

## **BCL ep318 Classical Essentials: Are We Aiming Too Low? The True Goal of Education with Dr. David Diener**

Welcome to the best of Basecamp Live. In this new series, we've gone back through more than eight years of archives to bring you the most popular and helpful podcast based on your downloads. The first in this series, we're addressing a question that is so basic and critical that everyone needs to consider.

It's the question, what is the goal of education? In this episode, David Diener unpacks the true telos of classical Christian education, the bigger picture that shapes everything we do. Today, so many assume that education's primary goal is simply preparing a student for college and career, but classical Christian educators and parents know that these goals are far too low, and that that is a given, and we're aiming for something even greater, formation. Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation.

Get equipped to conquer the challenges, some at 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 Basecamp Live, Davies Owens, your host here. This is a really exciting and very special series that we are going into for the next four weeks. I can't believe it's the eighth plus year of doing Basecamp Live, being on this journey with you.

There's a lot of episodes behind me as I look over my shoulder, 300 plus. You can go to [BasecampLive.com](https://BasecampLive.com), jump on the search bar, put in a title, a topic, and there's a lot in there to listen to. I know that not everybody's been listening for eight years, so there's most definitely some episodes that would be very helpful that are, as they call them, evergreen, that are always relevant and helpful.

I just wanted to help you sort through all of those. We basically looked at what are the ones with the highest downloads over the last eight years and are showcasing those here over the next four weeks. Before we get into this episode with David Diener, I want to say, as always, thank you for taking time in your busy week to be on this journey of raising up the next generation.

A special shout out to a number of folks. I just got in about midnight last night from Groveport, Ohio, where I had the privilege of doing a day of teacher training and being with a team there at Madison Christian School. Shout out to Tim Houston, head of school, to Phil, to Josh, to all of you amazing teachers.

I was inspired by the work you're doing. You guys, five years ago, were not a classical Christian school and took this big leap, and so we're really having to rethink, really, what is the goal of education? We actually talked about that there. So shout out to you guys, as well as to Amanda

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

Again, welcome to being a part of this big community here at Base Camp Live, as well as Zipcast. You guys are both, both schools are part of the Zipcast community, as well. And then I want to just say in this, by way of just shout out back, I thank you, as always, for those who take time to go and email me, info at BaseCampLive.com. It means a lot.

I get to hear a little bit of your story, your journey. We want to do more of these opportunities of just capturing people's stories. And so Amanda Krall, who is there at Mirris Academy, where she teaches physical education, and she's a mom and a wife.

Mirris Academy, by the way, is in Ellsworth, Maine. I think they're one of the only, if not the only, classical Christian school in the state. And she took time to write and tell her story.

I just want to read a quick excerpt back, because I think it's encouraging, certainly to me, I think to all of us. She says, Base Camp Live has been foundational in my classical Christian journey. My home is now filled with great books, and we discuss biblical concepts at dinner.

We are slowing down to be more intentional with our time and the efforts to which we devote our attention. I learn something new from each podcast I listen to, regardless if it's the first time or the fifth, which by the way, Amanda, that may be a record to listen to one episode five times. That's impressive.

She goes on to write, when I have had a question about anything, your podcast is the first place I look to for guidance. You talk about a thirst for knowledge, and your podcast quenches my thirst. Thank you for being a constant as I pursue the true and the good and the beautiful alongside my son and my students and my husband.

Amanda, thank you. I appreciate those kind words and being a part of the journey here with us. Dr. David Diener is our guest, who was our guest, and he's still very much a part of this movement.

He currently is at Hillsdale College. He's the assistant professor of education. He's also a fellow of the Alkewin Fellowship at their National Council and serves on the board of the Society for Classical Learning.

You read about his whole bio on the website, but certainly probably the best person I know who's done two PhDs in the area of education to answer the question, what is the goal of education? Before we jump into this important and historic podcast, a shout out and thank you to the folks at Wilson Hill Academy, who've sponsored this episode, along with Classical Academic Press, the Classic Learning Test, as well as the team that's a part of ZipCast, who works alongside me and helps bridge that gap between schools and parents every day. Without further ado, that's a long intro to say, let's jump into this historic and important episode with Dr. David Diener. Well, David Diener, welcome to Basecamp Live.

Good to be with you live. Thank you. Yeah, it's good to be here.

Here on the road in Richmond, Virginia, and just enjoyed a great dinner together, getting to sit down. We've been talking about doing this podcast for quite some time. So, hey, for folks that don't know you, I've just shared a little bit here on the podcast of your official background, but you're doing some really important work.

You've been in, how many years as the head of school at Hillsdale? I've been in Classical Christian School Administration for 11 years. Okay. I guess 15 total in K-12 education, and then also worked in higher education for the past close to 15 years also.

Yeah. So, you've been, you were a seasoned veteran. You know, we were talking right before we started recording, just thinking about, so we're talking about really what's the end goal at the ROI, the end of it all.

I just have done a podcast, hopefully most people have just listened to here right before yours has aired, really on kind of the end of the journey. It's a 13-year journey for most students from K-12. It's a huge investment.

What's the ROI? What's the end game of it? And, you know, over the years, I think as classical Christian schools have become more known and established and awareness on the part of parents, that's good. I think people come with maybe a little deeper appreciation of what the goal is, but I want us to, you've written an amazing paper that we're basing this on really around this idea of what's the end goal, this idea of a telos of education. Explain what did you, what does telos mean? Sure.

Telos is the Greek word for end or goal or purpose is usually how it's translated. And I think it's really important for us all to recognize whether we're parents of a kindergartner or a teacher at the K-12 level or an administrator, a board member, or a professor. I mean, I've been able to work in a variety of those capacities.

I think it's incredibly important at any level to recognize that education is teleological. That is to say, education fundamentally necessarily is driven toward a goal or a purpose. And what defines classical Christian education compared to other approaches to education, I would argue is not primarily a curriculum or a pedagogical method.

It's primarily an understanding of the purpose of education. And whether it's a classical Christian education or a secular education, a pagan, humanist education, it doesn't matter what kind. Every approach to education is based on a goal, is based on an understanding of the kind of student that we're trying to produce.

Yeah. You say it's tragic because it means that in your paper, that as a society, we were working hard to make sure our educational train is running efficiently and without seriously asking where the train is going. I mean, I think that's a fair question.

Where's this train going? So much discussion about education today and the research that's being done or the ways that politicians and government officials talk about the importance of education or the way that many educators think of it, the purpose or the end goals are really not discussed very much. And that's unfortunate, as you said, because we focus on the hows, on what Neil Postman would call the technical aspects instead of the metaphysical aspects and how to improve test scores or how to lower dropout rates or how to close achievement gaps. All those things are fine.

But as you just said, efficiency of a system is only valuable if the system is going in a direction that we want it to go. Having a beautifully running train and beautifully laid train tracks is not really that helpful if the tracks run the train off a cliff. So I think it's really important for us to step back and say, what is the purpose of education toward which we're driving? And unfortunately, I think in our society, when people do talk about purpose, which they don't enough, in educational circles, a lot of times we have assumptions about education that I would argue are just contrary to the tradition of classical liberal arts education, thousands of years of thought in terms of understanding why we should be educated or why we should care about giving our children a good education.

So what do, it's interesting, even in the last decade, I was saying right at the beginning, you know, the culture keeps moving out from under our feet. Have you seen a change in parents that are coming and applying at your school in terms of their expectations? I mean, are they more aware of the right ends of education or do you think they're getting caught up too much in the how and not the why? I think parents intrinsically, most parents, naturally, I should say, want what's best for their children. They want their children to develop into good men and women who are living well, who are fulfilled, who are, you know, living lives of service and virtue.

However, there are so many educational assumptions in our cultural milieu. And what I see is that, especially as the students grow older, it's just a, it's so easy for parents to think of education as a transactional sort of business where, you know, they're, they are putting into the school and expecting a certain kind of output that oftentimes isn't connected, especially as students grow older to cultivation of virtue and wisdom and those kinds of noble ends, but instead is geared toward entrance into a good college or high test scores or things like that. So let's talk about, I mean, let's go ahead and just kind of put on the table.

I mean, what should the proper ends be? I mean, let's, let's establish that. And I want to come back around to maybe where we've come off or misunderstood it, or maybe even as educators wrongly promoting the wrong aspects of education. But where have we, where have we missed the end? What is the end? Well, throughout the tradition of classical liberal arts education, which is, you know, multiple thousands of years old, certainly there's been a number of disagreements and people who have differing views on education, but I would say by and large, one of the sort of central, not universal, but widely, widely held assumptions about education is that education is concerned primarily with cultivating a certain kind of human being, a certain

kind of person, in particular, one who is characterized by virtue, who is a virtuous human being able to live well.

And is that, is that a, is that achieved typically through, I mean, is it the curriculum? I mean, what exact, I mean, I'm getting kind of jumping ahead maybe a bit, but just what, what makes that transformation happen? I mean, it seems like that's, I mean, multifaceted. There's a lot of things that come together to make it happen. Yeah, absolutely.

So, there are, there are multiple ways that we can think about the means to that end. But I think it's important for us to recognize that within the tradition, what is meant by virtue is something that's much broader than what we think of as virtue today in English. A lot of times, you know, if you say, I really respect that person, you know, he's so virtuous or something like that.

What we typically think of is virtuous means, you know, morally upright, doesn't lie, cheat and steal, is kind and, you know, a loving person, kind of these the moral aspect of virtue. But within the tradition, virtue is understood as something much broader. And I think if we step back and understand that, it helps us to have maybe a broader vision of what education should be.

So, for example, going back to the Greeks, when Plato and Aristotle are talking about virtue as the central goal of education, which they both do, they are typically using this Greek concept of arete, which is often translated as virtue. It can also be translated as excellence. But the word arete is really broader than what we mean in English by the word virtue.

It really means excellence or the ability of a thing to fulfill its purpose. So, Aristotle, for example, in the Nicomachean Ethics talks about how every virtue causes its possessor to perform its function well. So, a horse can be virtuous insofar as it carries the rider into battle and stands in the face of the enemy.

The eye, you know, in your face can be virtuous insofar as it allows you to see. And so, I mean, I could give quote after quote after quote after quote over, you know, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years of people who understand virtue in that broader sense. Joseph Pieper talks about virtue as the ultimate potential, the ultimum potentia, the most a man can be.

He says it's the realization of man's potentiality for being. And even our English word virtue comes from the Latin virtus, which comes from the Latin vir for man. So, it's something like manliness.

In other words, virtue is fulfilling your human function. It's being, it's fulfilling the purpose that you were designed, created to fulfill. So, it's much broader than just sort of the moral upright person who's a nice, kind, gentle person and, you know, obeys the Ten Commandments or something like that.

Right. Which I guess, you know, you think about the word values, it seems like values has sort taken over today. Maybe it's even, it's blended at times or used interchangeably in people's vocabulary.

How do you see something like, somebody said, you know, I want my child to have Christian values. Is that synonymous with virtue or is that a different animal? Well, it depends what you mean by values. Right.

Because it's thrown around a lot as sort of a, as a value, you know, a lot of Christian schools would say we want our children to have Christian values. So, is that? Yeah. So, one aspect of, if we understand education in terms of this telos of cultivating virtue, one question would be, do the values that you want your education to produce correspond to what human beings were designed to do? Right.

So, you can have, you know, you could come up with certain values that you say, the goal of our system of education is to promote this or that value. But it may not be at the end of the day that those values are actually harmonious with human nature. So, what does it look like, David? I mean, you talk about, I get a horse, I get an eye, and it's fulfilling its purpose.

What is a, this is, I'm getting really basic, I just want to make sure we understand, what's the purpose of a human? I mean, at a very basic level, when you're in your area of purposefulness, you were made for this purpose, what does that mean practically? Well, so that's a great question. And I mean, I could give, I could give multiple answers throughout history. There are multiple answers that are given in different ways at different times by different thinkers.

I mean, this is the question, for example, in the Nicomachean Ethics, going back to, you know, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, he says, you know, what is the end that is not just a means to other end? In other words, what is the ultimately, what is the purpose or the goal toward which human life is oriented? And he, you know, explores that at great length. And finally comes to happiness or eudaimonia, something like well-being of spirit, or you could say human flourishing. Of course, I mean, we can give explicitly theological answers to the question, like, you know, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, right? So, I think that's good.

And different schools may define that in slightly different ways. I mean, I would say that there are answers to the question that are wrong, but there are also multiple ways of addressing that question that are accurate, or they get at different aspects of human nature. Because I think that's a, I think it's easy to be dismissive of the significance of that, telos, of that goal.

In other words, if it sounds like I just want my kids to be nice and polite and good, well-mannered, I mean, somewhere that's part of it, but at the end of the day, is that really what, is that the ultimate goal for us as humans? Is that what we really need if we're going to stand up against a very hostile and, you know, Christ in different culture? I shared with you earlier story of a number of years ago when I was at Ambrose, and we launched a high school girls volleyball team, and we were very proud of the girls, and they got out there and they had the uniforms on. It was first game, and they were up against a more established team. And about the first half of the game, probably two-thirds of the balls that came over the net, the girls would, one girl would look at the other and say, no, no, no, you get it.

No, no, no, no, you get it. You get it. And they were perhaps, maybe they were virtuous, and they were kind, and they were, but is that the end of it? We were successful.

They're very kind to one another. No, no, no. They needed to be a little bit less kind in that situation.

They needed a higher degree of prudence to know when aggressive, you know, violent action is appropriate. So, yeah, that's right. And also, let's be sure to remember that there are moral virtues.

There are also intellectual virtues. So, part of what it means to be a human being who's able to live well is to cultivate those intellectual virtues. And within schools, certainly, that's a big part of what we ought to be working to cultivate.

We're not just cultivating, you know, what, good Christian lifestyle in terms of those moral virtues. There is that, but there are also virtues of the mind. Well, and I think, I see in your paper, amazing quotes and references.

You quote David Hicks, and he says, the purpose of education is not the assimilation of facts or the retention of information, but the habituation of the mind and the body to will and act according to what one knows. So, again, I think we all celebrate that type of definition. We all want that.

We don't want just wooden fact-oriented kids that are off to just for vocational training. I mean, I think classical folks see that. What I'm pushing us to try to unpack a little bit more is, what does this really look like? What is the habituation of the mind and the body to will and act according to what one knows, i.e., you know, a Christ-centered view of the world? But again, keep going.

I think we're kind of getting into this, because I think it's important to see, because again, so many open house talks, we sort of, I think, end with just this very beautiful, but somewhat ethereal, like, your kids will come here, and they'll become virtuous, and they'll become wise, and they will become habituated to the, you know, according to what one knows, and so on. But it just, it feels very intangible in some ways, so. Yeah, and I think it's really important, so, to use a carpentry metaphor and dovetail back onto something that you were saying earlier about values.

And the other question is, when we talk about values education, sometimes that can be inculcating the right principles so that you give the right answers to the test. But it's not that, it's lifestyle. So, as in the case with the volleyball players, it's having the prudence to know what virtues to use in what contexts.

And that's really, really, really important. So, how does it play out? I mean, as an educator, you've been doing this for years, I guess, again, I'm pushing for the practical examples here. You know, if you strap the webcam on a classical Christian kid for a day, probably not a great

idea.

But if you did, and you could sort of observe their behavior versus perhaps a kid that was never exposed to a classical, you know, classical Christian experience where virtue is being formed within them. I think I know the answer to it, but how would you answer it? What you see is just an outworking of difference and how they engage the day. So, it's a great question.

Here's what I would say. I think that the outcomes that we would see in their lives would be the results of interior differences or interior outcomes. So, I think it's really important that we think about virtue, not primarily in terms of externals, if you strap a camera on, what would you see? You know, just like we know that out of the mouth, the heart speaks.

So, really what's important is what's going on in the heart, not what comes out of the mouth, right? So, virtue has to do with the orientation of one's loves and going, again, through the tradition. I mean, this goes the whole way back to Plato and in Augustine. Augustine talks about virtue.

He actually defines virtue as the *ordo amoris* or the ordering of loves. C.S. Lewis talks about this in the abolition of man. So, there's this long tradition of understanding virtue as fundamentally about what one loves and hates.

It's an interior affective thing at base. So, Plato, for example, says this in the laws. He says that he would call education the initial acquisition of virtue by the child when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses.

And he goes on, there is one element you could isolate in any account you give of education. And this is the correct formation of our feelings of pleasure and pain, which makes us hate what we ought to hate from first to last and love what we ought to love, called this education. And I, at any rate, think you would be giving it its proper name.

So, I would want to ask the question, like, when we look at our students and we want to gauge sort of how virtuous are they, I would want to say, we should primarily be asking, what do they love toward what things are their souls inclined? And that naturally will lead to actions that reflect or not that virtue. And David, I'm so glad we're talking about this because this is, I'm such a proponent of what, you know, we've talked on the show before about kind of three generations of classical Christian education. Gen 1 was kind of our starting back in the early 80s when schools were really starting.

There was, if you went to the marketing materials, it would talk a lot about the trivium and sort of this very kind of, you know, stages of development, which is true. And then Gen 2 is more great books. And Gen 3, I think we've really, in the last 10-15 years, emphasized more exactly this idea of the shaping of the affections.

It's been there all along. We've just sort of finally come back and said, this is actually the root of



what we're doing. We're forming the habits for what they love.

And I agree. I think that's helpful to hear because sometimes it just sounds like we're either just teaching them, you know, the telos of education is nice kids, polite kids who read their Bible all the time and who never say bad words. And therefore we've been successful.

No, we're talking about it. That hopefully is some of that works its way into its outworking, but the heart that's driving them. And that's the battle every day between what their phone Cyclops, the one-eyed monster is telling them about what to love and what we're trying to fight for, for what they're to love.

I mean, it's, it is a virtue battle. Right. And, and, and I suppose this is obvious, but I think we would be remiss not to point out explicitly that if you think about education this way, if we understand the purpose of education as this cultivation of virtue, then we're leaving out a lot of other things that aren't the true, proper.

And so for example, you can be, you can be a graduate of a school that's promoted virtue and live out a virtuous life. You, whether you go to an elite college and get a great paying job, whether you go into private business, whether you are a blue collar worker for the rest of your life, whether you are single or married or, I mean, on and on and on and on. Right.

In other words, this is a very broad understanding. And I think what so often happens is that if we don't think of, of the, the goal or the telos of education in this this, this broad understanding of virtue, we fall into these traps that think of thinking that, you know, the, the real purpose of education. Yeah.

Yeah. We say something about virtue, maybe in our promo materials or on admissions tour, but at the end of the day, you know, look at, look at our scores or look at our college entrance rates or something like that. And those things are really what define that we're a good school.

Going back to Plato, Plato actually says, he says the final outcome of an education is someone who is either good or the opposite. In other words, at the end of the day, the question isn't, you know, did they get high test scores? Did they get into a good college? Do they have a career path? You know, yada, yada, yada. The question is, is the student good or not? That's ultimately what matters.

Yeah. No, I think you're actually, his quote is knowledge or that virtue is either useless or it is pernicious. I mean, it's, it's, it's really reminds me of, I've had Pastor Patrick on before, who is a pastor in Rwanda, also runs Bright Future School.

They do a great job teaching classically in Rwanda. But of course, if you know that his point is having lived out and watched the genocide in 94, where a million people were killed in a hundred days, and a lot of these people had knowledge, but they had no virtue behind it. And he would say it's dangerous.

Plato said it's pernicious. It's obviously a... No, that's exactly right. And knowledge, if it's not guided by wisdom, is actually, can wreak incredible havoc and cause great evil.

Yeah. So we're gonna take a break, but I want to kind of leave a question we'll come back to. I mean, are we, I know you're kind of speaking broadly as you travel and you work with schools.

I mean, are we, are we too often selling our schools as educators or school administrators around the how and the pragmatics? And we're not articulating this, tell us appropriately. So I mean, we're really misrepresenting what we're even trying to do. And then I think parents are obviously are asking for the wrong thing.

So I'm curious your thought on, you know, how do we, how do we approach things like an open house and present better what is truly the end goal of education as we've described here? We'll be right back with Dr. David Diener. He's worked with families for more than 30 years as a licensed professional counselor and marriage family therapist. It's time for a quick encouragement on the best practices of raising the next generation.

We call it a McCurdy moment. So Keith, kind of a broad question for you. Now that we're, things are opening up and people are getting back into more typical routines.

What are you seeing some struggles that families are having at this point? It's a great question. You know, one of the things I have seen so much in just the last month, our parents coming in and just frustrated about how their mornings are going, especially with their grammar school kids and getting them started, getting them dressed, getting them out the door on time. And you know, one of the things that I say, there's an old adage that the best way to prepare for getting up for church on Sunday morning is by what you do on Saturday night.

And if we apply that logic to our young kids in school, the reality is we need to capture the evening. We need to capture bedtime better. And it's one of the most common difficulties parents have.

You know, I don't know the number of times I hear parents telling me, oh, it's just so difficult at night. You know, we don't have any schedule. We don't really have a good routine.

And so one of the most basic things we can do to really set our grammar school students up for the morning, but really for success the next day, is have a very simple routine. And the routine really needs to have two key factors. One is a time where the house shuts down.

And so if the bedtime is going to be eight o'clock, let's say, or 830, then you need to shut the house down an hour beforehand. And that means everything shuts off. Even if you have older kids, TVs are off, games are off, activities are off.

Everybody goes and gets ready for bed. Now the older kids, if they're staying up later, well, that's fine, but you shut everything down so your younger children are not competing with life at that moment. And then the second thing you have to have is lights out time.

And the simple motivator is, you take a long time getting ready for bed, you have less time before lights out. You get ready really quickly, then my goodness, we can read two or three books to you. And it's amazing to me when parents put a simple routine in and begin to capture the evening, how much improvement they see with the mornings.

Yeah, and it seems like if you start that with your grammar school, it can't help but have a down or up effect across the house. Everybody's kind of winding down and you're not staring at a screen at midnight and can't go to bed. So everybody... Absolutely.

Yeah, great advice. Great advice, Keith. Thanks so much.

Got a question for Keith to answer on a future McCurdy moment? Well, send it to us at [info@BasecampLive.com](mailto:info@BasecampLive.com) and learn more about Keith McCurdy on the speaking page on the Basecamp Live website. So David, thinking about most of our schools have this challenge of presenting this very unique form of education to parents that are not familiar with this form of education, not having gone through it. And I think there's a tendency, as you began talking about the how, that we kind of want to... We go to pragmatism.

We tend to maybe underemphasize the thing that's actually the most important part of what we do. So thinking about this both from the perspective of educators who are presenting this education out to the world and parents who are coming to say, is this right for my child? How do we do a better job of making sure we really are emphasizing the correct telos of education in the basic way we communicate what we do every day? It's a great question. Maybe we should start with a prospective parent before they actually come to a school as they're thinking about the educational options for their child.

And to that parent, I used to say something like when we would give prospective parent open houses for incoming kindergarten parents or something, I would say, what are your goals for your child? Little Tommy or Jane is four or five years old. What do you want your child to be in 40 years? To be happy, David. Or in 20 years.

And then if they said to be happy, I would say, what does that mean? What constitutes happiness? And what I've found is that typically, or what I have found is that typically parents have a decently robust understanding of how to answer that question. I've never had anybody say, well, I want my little Tommy to go to an Ivy League college and have a six-figure salary as a 22-year-old and have a trophy wife and a white picket fence in the suburbs. I mean, they don't. Well, they wouldn't admit it.

Well, right. So they're able to articulate a broader vision. Sure.

But then sometimes the habits that they fall into are actually geared more toward these. So then I would say, okay, so if your goals, then you whip out your portrait of a graduate or whatever. You say, if your goals align with the goals of this school and what we're trying to cultivate, then this is a good fit.

If they don't, that's fine too, I suppose. At least you understand what you're looking for. So if your goal for your child is that they grow up to be a good secular humanist, global minded, whatever, I mean, fine.

There's lots of schools that can offer that. If you want your child to love Jesus and know a lot of Bible verses, but not think particularly deeply or clearly about most things, there are schools that will produce that. If you want your child to be something like the vision that we are trying to articulate and the goals that we have, then maybe this is a good school for you.

So I mean, I would start thinking about it that way from a very young age. And I think really it goes, maybe we can come back to in the middle, but it goes in a K-12 context, the whole way to the other end of the spectrum. And I'm thinking of guidance counseling.

And we were just talking tonight over dinner, some of the crazy stories of parents coming in and demanding certain things or expecting that because they paid tuition for X years that their child is going to get into Y college, etc. And I like to go back to this statement that Arthur Holmes made in his book, *The Idea of a Christian College*. Back in the 20th century, he's a philosopher.

He said, the question to ask about an education is not, what can I do with it? But rather, what is it doing to me as a person? Education has to do with the making of persons, Christian education with the making of Christian persons. And so I always think if our guidance counseling was centered around that idea, that the question of where you should go to college or what job you should, you know, study, what career path you should study, the question should not be, what can I do with this? What will it give to me? The question is, what is it doing to me as a person? Who will I become in four years? Who will I be as a human being in four years if I go to college A, B, or C? And if we just sort of tweaked the framework a little bit and thought about the decision-making matrix through that lens, I think it would, in some ways, pretty radically shift our thinking. I mean, I think that's the sort of introspective question is, how often do we as educators or as parents inadvertently or maybe intentionally promote the very thing that actually we don't really want? And I think, you know, it's the age-old, the worst thing you can do when your child gets in the car at the end of the school day after you ask, you know, how was your day? How was the test? What did you get on it? You know, I think all of a sudden we've just shifted the whole value stack of what we say education's about.

It's about getting a grade when that's the first question versus what was the most meaningful thing on that test or what, tell me about the idea around that. I mean, those are, we do that all the time, I think, both as parents, educators, without maybe realizing the implications of that over the long term. Yeah, that's right.

So we could propose an alternative set of questions like, how did your soul grow today? There you go. How were your affections cultivated? No, but I mean, I'm saying that somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but I think your point is very well taken that it is so easy to ask questions instead of, you know, what did you learn that made you curious or that made you thankful? Or did you

learn something about God's creation about yourself? Or did you think about something deeply? Or did you have a good conversation? I mean, any of those kinds of questions is better than, so what was your, did you get your chemistry test back? What was your score? You know, that it's not- And then when you go on to say, and then that crazy teacher of yours that would even dare to give you that grade. I'm just kidding.

I mean, parents would never say something like that. But again, it's so, again, this is a 13-year formation process, and all of those kind of drips, if you will, day by day, moment by moment, in the home, in the school, if there's not a clear vision of what this is supposed to be leading towards, and again, I think most of our listeners would go, yes, we know it's more than college, but I think we do inadvertently buy into some of these value systems that work against the right to tell us. Maybe talk about too, when we think about, maybe, unless you want to go on with some of the other practical examples of ways this looks in the life of the school, because I think the guidance counselor example is really good.

It's not just the open house on the front end, it's how we launch our kids going out. But- And can I just add one thing to that? So, on the guidance counselor side, so what kind of questions are students asking as they're looking at different colleges, or as they're engaging with admissions officers, right? I mean, you can ask questions about average SAT score and incoming GPA of, you know, GPA of incoming freshmen and grad school placements and, you know, dropout rates. I mean, you can ask all those kinds of questions.

And I'm not saying those are bad, but are students thinking in terms of what kind of a person will I be? What kind of friendships will I form? What will the community and the culture of this institution direct my affections toward? I mean, and you can ask questions that are very practical of colleges to try to get at some of those things. So, staying in the vein of what to say, because there are practical answers, what do you say to the parent who says, okay, I get it. I love this idea of a telos that really forms the character and the habits and the affections and so on.

But at the end of the day, I want Johnny to be able to get a job. I mean, is that okay to tack that on at the end? So, there's absolutely nothing wrong with having a job or making money. We actually need to have jobs and make money in order to- Because I think sometimes we're accused of just being the people that want to, you know, raise up the next generation of, you know, ivory tower philosophers that are unemployed.

Well, my own story here is to that point. Yes, please. So, my undergraduate degree was in philosophy and ancient languages.

And I, upon graduation, put that to excellent use working for an Amish company building high-end cabinetry and doing high-end custom trim work. And so, I have a complete, what, a complete appreciation for the practical skills that will actually allow you to, you know, put bread on the table. I put myself through graduate school doing that also.

So, I've done carpentry work and construction my whole life and worked every summer through undergrad. And then, while I was going through two master's degrees and a dual PhD in philosophy and philosophy of education, my young family, in part, was supported because every summer I put away the books and picked up the tool belt and contracted jobs and did, you know, did carpentry and construction work to put bread on the table. So, no, I certainly don't think that in any way we should not be aware of the practical ramifications.

The problem is when we make those practical concerns the end goal or the ultimate purpose. So, if I may, I just... Yeah, go ahead. This is great.

Two people that address this explicitly, if I could just share a couple of quotes. One is W.E.B. Du Bois. And at the beginning of the 20th century, he wrote this.

He said, if we make money the object of man training, we shall develop money makers, but not necessarily men. If we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans, but not in nature men. And then he goes on to say, I insist that the object of all true education is not to make men carpenters, it is to make carpenters men.

So, in other words, it's not to say we shouldn't care if they're carpenters. It's fine to be a carpenter, but that's a means to an end, not the end itself. And then secondly, just along the very same lines, a number of decades later, in the mid-20th century, Sir Richard Livingston was talking about the illiberal approach to education that he was critiquing.

And he said that sometimes we ask what is most useful for the machine, not what is most likely to make a good human being. At times, the right model for our education seems to be *propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*, that is, for the sake of livelihood to lose what makes life worth living. So, it's not that there's anything wrong with a livelihood, with being able to have shelter and food and things you need, or even in, depending on how you use them, luxuries.

But that's not the end goal, right? The end goal, if we make that the end goal, what Livingston is saying is we actually sacrifice what makes life worth living for the sake of livelihood. And that's the problem. And that's also why we have a culture of depressed people, because we've raised up generations of people that can make a living, but they don't know who they are.

And on a very practical point, I think for classical Christian schools in particular, you can have your cake and eat it too, if you communicate this clearly, because the data is, I mean, and the quantitative metrics are there, that our students statistically are doing very, very well. I mean, there's lots of research on this, and over the years, research on liberal arts graduates, and I'm thinking of David Epstein's book, *Range*, right? And this concept of why generalists triumph-Overspecialize, right. Yeah, instead of the hyperspecialists.

So, there is a lot of data to show how studying Latin increases SAT scores, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But those shouldn't be the ultimate reasons why we're doing that. But it's not an either or, like either you pursue a lucrative career, or you get a good classical education that forms

your soul.

It can be a both and. Yeah, and that's so good to hear, David, because I think we tend to, we fall into one camp or the other, either as a marketing person at a classical Christian school, as a parent thinking, this is all I want. And again, maybe, and I think it evolves over the 13-year journey.

Typically, the grammar school kids, you're more, perhaps more focused on, I want character and virtue and nurture. And then all of a sudden, the lights come on that Johnny's got to go to college and get a job. And obviously, those things seem kind of like polite distractions, but now we need to get to real school.

And it's like, that's such a false dichotomy in terms of what's a priority for education. That's exactly right. And I do think, so we've been talking about sort of parents on the front end or students and parents or guidance counselors on the other end.

I think it's important for school teachers or administrators to think about this as well in the middle steps of that process, right? While the children are actually in school. And there are lots of practical examples that we could give of what it means to cultivate souls and help direct students toward lives of virtue. I think the important thing is that we have to ask the question of why and run it through that filter for anything we do.

So, for example, why do we study Latin? Why do we require our students to take fine arts? Why do we have a PE or athletic requirement? And in answer to any of those questions, we ought to be able, again, it's not that there's one right answer, but as we answer that question, we ought to be able to tie it back to our understanding of what a human being is and what a human being's purpose is and how the decision we made in, say, that curricular area is directed toward this goal. So, I mean, for example, in book seven of Plato's Republic, when he starts talking about education and what will be studied, he lays out what we today would call the quadrivium. So, he talks, he says, well, what subjects should we study? And they had already talked about gymnastic and music back in book two.

And so, he said, well, you know, they should study arithmetic. Yes, of course. Well, and geometry.

Yes, yes. And they talk about harmonics or music, what we would call music, and astronomy. And it is explicit in each of those cases that the reason why you should study that subject is not because it's practical for trading in the marketplace.

It's because of the way in which it forms the soul. And so, I think it's just imperative that we ask that question or be able to articulate why our grading system or our discipline policy or the curriculum we teach or our distinctive pedagogical practices or any of those sort of, you know, our engagement with parents, I mean, any of these kind of practical school operation questions, we ought to be able to articulate how it ties back to this teleological understanding

of the cultivation of virtue. And as you're saying, David, I wonder if part of the reason we have hesitancy, and I'm speaking in generalities here, but I think a lot of the evangelical Christian movement, especially as there have been historically a lot of Christian schools that were not academically rigorous, were not classical.

And I wonder if, you know, when we talk about, when you say something like the goal is this forming of the soul, the point I'm trying to make is I think sometimes it comes off like, well, yeah, I want my kid to have a strong soul. I want him to love Jesus, but they also need to be able to add numbers and function in the real world. And I think what we're kind of saying, that's, again, it's a, that is a reality of a lot of schools, that they'd fail on the academic side of it, and you're left with that.

But I think what we're saying is, no, forming of the soul is not just your kid's spiritual condition. It's their very nature of their being, and that affects everything about how they engage all aspects of life. It's much more robust.

Well, and the intellectual aspect of that should be front and center in the cultivation of virtue, because human beings are intellectual reasoning creatures. So, part of what it means to fulfill, a central aspect of what it means to fulfill our nature is to think well. And you're right, many times Christians have thought of virtue in this sort of simplistic, moralistic way.

Or just as it's, oh, he's talking about forming my kid's soul, yes, but could you please teach him something? It's like, these are, those are not... Distinct things. Yeah, that's not how that works. So, it just, and now we're for time here, but, you know, for instance, in your paper, you talk about like the mathematical arts and the teaching of, you know, numbers are, again, not just pragmatics.

It's a way of, the use of infinity is a way of just showing us some aspect of how the world works through math that reflects on the formation of our soul. Talk about, just kind of explain how, what you're getting at there. Specifically with regard to, say, arithmetic or geometry, something like, okay, so here are just a couple of quick examples.

When you study math, you learn about irrational numbers, like the square root of two or pi, for example, you know, 3.14159, and then you see how many digits you can memorize. These are, they're actually an infinite number of such irrational numbers. And the interesting thing about these is we know they exist.

We use them all the time, right? Every time you calculate the circumference of a circle based on its diameter, you know, or use the square root of two, you're using these irrational numbers. We use them, we know they exist, but we can't express them. It is impossible for us to articulate exhaustively what it is, right? So, and, but we know it's real.

And so you say, okay, well, how does that form the soul? Well, what it teaches students is that there are truths about the world that you should not reject just because you don't understand



it. You know, maybe you don't care that much about radical two, but what about the incarnation or the relationship between free will and God's will, you know, or predestination, however you want to articulate that. I mean, there are these complex mysteries that we accept and we know to be true, even though we may not be able to fully grasp them.

So that's one window. Another window would be like the nature of ideal concepts. So all geometric shapes, so like an equilateral triangle, right? We all can define it.

We know what it is. None of us can draw a perfectly equilateral triangle. And none of us, in fact, has ever seen a perfectly equilateral triangle.

So this raises all kinds of philosophical questions, right? Like, how do we have these ideal concepts that none of us have ever seen in this actual world? And again, the question would be, okay, what does that teach us about the nature of the universe? It teaches us that there are all of these ideal, we know this to be true in geometry. There are these ideal concepts that are paradigmatic of the things that we see in a corrupted form in our world. And we know them to be real things, even though we've never experienced them.

And again, we may not care about equilateral triangles, but what about ideal concepts like love? Can we believe in a perfectly loving God, even though in our own lives here on earth, all of the love we experience is broken, twisted, and corrupted? I mean, that's a soul-forming kind of question. It is. And it's not a forced... It's not forced.

It's just a natural part of the way the education happens when you present math in the way you've just done it, David. And I think that's, again, part... I think parents and educators look at, too often, math in isolation as a means to an end to, you know, back to kind of a vocational-only understanding of it. And yet, it's part of this revealing of the mystery of God through math.

It's not just in the literature class with Bible down the hallway. Correct. And yeah, we need to be able to articulate this for math and science just as much as for literature and philosophy.

But the beauty of it, again, back to where we began, is what's the end of this education? What's the point of it all? And what are the processes at work in this 13-year journey to derive this outcome, which is an amazing young man or young woman that I think is actually one of the few things in our culture right now we've got going for us to change the culture is to raise up civilized men and women that love Jesus. That's exactly right. I think classical Christian educators and parents, teachers, administrators, etc., asking this question of the telos and focusing on virtue is both a... it's an intellectual, philosophically robust and honest way of thinking about education, and it also is in alignment with a multiple millennia of our tradition that we've inherited of thinking about classical liberal arts education in those terms.

Yeah. No, this is a lot more we can say. We're kind of at time, but Dr. David Daynor, thanks so much for reminding us why we do what we do every day in raising up this next generation.

It's a beautiful goal. It's inspiring. And I know we will be blessed for raising up a generation that

thinks with this amazing depth of knowledge.

Well, thanks, Davies. It has been a pleasure. It's always good talking to you.

I'll have to have you back again. Thanks, Davies. Sounds good.

Hey, Basecamp Live listeners. This is Hannah, Davies' daughter here. Thank you for tuning into this episode.

I can confidently say that my kindergarten through college, classical Christian education has become a critical part of my life. It formed and trained me to be a strong leader, to love God. And now as a married young adult, it's really created a foundation for me to go out into the world, a world that's getting crazier by the day.

So thank you for listening to this podcast. It's absolutely critical what's being discussed here. If you could take a moment and send an email to [info@basecamlive.com](mailto:info@basecamlive.com). Let us know where you're from, where you're listening, what's on your mind.

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Thank you so much. See you next time.