

BCL ep311 Why Most Kids Can't Spot Propaganda (and what you can do) with Dr. Eliot Grasso

Classical Christian education isn't just about knowledge, it's about shaping the hearts, the habits, and the virtues of the next generation. And as parents and educators, we're constantly guiding our children's worldview, helping them build the wisdom and resilience that they need to navigate today's fast-moving culture. In this world filled with noise, knowing how to actually think critically and speak thoughtfully and lovingly is more important than ever.

Our guest today describes these distractions as particles of propaganda. These elements that are floating all around us every day. How do we equip our children to cut through all of the noise and the confusion? Join us for this episode as we explore the tools and the insights to help cultivate clarity and character and conviction 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. Well, welcome everyone to another episode of Basecamp Live.

Hard to believe another year is closing out. New year is beginning. Lots of exciting things in 2025 to be sharing with you with regard to Basecamp Live and Zipcast and just continuing on this journey of raising up the next generation together.

It is a joy to be with you. Grateful for so many of you around the country and around the world who are part of the journey here in raising up a generation that really does, as we're going to talk about today, have that discernment and that really foothold and confidence that is so lacking today, where I think so many people are kind of, as we used to say in the church world, sheeple. You kind of follow around.

We all need shepherds, but the question is, who's going to be the shepherd of the next generation? I believe we are as parents biblically and in partnership with our schools. So I want to welcome back on this episode, Dr. Elliot Grasso. A year ago, he joined a conversation with me here on Basecamp Live.

If you go to the website and search under slow school in a fast world, he gave us some really helpful ideas to think about around the importance of great book conversations and just thoughtful discussions that help us slow down and take a broader and deeper look at the world around us. So this is really a continuation of that conversation, really looking at Jacques Ellul's book, Propaganda, and many of the ideas that he brought up 50 years ago that are even more relevant today. Dr. Elliot Grasso is Vice President and Instructor at Gutenberg College, where

he's been since 2012, where he teaches courses on art and music and aesthetics.

He is very committed to fostering intellectual development in his students through discussions. So he's living out the very things that we're talking about here in this episode. He's also a very gifted musician and artist.

You can read more about him on his website. He and his wife, Kate, live in Oregon with their three children. So he puts into practice these ideas, not only in the classrooms, but in his home.

And so a lot of good practical wisdom here today. So we're going to jump into the interview before we do. As always, thank you so much to those amazing organizations that partner with us.

Their resources are truly helpful to us on the journey as educators in classical Christian schools and beyond. Wilson Hill Academy, Classical Academic Press, America's Christian Credit Union, the Classic Learning Test, folks at the Light Phone, and Gordon College. Take a look on our partners page, and you can learn more.

Without further ado, here's my conversation with Dr. Elliot Grasso. Well, Dr. Elliot Grasso, welcome to Basecamp Live. Thanks so much for having me, Davis.

It's a pleasure to be here. Really, to be back, because you've been on before, and we had such a good conversation. I thought, let's reconvene.

You know, I had the privilege of being there at Gutenberg College for your conference earlier this year, and you guys tackled this big topic of propaganda, which is a mouthful of a word. I think most people probably heard that word, but I thought it was so fascinating just to think about the challenges that we all face as individuals and as families. How do we raise up a generation that can really think well and not be susceptible to these many voices around us? So share with folks a little bit of, just kind of frame a reference on kind of your story and what you're doing there at Gutenberg, and then we'll jump into this exciting topic.

Sure, well, I'm celebrating 12 years of teaching tutoring at Gutenberg College. Gutenberg College is a small Christian great books college in Oregon, and we read the classics and discuss them in small groups. And one of the works that we read is by French sociologist Jacques Ellul.

Jacques Ellul was a Christian. He was a believer. And one of the questions he was interested in is what is our modern age like? And so he's writing in the mid to late 20th century, but he's tackling questions like, what's efficiency doing to us? What's propaganda doing to us? Do we have as believers distinctions working that can help us tease out truth from nonsense? Yeah, boy, is that not the modern moment truth from nonsense or truth from the, yeah, the silly voices that are all around us.

It's hard to escape that anymore. The word propaganda, I think in most people isn't a word you probably use every day, or we tend to think of it sort of like, isn't that what they did in the world

wars when they would drop leaflets out of planes with propaganda things on it, little leaflets that would fall to the ground. And in that kind of more, I guess, maybe an extreme case.

But when we talk about propaganda, unpack that word, because it's a big word for us. Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So propaganda, as Alul was thinking about it, isn't limited to politics and marketing.

Propaganda is a concerted effort to cause us to act without thinking. And so whether it's something like voting, or whether it's something like buying a soft drink, it could be even something like recycling, which I'm not here to comment on the goodness or badness of recycling, but just recycle without thinking about the impact or what it's doing or that sort of thing. So propaganda, it's a holistic framework that triggers your emotional impulses so that you feel good or bad about doing something and not really understanding why.

And so it causes you to feel good or bad about your own actions. It causes you to feel good or bad about other people groups or that sort of thing. Yeah, so the word feeling seems to be pretty embedded into it.

I mean, is that fair to say? Yeah, it's a visceral, emotional kind of response where you're acting without questioning. So just to, again, back up a second for a frame of reference, because I think everybody listening is like, yeah, this is really describing the modern moment. I mean, we're a culture today that's ping-ponged around by emotions and feelings and sort of groupthink and that idea of really being able to be a discerning, independent, truth-based individual.

Obviously, if they're listening to Base Camp Live, I have confidence they're either in a parenting role, a teacher role, trying to think about how do we raise up a generation that are not just lemmings sort of following around whatever the latest voices are. Is propaganda new or is this something that, if you went back, let's go to classical people, 100 years or 500 years, I mean, were people as vulnerable back then to propaganda? I think what Alul would say is that propaganda really starts in the post-industrial age. So the picture that he has in mind is we've got economies that are localized.

They're in cities. And so people working in factories are swimming in a mass of strangers. And so in the absence of being in communities where everyone knows each other, where there's trusted authority nearby, loving authority nearby, suddenly you're swimming in a pool of strangers.

And that is when someone becomes vulnerable to propaganda. So until you have mass society, right? Just imagine going to the grocery store. How many people do you know when you walk in a grocery store? Like hardly any.

And in fact, you're delighted and surprised if you meet someone that you know in a grocery store. So that wouldn't have been the case 300 years ago. That would have been ridiculous,

impossible.

So it really feeds on the concept of us being isolated in a mass culture that is created by a post-industrial world where we're all working in these huge centers and we don't really know each other well anymore. That's really interesting. I think you're right.

Because if you grew up 100 years ago in a small community on a farm, kind of the rules of engagement of life, what does it mean to be a child or a preteen or a teen or adult? I mean, those rites of passages, the sense of what is my purpose? I mean, these basic human questions were sort of answered by default, it seems like, as opposed to today where everybody's told to go and self-discover and the hyper-rise of individualism. Seems like those are definitely shifts that have happened. Yeah, absolutely.

And I mean, we're relying more and more as a culture for strangers on the internet sort of telling us how things work and how they're put together. And the difficulty of that is that, no, it's not bad to have information from strangers, of course, but the tricky part is that that information comes in particleized form. And so it can be difficult to assimilate all these fragments, all these particles floating around into a coherent picture of what's true and how do I live? You know, Keith McCurdy, who's often on Basecamp Live, we did a conversation or had a conversation interview here just a few weeks ago.

Where we talked about how do you know how to choose wisely sources of parenting wisdom? I mean, so as I talk to young parents around the country, there's just a moment in time we're in right now where there's not a clarion voice. You don't have to the point there, you know, a hundred years ago, you probably had multi-generations around saying, well, this is how we raise a child. And these are sort of the norms of behavior.

And today, to your point, we've kind of, we are in a, everything's become these little particles of information that come at us. And so we hope and trust that the sources of those are good, but everybody's kind of scattered in terms of having any clarion direction. And so it's really propaganda is creating this, to your point, these little particles of, you know, sort of, I guess, dislocated information that just floats about.

And it just becomes whatever the group mind of the moment says this is good is what normalizes it. Is that kind of a better way to describe this moment? Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

And I mean, I think, you know, one cause we could point out is sort of, you know, our affluence in this cultural moment that when people are struggling to survive materially, they cohere much better as a survival group. But America in the 21st century is so affluent that we can sort of afford, quote unquote, with big air quotes, we can afford not to have to interact or care for each other or rely on each other in the ways that, you know, would have been essential to surviving, you know, even 150 years ago. When you hear the term, you know, echo chambers, and it's, I think, especially coming through this last election cycle, there was a lot of, you know, for whatever people, you know, our opinions are not trying to be political about it.

But I think just looking at these mechanisms of how opinions are formed. And so you've got a moment where kind of mainstream, you know, media has really lost its foothold. You know, when I grew up, you had three television channels that was like the big, you know, which of the three do you want to listen to? And now you've got anybody that you can pick becomes a voice of experts.

And in fact, if you're listening to Basecamp Live, thank you for picking me as a voice of an expert. But you know, there's a lot of choices out there. And so you get people sort of in their little isolated communities that are feeding off of maybe a lot of bad ideas all in one place, which again, it's kind of this idea of propaganda that sort of isolated people and then given them a body of content.

You know, think if you're living in, you know, North Korea right now, you're getting propaganda that's probably pretty filtered and very, very specific in what it's hoping your view of the world will be. Sure, and I mean, there's truth and there's tribalism. I mean, one would hope that someone would be interested in the truth, which means that they're going to have to sift through a lot of voices that don't agree with each other to try to discern what is actually the state of reality.

Whereas tribalism is sort of about clumping around the campfire of whatever ideas I find appealing or comforting or whatever as such. So it's a decision about how to think about what one's priorities are. Yeah, again, it's coming from, so again, as we frame up this kind of basic question, what's the problem we're all dealing? We're dealing with this cultural moment.

There's a swirl of information from, you know, credible and non-credible sources and how do we make decisions around it? I've also, you know, heard you talk about the part of the problem with this is that when there is no really anchor point and everybody's just, you know, basically grabbing whatever the cult think of the moment is, it really leaves us with a sense that we're not morally responsible for anything. So talk a little bit about kind of how that undermines even that sense of morality in us when we have nothing to hold onto that's consistent. Well, sure.

I mean, well, I mean, human beings are fundamentally moral beings and to be a moral being is to be accountable for what one determines as good and evil and how one acts on that. So by determine good and evil, I don't mean you cook up a definition for yourself of what good and evil are. I'm talking about taking cues from God about what is good and what is evil.

And a big part of that is when you are practiced in impulsivity, when you are practiced to act without thinking, what you're doing is offloading your humanity. What you're doing is saying, actually, I do not have to be a moral being because someone else is telling me how to think, act and perform. And that's an incredibly dangerous situation to be in because what is happening is when we act without thinking, when we are acting without taking responsibility for what we are doing and to do so is to lose our humanity.

It is to say that we are just, we're just a petitive animals. We are just eating, drinking, sleeping.

We do not have any higher allegiance or authority to rely on.

And that's, that denies the reality that is. ISKRA Which is really, again, a snapshot of kind of this cultural moment for, unfortunately, for so many people. And I know Barna has recently talked about, I read recently, you know, only 4% of church-going Christians would actually have what's historically been thought of as a biblical worldview.

So you've got a lot of kind of 90 plus percent of church-going Christians. And again, it's a discouraging statistic if it's actually true at that level or basically synchronistic. So they've got sort of this hodgepodge of biblical Christianity mixed in with sort of latest, you know, modern progressive thinking of individualism or whatever it may be that, again, leaves them very vulnerable, I think, to whatever the loudest group think is.

And, you know, you've also talked about kind of the idea of, you know, the formation of our children's brains, which we parents love to remind our kids of. Your brain's not actually fully formed until you're 25. You know, and Keith McCurdy's talked about this.

Look, if nothing else, go look at the automobile insurance folks out there. They changed the rate of insurance at 25. There's something that happens there.

So the point is, like, prior to 25, you're still, and you always are, being formed and learning, but there's some immaturity that's even more, making us even more vulnerable, our children more vulnerable in that pre-25 age. It's a kind of a toxic soup, it sounds like, in terms of this propaganda moment. Yeah, it's quite tricky, I mean, to respond to your comment, Davies.

I mean, as a parent of three, I know that some of the hardest lifting that's done, well, all of parenting, if you care, is a hard lift. But the early years of parenting where you're sort of helping the child survive, it's new if you're a first-time parent. It's like, wow, this is crazy.

I have to pay attention to everything all the time. I think the tricky part is when children enter the pre-teen years and the teenage years, it's like, oh, they can dress themselves and wash themselves and feed themselves, and sort of like, oh, they're taking care of themselves, which is fantastic, but it can make one less attentive to the oncoming, incredibly impressionable developmental age called early adulthood. Between ages 18 and 25, there are lots of changes that take place.

One of them is that your children complete their values framework, which means they decide on what basis they're going to believe what is true and how they're going to go about living out those things. They're going to decide what their boundaries are for what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. And so the key part here, I think, is in a world of propaganda where there are thousands of people trying to get their attention because they want them to buy something or do something or that sort of thing, it can be easy for a parent to just say, oh, well, they're, quote, unquote, taking care of themselves.

They know how to think about stuff. They know how to, I have all the bad channels blocked on

our whatever sort of thing. But the tricky part is to stay vigilant, not out of fear, but out of attentiveness and love to a child's ultimate long-term arc and development and well-being.

So this early adulthood phase, 18 to 25, if your kid's in high school, like one of mine is, it's up and coming. It's not time to dial back the attentiveness. It's the time to attend to the life of the mind in a more thoughtful, thorough way for your 18 to 25-year-old.

Yeah. Well, and we're going to take a break and come back and kind of roll our sleeves up and get into what do we do about that? What are the antidotes to the propaganda? And I think there's kind of the analogy is, and I've heard others talk about this idea of it's kind of like being in a, you're never outside of some influence. It's like you're in a, going down the stream or going down a fairly fast-moving river.

And if you stop, you actually keep moving. So you have to intentionally start swimming upstream to counteract the overall flow of the culture around you. I think it's a great point.

I hear parents all the time with good intentions saying, I really want little Johnny to sort of start making his own decisions. And so let the school of hard knocks come into play. Some of that's true.

We certainly need our children to have to deal with natural consequences and make tough decisions, but they really do need us. And so what are the skills that we can be practicing in our homes that compliment what happens in our schools as far as really teaching discernment and how to think wisely? And what are a lot of these sort of propaganda things that come at us? Like you need to be happy or everything is about you or all these other assumptions. So why don't we take a break? Cause I'd love to get your thoughts on just maybe some of this top voices that we need to counteract and how do we do that well? Cause there's a lot of opportunity and it shouldn't be ever, even if you're a busy parent, there's some easy things you can do in the course of a normal day that I think really help support and encourage your child to have healthy worldview and healthy foundation under their feet.

We'll be right back and continue the conversation. 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. Elliot, we are continually living as a countercultural people. We, I know that term often gets thrown around, but to the point that you can't just stand in the river, you're going to get swept down.

You're going to be swimming upstream. And as followers of Christ, as biblical people, more and more, the things that the Bible says are true and good and beautiful are not the things that the propaganda swirls around us about. So what are some of the things that come in your mind is just kind of things that we ought to be thinking about as parents and educators what are the top things we might want to be counteracting that are kind of in the normal swirl of the propaganda of the day, like happiness.

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Well, I'll point at Allul's four great collective presuppositions of the modern world.

He calls them, which is really just four priorities that we sort of imbibe without even thinking about it. The first one is that man's aim in life is happiness. The second is that man is naturally good.

The third is that history develops an endless progress. And the fourth is that everything is matter. So those, to my mind, sort of run at cross purposes with biblical Christianity in a number of fundamental ways.

So it seems to me that in terms of happiness, my purpose in life is actually not to be happy. My purpose in life is to be conformed to the image of Christ. My purpose in life is to love my neighbor as myself and to love my God with my entire being.

And so whether happiness is a byproduct of doing those things is sort of beside the point. My life is not about living for myself and my personal happiness and well-being. It's about living for God and living for other people until my life is spent.

And that's how I should think about quote unquote happiness. In terms of goodness, I mean, this one will be the most apparent, I think, to us, which is that, you know, man is made in the image of God, but we're sinners. We're fallen.

We're a mess. We were rebels. We know what we should do, but we don't want to do it.

So we're not good as such. We are flawed and we're fallen. And so we're not just good, as it were.

You're right. That's probably the easiest one for parents. Like, yeah, I kind of knew that.

The day I brought him home from the hospital, we for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory. Yeah, yeah. So yeah, but you're right.

But that's not the normal. In fact, that's almost offensive to the sensibilities of the modern world that, wait, no, we're always good. You know, everything is good.

Right. Yeah, keep going. And then what was the next one? History, you said? Yeah, history develops in endless progress.

So, I mean, it seems to me that the purpose of history is for God to demonstrate His glory and that the biblical narrative kind of tells us that the things are going to keep devolving. They're going to get harder and harder and worse and worse until the Lord comes back. And so our culture embraces a progress narrative where we prize efficiency as our greatest virtue.

And so if things get more and more and more efficient and goods become more and more affordable and more luxurious, then we assume that that means, oh, we're making progress. Isn't that great? But it seems to me that that is not exactly sort of what the Bible authors have in mind when they talk about the history and where things are going. It's certainly a bias that I think we all have to work, you know, struggle with.

You know, we live in a world where if you have the three-year-old iPhone, you feel like you're, you know, you know, using a Model T to talk on, you know, or you just, there's just a, you're right. We just worship progress. And so I think especially for those who are part of classical Christian schools, we already feel like we're questioning, or, you know, are we, are we, are we going in the wrong direction? Shouldn't we be going the other way where everything is, you know, everything is high-tech and modern and AI-driven and we're supposed to get out old dusty books? Are you sure our children are gonna be okay in this form of education? So we're gonna talk about that in a moment.

But yeah, that's a really, I think just calling that bias out, it is, we, we have a very, kind of anti-history perspective that sits behind a lot of what, what comes at us today. So yeah, very helpful to note that. And what was the last one you mentioned that a little talked about? Yeah, the fourth and final one is that everything is matter.

And so you, me, the computer, the car you're driving, it's all just physics and chemistry, man. It's all just atoms in motion. There's nothing else to us.

We're just sophisticated, rational animals that for some reason, write symphonies and compose poetry and do mathematics. You know, who knows why, but we're just a big cosmic accident of atoms colliding into each other. And I mean, I think that, that clearly kind of like the goodness question number two is sort of directly contradicts sort of what a human being is.

Their spirit, their soul, their immaterial things about reality that are realer than the physical things that we interact with that change on a constant basis. So yeah, it's not just a matter of matter. It's not just a matter of matter.

Well, and again, I think, you know, when you isolate these, I suspect most of us are like, oh yeah, of course. I mean, we believe in, you know, there's this, certainly God's a part of a world that's bigger than matter and all of these things. But in reality, I think, do we operate sort of more in that base level? And do our children, they're certainly drawn into the material world in a very unhelpful way at times.

So let's start thinking then about, so this is kind of what we're up against. And then, you know,

the antidote then to this would be what? What would you say is the best way to counteract that so that we are, we have resilience and we have discernment when it comes to these many voices or particles as it may be that swirl around us? Certainly. So I mean, these four presuppositions, no one's gonna come out and say them to our face.

They're implied. They're implied in all sorts of media, speeches, graphics, memes, everything, it's implied. So it's not gonna come right at you like Davis and I have just been talking about.

It's gonna be very subtle, but so that can create for some like a bleak picture. It's sort of, everyone's going to be hit with propaganda. It's impossible to avoid because it is the world that we're in.

But I think a little author, something really helpful. He writes, quote, propaganda ceases where simple dialogue begins. So the second in which we start having an artful conversation, start asking why, or is that a good thing to do? Or how do you know that's true? Suddenly propaganda becomes defanged because we're not just soaking it in mindlessly or actually reviewing the contents of our minds and deciding this really how I want to be and think and live.

You know, and that's such a, it's such a, it's so basic and maybe so obvious in some ways, but so, you know, so propaganda ceases where simple dialogue begins. So dialogue obviously requires putting the phone down and looking at each other and having a conversation requires being in community and having an embodied life with others that are now in a place to actually have conversations. And, you know, I've talked, as I often think of, you know, the Zipcast media world that I'm running to try to help bridge that conversation, to help prompt conversation.

So, you know, the heart behind Basecamp or Zipcast is just, could we encourage people to think about ideas to then have conversations? So often in the Zipcast world, they're in a minivan riding to school and they're hearing various ideas and perspectives on classical or parenting. And the idea would be, could we use that as an environment to start having meaningful conversations? One of the greatest gifts I think parents have is in those younger years is that kind of captured audience and the carpool and the minivan moment kind of riding to school, which, you know, can be squandered quickly with bad radio or, you know, everybody on a device or could it be redeemed somehow? So I'm thinking about where those little moments are in our lives, where conversations and dialogue could actually happen. So let's unpack that a bit.

We'll look at school in a moment, but in the world of our homes, so I've mentioned kind of car time, where else do you see places we might want to redeem to bring about this simple dialogue? And then what does simple dialogue look like? Yeah, I mean, well, in the home, there's dinner time, there's breakfast time. It's less, I think, about, you know, blocking out 16 hours in a row to sort of like set the record straight and more about constant regular touches where the parent and the child are interacting about how they're thinking about things and what's true and why do we think the way that we think? And it's, I think, the character of it is

really for the child to experience the parents' love by inquiring about how they are doing with things. So this isn't, it isn't purely a rational truth download moment where you just download all the answers into the child every dinner and they sort of say, okay, I guess that's true and sort of walk off.

We receive the truth based on how well we're loved while it's being delivered to us and the sort of process that we were invited to be in with the humans who love us and the humans who we trust. And so asking questions about, you know, what do you guys, if you hear something, ask a question. Why do you think that? Johnny, why do you think that? Sue, where did you learn that? Just ask buckets of questions.

When I was a kid driving to school with my father, we did this, we sat on the beltway in Baltimore City. It took forever. And I would say, you know, I don't even know what I was saying, but he would pepper me with questions.

Why do you think that, Elliot? How are you, you know? And so it's like, oh yeah, I mean, you know, I'm in process. I'm younger. You're in process.

You're older. You're trying to figure me out. I have no idea what I'm talking about.

And that's a good thing for anyone to realize. And it's a question that can reveal. I have no idea what I'm talking about.

And same for kids too. Well, it's, again, sometimes it's these odd, on the one hand, I think people listening are like, okay, so what you're telling me, the antidote to all of this is just have a conversation. Well, yes.

However, what's the nature of that conversation? And this is why I've always, you know, caution, and I've been guilty of this back in the day as a parent, you pick your child up from school and the first question is, you know, did you have fun today? Because that's what all Americans want to know. If you get through any activity, was it fun? Like, I'm not sure that's the best question to start out with. And maybe it's like, what did you learn today? Or what was the challenge today? Or what did you find surprising today? And so, you know, just you're right.

The questions both honor that person because you're giving them the floor in a sense. And you're asking them to really reveal what's in their mind. And that gets harder, certainly as our children move into these preteen and teenage years, which historically, and maybe even culturally, it's sort of like, it was good.

Yeah. You know, like, how do we actually break through all of that? Well, we start early, ideally sort of creating an environment where questions are normal. So what are some other, we'll take a break here in a second, but just thinking about types of questions that would help, you know, get the conversation flowing.

Like, what are some examples maybe around worldview? What are you thinking about? Oh,

yeah. No, I want to give parents what I find to be an incredibly powerful tool. And these are seven fundamental worldview questions.

And so these are, number one, what is prime reality? Like, what's really real? Secondly is, what is the nature of external reality? That is, what's the world around us like as we encounter it? Number three, what is a human being? Number four, what happens to a person at death? Number five, why is it possible to know anything at all? Number six, how do we know what is right and wrong? And seventh and finally, what is the meaning of human history? Those are some pretty rich questions if you're stuck in traffic, I would think. And there's probably some maybe less daunting versions of some of those questions. And as you're reading this, I'm even thinking, you know, really that, you know, the catechisms of the church have really sort of encapsulated a lot of this very basic, you know, who am I and why am I here? What's the chief end of man? I mean, all of these are really, I think, getting at that very basic framework you're talking about.

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, these are big, huge questions. And we spend our lives working our way through them.

And so even if one has a completely finalized, like, rational, compelling answer, like, one still has to live with them and live through them. So they can be good fodder for discussion. Yeah, why don't we take a quick break? We'll come back, and maybe we can even kind of role play through a couple of these, because it's, you know, how do you take something as sort of, you know, overarching as what is prime reality and sort of bring that down to sort of like a dinner table conversation? I'm just not sure that's probably the best question to start out with that way.

But I think the essence is absolutely spot on. And if we kind of get our children used to thinking deeply and thinking biblically, obviously it gives them a resilience to sort of this, back to the silly particles of the propaganda world sort of sprinkling all around us. So that's the hope, at least.

We'll be right back and continue our conversation. You choose a traditional education for a reason. So why use standardized tests that don't reflect that? Basecamp Lab is proud to partner with Classic Learning Test, which offers online 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.cltexam.com forward slash Basecamp. Ella, you think about these questions in your list.

I was kind of smiling because they're just, you know, I actually minored in philosophy. So this is the kind of thing that we would have been talking about in a philosophy class. You know, what is prime reality and what is the nature of external reality? And yet these really are the essence of what does it mean to be human? And if we get those questions right, then we have a much greater foundation to build our lives on.

And so let's get practical though because I think for most families, and I would add one more caveat that for those of us who are in classical Christian schools and who did not have a classical education, I would be one of them. It's very easy to look at what even our middle school or high schoolers are learning and think, okay, I'm completely unqualified to have any kind of real deep conversation here. So I think even if you can sort of patch together an intelligent question, now you've got to turn around and be ready to answer the question, which could be intimidating.

So what are just some, you know, give us some, you know, starter things that we could work on here. So, you know, we're at the dinner table. What does that look like? And you've got three kids.

What is it really? Do you actually begin, you know, hey, pass the bread and what is prime reality? I mean, it's probably not, probably not the flow of the conversation. What does it really look like then? Yeah. Yeah, no, great, great question.

You do not need a degree in philosophy to do this. Asking thoughtful questions is a skill. And you could start something like prime reality, which seems like completely obtuse and alien and foreign.

Just ask him questions like what do you see? What's around you? Who's sitting next to you? I mean, really what you're trying to get them that what you're asking them is what's true and what are they perceiving? So yes, sitting at the table, it's made of wood. I'm eating the food. It tastes savory.

I'm loved. I'm in a house. I'm in an apartment.

I'm outside. Yeah, ask him questions like this and see how they interact. And then ask questions like, well, is there anything that's real that we can't see? Yeah, there's viruses.

There's microbes. There's China. I can't see China from here.

That's probably real. I can't see Saturn. How about transcendent things? How about immaterial things or the things that are real? So I mean, really, what you're asking the child to do is sort of reflect on the nature of their experience without making it sound like a big bombastic, pompous, crazy philosophy question.

It's absolutely a philosophy question because you're trying to get at what's true, which is a factor, a function of wisdom. But yeah, just ask them to describe their situation and their self and how they're encountering the world. Yeah, I think about, I'm a big fan of Francis Schaeffer's influence in large measure by a lot of his writings and time at LaBrie Fellowship.

And one of the things I appreciated about Schaeffer and LaBrie was always this kind of their motto was honest answers to honest questions. And Schaeffer really anchored to this idea that biblical Christianity is real truth for the actual world we're in. And there's the story of him at one

point in a conversation with this Buddhist.

And the Buddhist was arguing that there is nothing real. It's all illusion. We're all just a drop of water in this cosmic ocean of life.

And I think Schaeffer went over and picked up a pot of hot boiling water in a teapot and held it over his head. And he goes, well, then you won't mind if I pour this on your head because you're not really here. And it was like, whoa, wait a minute.

I really am here. And I thought this is what's so beautiful about Christianity is that it actually speaks to the real world. And we have, not that we understand everything, but it's not just some ethereal religious experience we're talking about.

We're talking about the real problems of the real world. Airplanes have wings not because we think they look nice, because there's a physics that requires them to have wings and so on. And so I think what I hear you saying, it reminds me when I, as a young dad, we used to go around the dinner table and do what we called heaven and earth questions.

So every child would have a chance to ask a heaven or an earth question. So a heaven question is like, what color are God's eyes, I guess. Or more theological type questions, why is there sin in the world? And then the earth questions are just, how does a plant grow or something that just sort of very basic, how does the world work? And I think those are, what I hear you saying is sometimes this is not complicated philosophy.

It's just having intentional conversations that talk about things that really matter. Is that maybe a way to say it? Yeah, absolutely. I mean, reality is at hand.

So let's allow our curiosity to probe it, to investigate it, to explore it and to wonder at it. So, all right. And again, and the time's gonna catch up with this here in a second.

So we began by talking about, we're in this world of propaganda. You can't get away from it. These particles are all around us.

So if we've had these conversations, how just, so make sure we're all on the same page. How does that build this resilience? So now a child comes in the house and all their peers in the neighborhood are talking about a particular thing or valuing something that maybe we would say is not difficult to value or things are off kilter. How does this dialogue reset that child? Yeah, well, I said a few moments ago that asking questions is a skill and you have to practice skills to get good at them.

So if you help your children practice these skills, they will be good at asking questions in a loving way, not just of their neighbor, but of themselves. They can reflect on the pieces and particles that are all floating around in their mind that frankly don't agree with each other. And they can ask and make fine distinctions about, oh, well, wait a second.

How can we be just chemistry and physics and atoms in motion and also be an immaterial soul that will live eternally, blah, blah, blah. Those pieces don't fit together. And so when your son or daughter is out interacting with people by practicing these questions at home in whatever form works best, then you're actually giving them an incredibly powerful tool, an incredibly powerful apparatus, which is to question the world as they encounter it.

Well, and again, just absolutely. And that's the heart I think every parent has is we want our children to leave home someday and to stand on their own two feet and hold onto their faith and not be swayed by the latest and the loudest trendy voices that are out there. Just as a final comment, obviously we're both big fans of classical education.

You're at the college level. Spent my time for 24 years in K-12 classical Christian. Very complimentary to everything we've just gotten through talking about is what happens every day in these classrooms, which is we're tackling these big conversations that I think sometimes it's easy to dismiss it as it's just sort of, I don't know, more philosophical just for the sake of being philosophical versus really what we're doing is everything we've talked about.

It's building that resilience. So maybe just speak to that as an educator to other educators. How do you see this playing in? Yeah, absolutely.

Well, I mean, the art of this, I think is grounded on the idea that every decision we make flows out of how we answer these questions. What I think is real is gonna govern all of my behavior. It's gonna govern all of my words.

It's gonna govern all of my choices. And so it's not an abstract, distant, historically locked away sort of place. These are the questions that every human being is responsible for answering.

And even if they act like they're not responsible for answering, their lives are going to reflect the answer that they are assuming, whether or not they really understand the answer that they're embracing. And so it's much more about dealing with a form of practice where we're reading literature that asks and answers these questions. And so for us, what we wanna understand is, are these answers the right ones to live with? And that's the beauty of classical education in my mind is that it presents a wide plethora of kinds of answers.

Homer's answer to the question about God is not the Bible's answer to the question about God. And so to have those two answers stuck right next to each other in close proximity, to be able to see the difference and label the difference, that's where the value is. Rather than just living, as you said, Davies, in an echo chamber where all I hear is one answer, I'm not really in a position to assess one answer.

I need things to compare and contrast to see like, oh, actually, this seems like a little difference, but when I put these two things together, that's like a huge difference. And I think that's a huge value for classical education. That's well said.

Well, thank you for helping us kind of frame this larger challenge that we all deal with every

day. I mean, it's literally the air we breathe is sprinkled with the pixie dust of propaganda and sort of how do we carefully navigate that, especially as parents today. So it's encouraging.

I mean, on the one hand, it feels overwhelming, but we've got truth, goodness, and beauty, and we have hope. And so the idea of coming together and having more intentional conversations and forming and shaping what our children love, that is the heart of what we're all about. So thank you for giving us just some, I think, good frameworks and understanding on how to proceed wisely.

Thank you so much. It's always good talking with you. Likewise, Davies.

It's been a pleasure. And thanks for all your hard work and helping families across the nation. You're absolutely, you're welcome.

We'll definitely want to continue more conversations with you. Thanks so much. 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.

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