

BCL ep321 The Key to Inspiring Children to Seek Truth and Goodness with Nick Duncan

If you spend any time around classical Christian schools, you're going to hear the phrase truth, goodness, and beauty. It's really a cornerstone of classical education. Truth and goodness seem obviously essential, but what about beauty? Is it just a luxury that our busy modern world could do without, or could it in fact be the most important of them all? In this special episode from our Basecamp Live Classical Essentials series, we revisit one of our more popular discussions on why beauty is not just decoration, it is transformative.

Discover how cultivating beauty in our schools and in our homes shapes our hearts, our minds, and our culture. Don't miss this thought-provoking conversation, all this and more, on this episode of Basecamp Live. Mountains, we all face them as we seek to influence the next generation.

Get equipped to conquer the challenges, summit the peak, and shape exceptionally thoughtful, compassionate, and flourishing human beings. We call it ancient future education for raising the next generation. Welcome to Basecamp Live.

Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Basecamp Live. Davies Owens here with you on the journey of raising the next generation.

I am so energized because I've been on the road for about the last three weeks at three different schools, having the privilege of speaking to parents and to teachers, as well as to board members and to students. And all of it has been encouraging to me, just because I love seeing what God is doing through your schools all around the country. Some schools are startup schools just a few years into it.

Others are well-established legacy schools. We've got folks who are part of collaborative schools and even homeschoolers that are out there and folks internationally. And I just continue to recognize there is really a revival and movement.

So if you're in a school right now and you're thinking, we're really kind of the only ones around doing this thing, let me encourage you. God is doing a lot of this thing called classical Christian education. And a lot of folks are seeing the need to do it differently and to raise up a generation that truly loves what is true, good, and beautiful, as we're going to be talking about here on this episode.

I want to say a special shout out to Scott Taylor, who is the head of school at Redeemer Classical School in Fayetteville, Georgia, as well as to Stuart Davidson, head of school at Coram Deo Academy in Bremerton, Washington. Thank you for your teachers and parents and community listening to Base Camp Live. Thank you for being a part of the Zipcast platform.

In fact, next week, we're going to have a very special episode where Hannah will be with me.

We're going to be talking about really the state of communication and engaging one another in a very hyper-distracted world and all of that impact that it's having on our homes and schools, looking at just some broad challenges that are happening in the culture, but also solutions, as well as what we've been doing with Zipcast, which has been very well received. And we're going to be announcing some details on Zipcast 2.0 that I'd love for you to take a look at.

You can learn more about it at zipcast.media. All that to say we are a part of a big journey together. I'm always grateful for those who partner with us and sponsor each episode. This episode is sponsored by Wilson Hill Academy, as well as the folks at The Light Phone, as well as Life Architects Coaching and the Classic Learning Test.

These folks and others are there for you. Check out our partners page on the Base Camp Live website, and you can learn all that and more. Our guest, Nick Duncan, is really a renaissance man.

And I mean that with the greatest of compliments to him. He is currently a 10th grade humanities teacher at the Ambrose School in Meridian, Idaho. He also teaches Greek there.

But I first met Nick as he was a chef in his own restaurant. He is an amazing chef, very talented, and left all that behind to come and teach in a classical Christian school. He also has a background in theology and training.

He's got an MDiv from Liberty University. He also has a bachelor's in entrepreneurship, which is what I think makes him such a renaissance man. And I say that to say that even the way that he approaches teaching humanities has been to try and look at it more dynamically, and to ground each year in this very important question that he teaches in, or each year he's teaching, he grounds it into the question, how did God prepare the world for the coming of the Christ? And so you're going to hear him reference this in the interview, and just know that he is a person who's out there alongside you improving the way that we go about taking very ordinary words like truth, goodness, and beauty that we say all the time, and really help bring new definition and understanding.

Nick lives this out not only in his classroom, but in his home. He is with his wife, Jory, and they have two children. And again, just a wonderful interview that was worth bringing back out of the archive.

So without further ado, here's my conversation with Nick Duncan. Welcome to Basecamp Live, Davies. Owen's sitting here with Nick Duncan.

How are you, Nick? I'm doing well, Davies. Thank you. I'm so glad to actually be with you.

It's nice to actually do an interview where I get to be with people. And we are six feet apart, if somebody's worried about that. We're doing great here at Distance.

We have a six-foot pole in between us right now. Yeah, we're not too worried about it, but it's

good to be with you, Nick. We are here today to talk about really a discovery that I would, if I can use that language, kind of a discovery that you've made that I think is kind of the most important discovery framed in this bigger conversation of what are we missing in classical Christian education? And I know I've kind of become a student of every time there's an open house talk online or somebody's written a new book on classical Christian, I want to understand how are they articulating what it is.

And it does seem like when it comes to this triad of the truth, goodness, and beauty thing, that's probably at every open house, we tend to have more interest in truth and goodness than maybe beauty. So we're going to talk about how we maybe lost beauty and why that's important as the big missing ingredient. But first, if people don't know you, I first met you, I think, under the official name of Chef Nick.

And then you've been in the restaurant world and cooking professionally for how long? About 12 years. Yeah. And you had a restaurant, went to your restaurant at one point.

It was really good. You used to cater food for the school. And then at the same time, you were also very involved in your church as an elder.

You've got an MDiv. You're a professional Christian, I guess we could say. Yes.

But then somehow along the way, this school bug bit you. So how did that happen? You ended up teaching now as a 10th grade teacher. Yeah.

Actually, it was actually through you and David Goodwin, believe it or not, both of you had a different influence on me. But I was asking, you guys were actually, our church is across the street from the school, and you guys were looking at using our building. And I was just like, what is the Ambrose School? And what is classical Christian education? I had no clue what any of that meant.

And through talking to both of you at different times, I had the bug bite me for that. And my son, who was only one at the time, I was like, man, when he is old enough to go to kindergarten, he's definitely going to Ambrose. I don't care what it takes.

And so since then, my fervor hasn't left for the classical Christian education. Do you remember specifically what was the bug bite? What was the thing that you went, okay, that's it? Yeah, no. So I used to do middle school and high school youth ministries at my church, and I would only have these kids for two or three hours a week, if that.

And just realizing that I was competing with hours and hours of public school and sports and band and all these different things. And I felt like I never had really a good influence. And talking to you and David made me realize, man, there's hours and hours a day that the people at Ambrose have an influence over these children.

And so I think David had some like 16,000 hours he talks about if they go from K through 12.

And that really spoke to me, like, man, if we're going to do ministry with children, that's the way to do it. Not necessarily the one hour on Wednesday nights and the Sunday school on Sunday mornings, necessarily.

So then you kind of dipped your toe in teaching Greek, not a small, that's like dip your whole foot in. I mean, as far as that's pretty amazing with your seminary background. So you started teaching Greek.

Yes. Greek one and here in Ambrose and loved it. And I had such a good experience with the kids.

And we just had a lot of fun teaching Greek. And then an opening came up for 10th grade humanities, and I applied and ended up getting it. And I've been here ever since.

This is my fourth year total counting year of Greek at Ambrose. And like, just like this is my favorite job I've ever had, I think, honestly. So that's, that's a pretty, that's pretty, you're pretty good cook, by the way.

I think at the end, if people are interested, we are going to offer a chef Nick, a cooking tip. So I don't want to lose that side of your many facets of Nick Duncan's talents. But, but let's talk a bit more.

What I love, you've been, you know, three, four years now in a classroom, kind of behind the scenes, if you will, in this form of education, where, you know, as we said, I said right at the beginning, truth, goodness, and beauty. It's on everybody's website. It's kind of what we claim we do.

But you kind of made a discovery in terms of those three don't often, don't always get equal limelight. Like what, what's, why is that? What did you discover? And how has that changed you in the classroom? Yeah. So for me, I don't think I even really understood or realized that beauty was never really talked about.

And I've discovered since then, it is, but not explicitly. We hit on it and we hint at it, but we never really go deep into like the theology of beauty, for instance. So I remember thinking one day, I was like, you know, I get truth, I get goodness, but I really don't understand beauty.

And I kept thinking back to my seminary days, and I'm like, I don't think we ever talked about beauty. Like that just seems completely devoid of the theology of beauty. And I was like, you know, if a student asked me, why is beauty important, or why is it included with truth and goodness? I realized I had zero answer for that.

I had no good answer. And so it started me on a journey of just finding that answer. And maybe not to spoiler alert, we won't go into what we're going to say at the end here, but I want to reassure if anybody's listening, they're thinking, okay, these guys are about to get out their pipes and tweed jackets and go into some deep esoteric conversation of the importance of the

philosophy of beauty.

We can go there. But I think the reality is this has everything to do with what a teenager today has got to understand. If we really want them to be followers of Christ in a very complicated world, this beauty thing actually has a lot of just practical value to it.

Yeah, actually, it's probably between the three, it's probably one of the most applicable in their daily lives between the other two. So much so that I think it does more to build the affections for the things of God, even more than truth and goodness, believe it or not. So why do you think truth and goodness get first pick? And why do they get limelight? Because they're easy.

Honestly, truth and goodness, those are things that we have an easier understanding of compared to beauty. Truth, we get it like God's Word, the Logos, goodness, like when God created the world, it was good, it was very good. And we understand that there's the different dimensions to that.

But when we come to the word beauty, in fact, I had an exercise with my students earlier this semester with our tutorials saying, hey, how would you define beauty? And it's interesting to see what people come up with. And I would honestly offer that to anybody, how would you define beauty? And what does that mean? And it's very esoteric. It's very hard to come to a substantial understanding of.

And I guess I wonder, I mean, for so many, those of us, most of us parent teachers, we didn't grow up under classical Christian and sort of the modern world that we live in is you get your hand slapped if you critique anybody's definition of beauty. I mean, isn't that part of the problem? My beauty is, don't tell me what my beauty is. I mean, it's all individualistic and subjective.

It's turned into that. It wasn't always that way, though. That really started happening with Edmund Burke.

And that's when it started really becoming the idea of beauty isn't a beholder kind of a thing. But before that, it really didn't have that understanding of the world. And I'm saying, because I can see, again, people thinking, okay, where are these guys going? Because it seems like beauty, it's almost like, I don't know, a cherry on top.

Like that's nice. And isn't it great that our many classical Christian schools care about aesthetics. We care that the building doesn't look like a lot of, I've always said, I've always wondered, why is it that so many government schools look frighteningly a lot like prisons, like maybe the gray walls and the brick and the steel probably doesn't invoke a sense of beauty.

I mean, there's something to an aesthetic. And that's, again, part of this piece that I think is easy to sweep away and say, beauty is just a cherry on the top. And actually what you're discovering is it's the centerpiece.

Yeah. And actually beauty, I would say, has been the victim of our society becoming more and more utilitarian. And so as we, if we're trying to repair the ruins in the parlance of the classical Christian movement, then part of that needs to be reintroduction and rediscovering of what beauty actually is and how that can inform an established or a proper aesthetic.

Okay. Well, we're going to take a break in a second and come back because I want to really get into what is this, as you say, it's kind of a Trinity and this is, it'd be like leaving out the Holy Spirit, which would be a big mess. So we want to figure out, I don't know if we can equate beauty to the Holy Spirit, but beauty is pretty important.

And sort of your experience again in the classrooms and just ultimately we're talking about some great stories of students just becoming alive to this very thing that God made them for this idea of transcendence. So we'll be right back with Chef Nick Duncan. I want to take just a moment during our break and let you know about the great work that's being done by Wilson Hill Academy.

They offer a vibrant, rich, and accredited classical Christian education available to families and schools almost anywhere. With a click of a button, students join master teachers and friends live online from all over the world to engage in deep and lively discussions, solve math problems, conduct science experiments, translate Latin, deliver thesis presentations, and so much more. At Wilson Hill, students make lifelong friends and graduate well-prepared for college and beyond.

Discover what's possible for your family or school at WilsonHillAcademy.com. So we're here with Nick Duncan talking about this discovery of the lost beauty of truth, goodness, and beauty, or beauty has sort of been the neglected element of all of that. And it's not just a philosophical loss, Nick, it's really downstream if you look at where our culture is today. And I think, you know, you hear a lot these days, especially in COVID world of the rising sense of disparity and depression and isolation, loneliness, especially among teenagers.

We were talking at the break just about there's actually a pretty direct corollary to when you raise kids on just this pablum of materialism and beauty is in the eye of the beholder and there's nothing transcendent. It leaves a very, a gap, a hole in our souls that beauty can fill. So talk about how that fits.

Yeah. And so I want to actually give some credit to someone. I've never met this person, but she wrote a book.

Her name is Lisa Kutras, and she wrote a book called Tolkien's Theology of Beauty. And I'm not kidding. When I read this book, it really changed my viewpoint on so many things.

But one of the things that I'm using Tolkien and Lewis and scripture to kind of to show this is she shows how the transcendentals, truth, goodness, beauty, and also transcendentals, love, hope, faith, things of God. We were created for those things. We were created to experience a

life totally immersed in truth and goodness and beauty.

And because of the fall, because of our separation, we were now down to glimpses of those things where we can still glimpse them. We can still experience them in small, minute ways, but we don't get to experience them fully. And what that does is it leaves us a hunger for those things.

And so we want to experience the beauty. We want to experience truth. We want to experience goodness.

And we hunger for it, even though we may not realize it. And what the world tells us today, our culture tells us today is we're primarily a naturalistic, materialistic world where there is no spiritual realm. There is no transcendence.

And that's bred a culture right now that's just like we're stardust and we're products of chance. So it's very nihilistic. Nothing matters.

And we wonder and hopefully are not surprised by the suicide epidemic, for instance, is a good, I think, a good corollary to this. It's led to this anyways. And so how do we fight that? And when we remember that we are created and designed for not just the physical, but also the spiritual, and we can introduce those transcendentals, things like truth, goodness, and beauty, then it reminds people and it shows them that there is something more and beyond the physical.

And so it's actually has real world application. When we can expose our students to the truth, to goodness, to beauty, it reminds them and it leads them always should lead them towards the creator and which automatically assigns worth and dignity to us as humans. And then things now start to matter.

And so again, I don't know if I answered your question or not, but... No, I think that's very helpful because again, I think we live in a world where we've tried to kind of dumb down. Somebody once said when I was doing youth group years ago, the worst thing, the worst thing in the world is to bore people with God. Like let's make God so commonplace, Jesus, my buddy, and everything is about ourselves.

And then the world tells us that you can be anything you want to be. You can do whatever you want to do. And if you're, you know, if I'm the centerpiece of my world, that's a pretty depressing place when I'm alone and quiet thinking about it.

Yeah. And when you mess up. And when you mess up, like, well, and yet what we're saying is that what we want to give our students is the very thing we're, we long for as humans, which is to, is to be on our knees before something bigger than us, a Holy God, a transcendent God and beauty provides us.

But what is that? So we'll keep going to this cause I want to, you've, you know, Tolkien and others have, have spoken into this in ways that have helped informed you. So, I mean, as a

classroom teacher, you've, you've kind of gone, okay, wait a minute, we've got to lean in and do more of this. What does that look like? Yeah.

So one of the things that we kind of talk about in our classes, looking at just human history and, and the way societies have moved over time, when things like the transcendent, when we, when we take away God, when we take away the spiritual realm and the transcendental realm, and just bring it to the material, what happens is beauty is actually the first casualty of that. And so beauty goes down to the level of just humanistic aesthetics, like beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And what happens then over time is then it turns, it also brings down truth and goodness.

So now truth and goodness are in the eye of the beholder. It's very subjective. And that's exactly what we see in our society today.

That didn't happen overnight. It happened over probably some centuries, but go ahead. Yeah.

Well, so I'm just, you know, I'm, the folks are probably thinking, okay, I'm following you, but like, what does that look like? And I, and I don't, and again, I'm curious just from a pure, like boots on the ground, what does that mean? Like our kids need to stare at more beautiful art. Our kids need to have, what does that look like? So that's a great question. And that might be part of it, you know, exposing our kids to things like, like, like a true opera, for instance, can it be a beautiful thing or a Gregorian chant or a beautiful art or what have you.

I mean, a beautiful building that we go to school in, those are all important things, but we have to realize that beauty is, has a purpose as well. And it actually makes the truth and the goodness more attractive. It actually makes us want those things.

And so beauty can actually start to inform and transform our affections for things that are true and beautiful or true and good. Right. And, and so like, when we have a hard time, like, why don't, why don't our kids want to do the right thing? Or why don't our kids want to be good? Or why don't our kids want the truth? Well, one of the things we have to look at as well, if beauty has become a casualty and the true and the good don't appear good to them, like how can we transform their affections towards that? Well, making it winsome, making it a beautiful, in a sense, can help lead that to those things.

So what does that look like though? I mean, what is, yeah, give me a sense of where that, where, where we picked up beauty that we discarded and all of a sudden that created more value for truth and goodness. Like how did that, what does that look like in the life of a young person or even in the life of, in the readings that you're doing? Yeah. How are you going to approach that? Yeah.

Yeah. So I guess from a very applicable standpoint, one of the things we talk about is, let's say just an easy example, like music. So pick your favorite song.

And we have this discussion and, and how do you know it's beautiful? I love Lady Gaga. What's

wrong with that? Yeah. That's the thing is like, how do you know this song is beautiful? And so what we realize is truth, goodness, and beauty are intertwined.

They are kind of a Trinity of sorts. They have to go together and they work together. And so when, if something's truly beautiful, there will be truth and goodness associated with it, part of it.

And so now the students can take a look at that song that they love and it's beautiful in a sense because they enjoy hearing it. Right. But is it truly beautiful or is it a beauty that's leading towards God? And then they can look at that song and be okay, well, it's not good or it's not true.

Therefore it can't be truly beautiful. And then the question comes, well, why would we want something less? Why would we want to expose ourselves or to enjoy things that are away from God or don't please God? Right. I mean, it's not even about like what you like or don't like.

It's like, if we're designed to experience the true, good, and beautiful, and only through those things can we truly be satisfied in a way, then we're actually experiencing less when we have things that don't experience the true, the good, the beautiful in some way. And so it starts to inform their aesthetic on their own. They can actually go home and look at the song, listen to the songs, the TV shows, the books they read, whatever, and they can start automatically.

Is that true? Is it good? And is it beautiful? And they start making their own decisions right off the bat. So I'm wondering, I'm trying to weave this back into your world as a chef. Is there a corollary, do you think, it's sort of like saying modern American food is largely just kind of artificial fast food.

It's just, it throws calories in your body and a whole bunch of chemicals. And it just kind of, it's kind of just truth and goodness. It's true.

It'll fill your body up and it's, maybe it's good because it has fillers in it, but it's really not beautiful food. Is that a, can we, can you make that work? So I used to teach at the culinary school and one of the biggest things that we taught was plate presentation. And the idea is you always eat with your eyes first.

And so if, you know, if I was going to make a wonderful dish and I just slopped it on a plate and threw it in front of you, it might taste as good as no matter how I played it up, right. And it's still going to be good food or whatever. But you're not going to enjoy it.

There's something missing or lost from it. And so you, you know, there's a whole, like I said, class on just how to do plate presentations and the rule of thirds and all these different things and, and in different textures and colors. And basically it comes out and it's just this beautiful thing.

And, and to me, a win from a chef's standpoint is they just sit there and stare at it for a second

before they even dig in. Right. And, and it's more enjoyable.

It brings it to a whole new level and they haven't even tasted it yet. Right. And I think that's what, again, is, I think it's a great example.

I can think of when I was young, college 20 something, I had the blessing of having a British mentor through my time studying at La Brea. That's a long story, but I remember he took me to the Tate gallery in London and I had, I was typical American teenager, kind of public school, prep school thing, kind of impatient. I didn't grow up around art and stuff.

And I remember we went in the Tate gallery and he sat me down and said, stare at that Rembrandt for, I'll be back in 20 minutes. And I thought, I got it. It's a picture he's got in a boat.

Okay, good. But I found after about, I don't know, some period of time before the 20 minutes, all of a sudden, when I was willing to really focus on that piece of art, it became three-dimensional and became rich. I saw things I would have never thought of before.

And I started gaining thought and dimension that I would have never had just skimming across the top of a picture of a guy in a boat or whatever it was at that point. So, I mean, there's a dimension that awakens in us through beauty. And there is, and you can go back to the chef's analogy.

I don't know, and I know a lot of chefs, I don't know very many of them who are picky. And the reason why is that the more they work with the food and the more they see the talent that it takes to create certain things or to cook in different techniques or what have you, they start to, and they have to know how it's supposed to taste. So, even things that they might not like, over time, they actually start to enjoy them and love them.

And I had students that were like, well, I don't want to, like, for instance, we'd be teaching them how to cook salmon properly. And we're like, I don't like salmon. Well, I bet you haven't ever had it cooked properly.

And then you cook it for them. And they take a bite and they're like, you're right, I've never had salmon like this before. And now they have this new love of salmon.

Great example. And I think that's what we try to do in our classrooms, right? Is like we introduce them to these stories or to these ideas. And again, we can read them off like we hate them.

And it's going to take something away from it when we're excited. And that's really modern education is it's really just let's distill this down to the best basic set of facts. It's as Charlotte Mason, who often quote talks, it's really like sawdust.

I mean, it's just eat your silly sawdust and it's twaddle. It's just the lowest common denominator. It's nothing.

It doesn't raise the spirit of the soul. And I think that's, I mean, it's exciting because this is the very enterprise that we're trying to raise a generation up that loves what God loves. Well, if God is rich and owns all of, I mean, heaven will be endless beauty and it's a reflection of who he is, then we want to form that appetite.

I think it is a good cooking model there. And I think part of it, again, back to what we talked about earlier, is that it's so counter our culture where we can't say anything's wrong. Everything's got to be good.

It's like, no, it's actually, there is bad, poorly presented and poorly prepared salmon that tastes like rubber. Like we can say that and it's okay. We can say that art is really somebody tripped while carrying a bucket of paint.

And that's interesting, but that's not a Rembrandt. And think about it. You can't say that if you truly believe that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, right? But if you understand that beauty is objective and of, and from God, then now it's easy to say, actually, no, that's not beautiful.

Yeah. It's really good. Well, let's take another quick break.

We'll come back and we're going to tell a few stories and show again, just this amazing ability of beauty to transform what we love in our hearts and ultimately raise up students to be passionate followers of Christ, to see that, that third, what I call the 3D dimension of beauty. So we'll be right back with Nick Duncan. Graduating can be intimidating.

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Welcome back to Base Camp. Nick Duncan and I talking about truth, goodness, and beauty and the lost world of beauty that we want to recapture because ultimately we want our students to love what God loves. I mean, if there's, I don't know, a parent or a teacher out there that when they walk across to graduate, what did we do in this classical Christian experience? Oh, they know all the great books.

Great. They went through the trivium. Great.

There's something, we're missing it if we don't understand that we want to, we want to help shape what they love. And so beauty matters. And it's a, it's a real part of our education that I think often gets kind of second billing and not primary.

So tell me, tell us more. You were, you were quoting a few different, like Dostoevsky, what was his take on all of this? Yeah. So well, to begin with, we, through this journey, I just got super excited.

I know there's other classical Christian teachers and leaders out there that really do a good job with beauty. I'm new to this still. And so this was new to me.

And, and so I want to make that very clear that I know I'm not the only one out there that's even thinking about this, but I wanted to do something very intentional in my classroom with beauty and bringing it up to the level of truth and goodness into the eyes of my students. And so I talked to the administrators here and said, Hey, we have tutorials that I have to do. Can I use those tutorials and like, and, and really teach about beauty? And so they said, yes, go for it.

And. And by the way, people that don't know, I'd say at Amherst, tutorials are really more of kind of an Oxford model where you're meeting as a 10th grade teacher one-on-one or two-on-one. I mean, it's lower, it's a very small group, three-on-one.

Two or three. Yep. And, and we have time to go really deep into certain things.

And I'm doing this whole first semester on nothing but what is beauty. And, and we've just gone, we're in our ninth week and it's been fantastic, honestly. And the students have really, I think have gotten something out of it, but anyhow, like one of the things that we have learned through this journey as with our students is, you know, how can you apply this idea of beauty or like, how can you make it applicable? How can you make it true to life for you as a 15 or 16 year old? And one of the things that, that Lisa Kutras talks about with Tolkien is his idea of being a sub-creator.

And, and this is something that if you are widely read of Tolkien, this definitely comes up. But he, what that means is to him is because we are made in the image of God and because God is a maker, because God creates, then we also make, we also create, and we have this creative bone in our bodies. And so then we can use the gifts and talents that God's given us to make things or to do things like, you know, this table that we're sitting on right now, right? We can use the trees that God's created and use that to make a beautiful table.

And, and, and so that's something that we can do. And it's more fulfilling when we do those things. So if you have a penchant for, you know, drawing or painting or singing or whatever, we can do those things.

The cool thing that he equates to though, this Tolkien is the idea that not only is it natural for us to create because we are made in the image of God, he actually calls it a Christian responsibility. And so the idea that we get to participate in Christ's redemptive work in this world by creating, by making, and so when we can not only learn to appreciate art, but now we can use the gifts and talents God's given us to create beautiful things or true things or good things. Now, now it becomes more real to the students.

And they are starting to think like, what can I personally do to add beauty or goodness or truth to this world? It's no longer like, do I have to do this? Or I don't want to listen to this song versus this song. That's kind of almost like out the window at this point. Now it's like, how can I

contribute? And I gave an example, like when we preach the gospel, right? We're contributing, we're, you know, we're participating in the saving, you know, redemptive work of Christ.

We don't save the people when we preach the gospel, do we? None of us do, right? Christ still does all the work. He still does the saving, but we are blessed by participating in that. And we can participate also by creating things of beauty, truth, and goodness.

And, and it's made it very real to the students. And now we're looking at ways like, how can you personally, individually, based on what are your gifts and talents and things that you can use to add beauty? Which again, just, this is back to the point that it's the antidote to so many kids today that feel purposeless or go off to college and change their majors five times. They don't know.

I mean, they just were not in general as a modern here in America, I think preparing students for what is beyond. And part of it's because they don't know why they even exist or what their purpose is. I mean, you're saying you spent nine weeks talking about beauty.

I mean, I'm sure people like, oh my gosh, like how many times can you show them a Rembrandt picture? So you're not just, it's something more than that. You're awakening in them, I guess, a difference in a vocation and a calling, like there's a calling on your life. Is that kind of what you're saying? Like they're finding themselves in this story.

Yeah. And it's become real. And so now when they do see a Rembrandt or listen to an opera, I mean, just to give an example, when we've just finished the Iliad in our class.

And as we go through the Iliad and, you know, I make a comment, oh, this is such a beautiful passage. And immediately some of the students are like, is it truly beautiful? Is there truth in goodness? I mean, they are instantly just bringing that to, and Mr. Duncan, is that truly beautiful? And then we have a conversation about that. And they're starting to use those ideas to inform themselves.

Is this something that can add truth or goodness or beauty to my life? And it's becoming real to them in very many ways. And I'm starting to hear them. They're starting to own it, which is really cool.

They're starting to actually say words like beauty in different contexts. I'm hearing them, you know, in the classroom or in the hallway. And like, well, is that really beautiful? I mean, it's really just been a neat thing to see.

Well, it sounds like, again, just kind of as we wind it down, just again, back to what difference is this making their lives? They're certainly making wiser decisions on media they're consuming, because they're having to kind of run it through. It's yeah, I like the beat, but is it equally representing something that's true and beautiful? So there's sort of a guiding, they have a compass, if you will, they're kind of working through decisions of media, they're making decisions about who they are as a person and how they will engage the world now and in the

future. So these are very practical.

I mean, I can't imagine better things to hand students in our modern world than shape helping them understand beauty. Well, and it gives them something tangible. Like when you say, hey, you need to honor God.

Right. Right. Well, what does that mean? Do the rules.

Do the rules or whatever, right? And it's almost this abstract, ethereal thing. But now it's like, okay, well, actually, we kind of have an idea now of how we can honor God through the media that we expose ourselves to and whatnot. And now they do have a compass, I think is a good way to put that, where, you know, they still might make the wrong choices here and there.

And that's to be expected, probably. But they can make better choices now, I think, too. Well, they have, again, it's the difference.

I should just record the breaks, because fun things already said over the break. We were talking about, really, it's a difference in kids that just, you know, eat Taco Bell and think that's going to be the best thing they ever find. And actually having taken a cooking class with you and learning not only to taste excellent salmon, well-prepared, but to prepare it.

I mean, so all of a sudden, that's a huge game changer in how you would live your life around food. And you're talking about the way they live around life. Everything is.

So we're moving from Taco Bell to salmon world here and teaching beauty. And once they experience that salmon, they start to realize, like, why would I want that Taco Bell? Right. And I never had to tell them that salmon's better than Taco Bell.

As a teacher, I never had to tell them that this is better and try to explain that why, and try to give a quantifiable whatever to that. They start to realize it themselves. And it's very freeing as a teacher.

We probably should start this, because I think kind of tie a bow in it using this little example. But I think a lot of times in our classical Christian, conservative Christian world, we start with truth, which would be sort of like sticking up on the wall. Here's the Taco Bell list of ingredients versus the freshly cooked salmon.

And we just sort of berate, if you will, with this is a bad ingredient, and that's a bad ingredient, and this is a good ingredient. And all we know is this sort of theory of cooking based on what's the truth statements. And maybe the goodness is, you know, maybe what we should or shouldn't do.

But beauty is the difference now in actually preparing that salmon and preparing that bean burrito and saying, OK, you go try these things. And aesthetically, you've tasted something that's so much more powerful than a cognitive list of do's and don'ts. So, yes, I mean, I think

that's your point.

You summed it up. I'm just trying to put this together. Now I'm ready.

I will never eat Taco Bell again. But ending on that, speaking of cooking in our final moments, I promise everyone that Chef Nick, the theologian teacher would maybe offer just some cooking wisdom to those of us who we all have to cook, which should just in our average home kitchens, which we'd be thinking about, always find ways to build flavor, you know. So, for instance, like if you're going to put garlic or onions, give that a few minutes by themselves to really deepen that flavor and then add your other ingredients.

And you'll find you have a lot more complex meal than just throwing everything in at once or what have you. But I will say this to drink wine with your meal. You're not Baptist, are you? No.

And the reason why is because wine has an acidity to it. Yeah. So if you ever notice your first bite, like think of like an amazing restaurant you go to, your first bite is amazing.

But then after five or six bites, it's not as amazing because your tongue is now coated with fat and different things. And wine actually cleanses that and it makes the seventh bite just as good as the first bite. So you actually get a better meal experience overall when you can drink wine.

All right. Well, at least for your adults out there, we can go that route. That's right.

Yeah, that's really good. We'll definitely have to. We should just do the Chef Nick cooking tip of the week for Basecamp.

So Nick, thanks so much. Seriously, this is really helpful. Mention again, a couple of resources, books that were helpful to you that people might, hey, I want to read more.

You talked a little bit about Lisa Kutras' book. Yeah. Believe it or not, Aristotle had some good stuff, but Lisa Kutras' Tolkien's Theology of Beauty and then Roger Scruton, of course, and Louis Marcos, one of his books helped inform me, but I mean, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, all these guys have touched on the subject and just we just have to find it and rediscover it, I think.

And some of the Basecamp listeners a couple years ago, Steve Turley came in and talked about his book, Beauty Matters. So different, a little different take on it, but it's the same general point that it's really a very important thing that we don't lose. So Nick, thank you so much for being here.

We'll have to have you back. Thanks. Appreciate it.

Thank you. Well, you did it. You stayed till the very end of the podcast.

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Hey, we're going to be back again next week for another episode. Please join us. We wouldn't want you to miss.