah, I mean, that's the transactional stuff that it's so easy. I mean, the place I keep going back to over and over and over again is it is in failure where students, where children, they actually begin to see grace most vividly. You know, so if you don't ever let your kids fail, you're not gonna have the opportunity for a conversation about grace.

And so those are the prime real estate for conversations about the gospel, where students come to grips with the first time in their life, maybe I actually can't do everything I thought I could and I blew it. And for the gospel to come sweeping in and to say, you know what, that's why you need Jesus. And that's why your dad needs Jesus.

That's why your mom needs Jesus. And that's why I'm deeply still proud that you are my son, you are my daughter. I mean, what a great opportunity.

Yeah, it's really becomes a power of blessing over your child once they see that. So why don't we take another break? We're gonna come back and get real practical because what does this actually look like and how can we create homes and schools where students know kind of the rules of engagement, they know how they fit into the community and how they're anchored to that sense of their identity in Christ and in the norms of their family. So let's take a quick break and come right back and we'll continue the conversation.

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academic assessments that strengthen a traditional education. CLT's assessments for grades three through 12 provide a meaningful metric of students' abilities, equipping parents and educators and helping students pursue a fulfilling future.

Explore CLT's assessments by visiting www.cltxam.com forward slash Basecamp. Now, I'm sure folks listening are both personally agreeing and feeling this in their own lives and in the lives of their children. I mean, we just live in a world where, remember years ago, the book *Bowling Alone*, Putnam wrote, and I thought that image of just, people that you go to a bowling alley, not that I go very often, but you know, people in there, they're bowling and they look like they're all part of this wonderful community.

We're kind of, but we're really lonely in a crowd. We're not connected. So practically as a parent, how do we partner well with our schools and in our homes just to create environments where our children know boundaries and feel loved and connected? So, I mean, I've got lots of thoughts and things that I see, and I've, there have been times where I've seen things in schools or other homes that it's caused me to break the 10th commandment.

I've kind of coveted things that they've done. And I'm like, well done. Yeah.

But I think that where I wanna start with is almost a statement of hope. As a family, as a father, as a teacher, as a coach, you're going to blow it. You just are.

It may be that the greatest rhythm, and I think a lot of it comes down to habits and rhythms and rituals. The greatest habits, the greatest ritual is that students, children, they need to see the adults that care about them most deeply habituate a willingness to ask for repentance, to admit when we blow it. You know, for kids to know that my father, my mother is willing to admit wrong.

I mean, I think that, and that's a very hard thing to do, and I know it's words, but to put that into practice, that to get really comfortable to say, no, I actually, I should not have done that. And even when it's small things, sometimes we wait to the big things, like to make sure, and maybe even if our kids don't realize that we blew it, to actually say, you probably didn't even realize I did this, I shouldn't have done that. And I think, I want to start there, because sometimes when you give people a list of things you can do, we're like, okay, great, here's some things I can do, but what happens when you don't? Or you haven't been.

Right. Yeah, yeah. And start there.

By the way, that also sets kids free, because it sets them free, it allows them to be failures, which they are, because we believe sin is real. It sets them free to even belong that much more deeply, because they don't have to perform. That's not what helps them to belong, what they do and don't do.

It's because they already belong. So I have this deep conviction that that's one of the most powerful things that adults can do with children, is to model a habit, a ritual, rhythms of

quickness to say, I was wrong. Okay, so that's kind of like my soapbox.

Yeah, no, that's a good backdrop on that. I was just gonna say, I mean, part of that too, is you're saying that would be just how we model things, like developing social skills. I mean, just these are things, I was thinking a couple of months ago, I was out at, I think it was a Home Depot, and ran into a family, and they were there, their high school daughter was there with them, they're just acquaintances from our neighborhood, and I don't believe they're believers, and they'll go to our school, I mean, just random folks, if you will.

And we began conversation, and their daughter was sort of turned away on her phone, and she turned towards us, and at no point in that conversation did mom and dad go, oh, hey, you remember our daughter, or made any gesture of sort of the socializing. So I kept thinking, this is just an awkward, it's an awkward moment, because at that point, I didn't remember the daughter's name, and I thought this would be a perfect moment for a parent to just reinforce social skills, and reintroduce the daughter, make her feel included. It's amazing how just things like that, I thought, wow, that ended up being a conversation where she probably felt like, these are not people that I should be connected to.

So just an example, the ways that we even introduce people, or form manners, is part of that process. So, yeah, keep going. Yeah, so then when it gets into, so those are, that would be sort of a posture towards putting this stuff into practice, but when you start to put things into practice, we've talked some about like rituals, family rituals.

I love rhythms. One that we do in our home, every Saturday night, we throw the blanket out on the floor, and our kids are getting a little bit older, but it was more fun when they were super young, throw the blanket out on the floor, and every Saturday night, we would watch a movie together as a family and get pizza or whatever. And I kind of get bent out of shape if somehow we wreck family night.

But the kids do too, because it's like, they think that's what is normal for them, that's healthy. It's like, this is a protected, and it honestly doesn't have to be something like that, but we need to define what are some of those sacred, and I don't mean sacred like church or not church, like that we hold these things in our family to be sacred, that we eat meals together as a family, we protect it. And we don't just eat meals together as a family, at the end of our meal, we typically are reading something.

You could say it's devotion heavy or even devotion light, but something that we kind of, we're just talking with each other, we have almost kind of ritualistic questions we talk about around the dinner table. We have our family night. Those are things that I think ground us, and Christmas time is right around the corner for us, and every year at Christmas time, I spend a day with each of my kids on Saturday.

So we have a few Saturdays of Advent, and it's like I take my son out for, and we do breakfast together, and we do lunch together, and we shop together for their siblings and their mom.

And they almost like they would not feel that Christmas was right. I mean, every family has your own little Christmas traditions.

Take those traditions, those things, and do everything you can to reinforce them. That helps kids belong. Because of those boundaries, because of the belovedness, rather than just kind of happening to us, we need to make sure that we are with a level of intentionality, helping our kids to celebrate them so it's not just happening, but it's intentional.

Well, I love that you've just sort of, what are your family rituals or traditions? I know families that have, you know, Saturday morning, they always make pancakes. They do that together, you know, that kind of thing. Or dad's dating their daughter.

Once a month, they take them out to have coffee. You're right, these are not like, you know, shocking new ideas. These are just, it's the little things, and I love what you're talking about, just the blanket on the floor with some consistency of family gathering.

That all of a sudden creates a rhythm, and those rhythms then create a sense of belonging. It's great, great examples. Yeah, and then in a school context, I think that sometimes we tolerate sports.

We say, well, it's kind of this thing you have to do in the life of a school. You know, you're a school, and well, we have to have sports, and sometimes we've seen it where it becomes the tail that's wagging the dog, but sports or fine arts or clubs, those may be the most powerful tool we have to actually nurture a sense of belonging, and not even and always just for the kids playing the sport. Think about like a basketball game on Friday night.

It's not just the players of the sport that are the ones that feel a sense of belonging to the school. It's the fans, the kids that are showing up to root on their peers. So I think in the life of a school, to embrace those things and even do everything we can to use them as a vehicle for nurturing a sense of community passion.

Yeah, those are great. Yeah, and I think about the power of sports. I mean, obviously, everybody's painted their face blue or whatever, and they're running around in some shared ritual or experience.

So let me think, you know, I'm thinking about those are such great practical suggestions. What would you say to a parent who says, you know, I love what you, I get it theologically, I get the importance practically of family rituals, but you know, children are different. Some are naturally gonna be more outgoing, more gregarious, more naturally engaged.

Some might just be more introverted. I can also think of a lot of our smaller schools where you've got, you know, in my own children's journey, you know, maybe there was six boys and, you know, four girls in a small startup school classroom environment, and you just don't get to pick all your friends in that sense of like peer-to-peer belonging. That can cut real deep, and we know that's a lot of the anxiety that happens.

We've talked a lot about the home world, the world of our homes, but you think about our kids go to a school, even if it's a great Christian school, navigating some of those social pressures, especially if you, your child is maybe not as outgoing. What advice do you have in those situations? Yeah, I think that, and what you're saying is absolutely a challenge. I think if you're the teacher or the coach, I think that the kids have to, what I've learned over the years is that what kids need to see is from the teacher or coach, absolute unmerited favor.

That's that belovedness piece. That the teacher is looking for what makes that kid thrive, like what causes a light to come on in that child's eye, a grin, and to figure out ways to celebrate that because it's easy to connect with a student who just, let's say, is naturally compliant. The other kids automatically think, well, in order to receive the favor of my teacher, I have to be like that student who does everything right.

But if the teacher or the coach is finding out, and here's a kid that he just loves Jordans. He's always wearing Nikes and all, he loves the shoes. He's got a high, he's got a shoe game.

Okay, then I have to go out of my way to value those things because, and once again, there's, you talk about the theology, God's kingdom is very diverse. And not everyone has to be the exact same way. And if maybe a student is really good with his hands to pursue that child in his giftedness and say, in order for you to have value and merit, you don't have to be like this other one.

And if the kids see me as the adult in the room celebrating that child for who he is or who she is, it isn't just about that child feeling honored. The rest of the children, in many ways, are set free to realize, I don't have to conform in order to have merit. And it takes a lot of work, especially in that small school because very quickly in a small school, students are gonna, they're not going to find people like them necessarily.

The diversity is going to sort of surface that much more quickly. And so you have to pursue it. You gotta, I love that you, I love, no, I think that's exactly right.

And I think it's even harder to your point when there's even more of a kind of a homogenous set of norms in a smaller environment school where success equals and we celebrate these things and yet you've got a child that's maybe geared more, to your point, maybe more hands-on or maybe more common arts versus pure liberal arts and sort of like where does that get, where do those outlets get established? Where does that get valued? And I think a lot of our schools that success equals at graduation, we stand on the stage and declare what college you're going to. Well, that says pretty loud and clear. That's the whole end game here versus Billy's gonna go off to welder school and make \$150,000 his first year and you guys are, it's like, maybe Billy got it right.

But do we celebrate that? And do we, to your point, it's really easy to, I think, try to overguide our children and their giftings while at the same time letting them know they belong if they're not exactly the way that maybe we think they need to be. So separating those out. And that's so

beautiful, Davies.

I mean, it is, as a result of kind of where we are in our educational, even parenting moment, we've so narrowly defined what success is. Right, exactly. Which then ties to belonging.

So success is you belong if you achieve in this narrow sense of what we think it needs to look like. And that's, and again, I feel like we, people, and then we're gonna wrap this up, but I mean, again, we're not speaking out of both sides of our mouth. On the one hand, we're saying, it sounds a little bit like let the child kind of lead and discover and find their gifts.

I mean, we're not, there's an element of that that's true, but it doesn't mean you forsake those deeper kind of rules of engagement or identity, where identity comes from. So it's, there's a little bit of a both and there, I think, where there's freedom, but there's also a foundation. Well, and that's where I think that, that's why I kind of like those words that I've used in order to kind of build a scaffolding for belonging.

Yeah, you have to have boundaries and belovedness. You know, it's kind of, belovedness is, I love you who you are. But those kind of all work hand in hand, that the bravery and the belovedness and the boundaries, just as a parent or a teacher, a coach, be constantly thinking, how am I nurturing those three? I think if you nurture those three, it will create that sense of belonging.

That sounds great. Yeah, absolutely. Well, Noah, thank you for your insights on this, obviously a topic I think anyone listening can certainly relate personally and as we raise the next generation.

For folks who wanna know more about what you've written and your work, yeah, share a little bit of your, how do we find, how can folks find you? Sure, the simplest thing is just to check out our website. The organization, the nonprofit that I run is called Renew Education and our website is renew-education.org. And we've got a podcast and blog posts and we walk alongside schools and have a book on Christian education I've written to try to just help with some of these framework ideas for schools, but that's the easiest place to reach us. Sounds great, great.

Well, Noah, thanks so much. Always good to be with you. Well, you've done it.

You made it through another episode of Base Camp Live and I sincerely hope that you've been encouraged along the way. Thank you for being such a faithful listener and thanks again to America's Christian Credit Union, Classic Learning Test, Gutenberg College and Wilson Hill Academy for sponsoring this episode of Base Camp Live. Be sure to give us a five-star rating on Spotify, Apple Podcast or wherever you're listening from.

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episode that you will not wanna miss.

Thanks again for listening.