

## **BCL ep339 Summer Flashback: How the Great Books Impact Modern Life with A.J. Hanenburg and Graeme Donaldson**

In another of our summer flashback series, we consider the value of reading long-form books, especially the really old ones that have stood the test of time and are at the heart of a liberal arts classical education. With so much content readily accessible today, why do we still turn to these age-old texts, especially when the basic stories and facts are just a click away in a text-centered world? Are these classic works still the best way to ground the next generation in God's timeless truths while equipping them to navigate the complexities of the modern age? Join us for 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 yet another episode of Basecamp Live, Davies Owens, your host here with you on the journey to raise the next generation. As I've mentioned many times this summer, it's been such a joy to be at summer conferences and to receive emails from so many of you just continuing to be encouraged by the shared work that God is doing in our midst of raising up the next generation with classical Christian education and excellence in parenting and wisdom and just being aware of what's happening in the culture around us.

Always love to hear from you, info at [Basecamlive.com](http://Basecamlive.com). Love your comments and suggestions and ideas and questions. All of that is always super appreciated. By the way, this is a just a great time to remind you that part of the big reach, if you will, of Basecamp Live is to come alongside you in your schools.

I know a number of you have discovered on the Basecamp Live website page, there is a tab called sharing and under sharing, it explains how you can add the weekly Basecamp Live episode update to automatically populate on your school website through this RSS feed. The details are all there, but it's a way to keep your front of your school website fresh in the sense that there's new content coming every week that auto-populates from our server that pushes it out as the new episodes drop. So it just keeps Basecamp Live as a resource available to your school families.

Or if you are a parent at the school, encourage your school to consider doing that. And more than anything, just word of mouth. People learn more today and are, I guess, convinced in a positive way to listen to a podcast through the word of mouth.

So please share with others the opportunity to be a part of the Basecamp Live community. And if you are a school leader or you like resources of promotion materials that you can have

available to give to your parents, just email me info at [basecamplive.com](http://basecamplive.com). We have a little promotion packet we can send out to your school, which is also helpful. All that to say, we're just glad we're all part of this journey of gaining wisdom and encouragement in the process of raising and educating the next generation.

This series is called Flashback because we're just picking some of the best of the past recordings. There's many, many of these great recordings that you can find that are evergreen. They're on our website, [justbasecamplive.com](http://justbasecamplive.com). Today we jump into a topic that is one that is just basic in a sense, and that is the importance of reading books.

But at the same time, in a world where I don't know if this is still true, it was a few years ago, it's probably even more extreme, which is Americans read one book for every 100 movies they watch. It's probably even more today. But the point is there is something very countercultural about reading a book in its long form format.

It's intimidating to many of us. And I say us in the sense that so many today are finding it harder and harder to go deep and to pay attention in a world that's so scattered. By the way, Nicholas Carr, probably 15 years ago, wrote the book *The Shallows*, where he really hits home this point that even as a journalist, it's become harder and harder in a world of short attention spans to go deep.

But that's definitely something that we want to encourage. And it's like building muscles. You kind of start small and you go big.

That's actually a big part of the strategy of Zipcast, is let's take some small content segments and invite you into deeper understanding and connection. All that to say, AJ and Graham run the Classical Stuff You Should Know podcast, which is another great resource. They discuss literature and philosophy and history and education all from the framework of a classical Christian worldview.

Graham Donaldson has been teaching literature to students since 2011 at Veritas Academy. They're in Austin along with his colleague, AJ Hennenberg, who has been educating students there since 2009. And their podcast, again, is a wonderful resource that takes these ideas and goes much deeper looking at individual books and resources.

And so I encourage you to dig into their great resources. There's information about them and their podcast, the Classical Stuff You Should Know, in the show notes. As always in these episodes, we love to do a shout out to the many of you who are listening and are part of school communities where you're connected to us as Basecamp Live and Zipcast families.

A special shout out to Diana McKee, head of school at the Imago School in Maynard, Massachusetts, along with Cameron Cook, head of school at Veritas Academy in Austin, Texas. Cameron, thank you for the great work you do and for having folks like AJ and Graham and Thomas who are part of the great extended work that happens there on your campus. This

particular episode of Basecamp Live is brought to you by Wilson Hill Academy and encourage you to check out more of their great resources on our partners page along with Life Architects Coaching and, of course, the work that we do with Zipcast.

Without further ado, let's jump back in time to this great interview with AJ and Graham. Well, AJ and Graham, welcome to Basecamp Live. Hey, thanks for having us.

Yeah, happy to be here. It's great to be with other podcasters. You guys are, you've been at it for quite a while.

How long have you guys been doing the classical stuff you should know? I think 20, we started in 2018 and it was like AJ and Graham sharing a chair and talking into a monitor and then it's, we brought 250 episodes in an episode a week from there. So yeah, it's been, we've been doing for a while now. That's it.

I mean, that's commendable. I know as we're in this podcasting space, a lot of folks out there and after about the eighth episode that kind of fizzles out. So if you're north of 100, you are a raging success story.

So well done. Very well done. Either raging success or like incredibly stubborn.

That's what I was thinking. I was like, we just won't give up when all signs say. Well, I want to hear, well, yeah, stubbornness is actually a good, I think, attribute of podcasters, but I want to hear some of your own stories.

But the title itself, the classical stuff you should know, I mean, what's the background? Well, actually it's just back a little bit. Let me hear your background and then I want to hear the background of how you ended up coming up with this podcast. So yeah, AJ, what's your little bit of your story? So my story is I, I, my brother-in-law was a part of Veritas.

He was the vice principal at the time. I got the call to be a teacher when I was, had dreadlocks down to my waist. I was working at a coffee shop at a bakery and my brother-in-law essentially said I could hire four teachers or I could hire you because you have a background in all four things that we have vacancies in.

So I got the call. I did the interview while walking around in my house shirtless, um, on the phone. Wow.

Thank heavens it wasn't video. And then I got called down and, um, this is a quick, funny story. My first like trying out teaching to see if I liked it.

Um, one of the office ladies thought I was a homeless man that had, that was like wandering around campus and asked my brother-in-law if we needed to call the police. And he said, no, that's my brother-in-law. He might teach here.

So I ended up doing it. And, the board made you cut your hair though. Board made me cut my

hair.

So that's how I got into it. I've been doing it ever since. Apparently I'm built to teach.

And then I think the way we got into the podcast was we started learning all kinds of stuff that I'd never learned in my education, right? Like I learned, I was learning about the spheres. I was learning about how to actually write. I read the Iliad and the Odyssey and I was like, Holy smokes, this stuff.

How did I get through my entire education without knowing any of this? We should have a podcast. And I think he said, yeah. And then one day we're like, okay.

And we did it. And we expected to just have like our moms as listeners, but you know, it kind of took off. So, yeah.

Well, moms are good to kind of jumpstart things, I think, but that's a pretty well, gosh, I've never, yeah. I've never, I think, talked to anybody in the classical space that had dreadlocks, but that's a pretty awesome starting point. So, and, and I mean that in all sincerity, cause it gives you a perspective.

You're not just coming straight through the, you know, library to the Academy, to the classroom. You've kind of got that. We're going to get into here in just a moment, some sort of kind of, you know, the world of literature and the world, the real world, like how these things intersect.

So that's awesome. You've had that kind of your own journey there. So yeah, Graham, what's your, what's your background? Yeah.

So I'm Canadian, I'm from Canada and I come, so I'm maybe like almost the opposite side of AJ. Like I come from a family of professors. My father was a professor.

My sister has PhD. She's a professor. I grew up in university classrooms.

Take the kid to work day was like me photocopying my dad's like new Testament tests in the basement of the library. So I've always been around colleges and universities. And I studied when I did an undergrad, I was just really drawn to, to romantic poetry and C.S. Lewis.

And then didn't have no idea that there was going to be this sort of in the South, in the U.S. there was gonna be this classical school movement. I just kind of figured that I was going to be able to indulge the things I liked to read in college, but there wasn't really, the only opportunity would be like public school teaching. And I had gone through public school and, and I knew that wasn't really what I wanted to do.

So just sort of resigned myself to the fact that this was going to be just sort of, there's no career here, but this is just sort of a private enjoyment. And then when I, when I got married and moved to the United States, I found that, Holy smokes, there's like this whole thing happening

with classical schools. And all of a sudden, like there's a, there's a place for all the things that I had grown up reading and enjoying to actually like apply in the classroom.

Had no thoughts about ever being a teacher. Didn't think it was going to be what I wanted to do, but, but yeah. So here I am now, just like AJ, a Northern transplant here in Texas.

I love it. I love it. Well, that, that you're definitely, and we're all witnessing really this, this tidal wave, this movement that's just shifting really around the world right now, as families and individuals are discovering, as you alluded to AJ, like where, where was this? Like, I mean, I remember interviewing George Grant years ago and he's like, I got gypped.

Like somebody didn't, my education did not have this richness and now I'm coming to discover it and appreciate it. And I think most of the folks listening right now are still in that camp of, we didn't have this. We don't, we didn't get this.

We didn't know it growing up. What are you seeing as far as, with your kind of pulse, be it on classical Christian education, where, where is you look at across the landscape? You've got listeners everywhere. What are you guys seeing as far as kind of the trends and the growth? Yeah, I, the thing that I see the most is, I think a lot of people are looking at kind of the cultural moment and the political moment.

It always, I think this, this comes every, every election cycle. I remember this happened. Well, we didn't really, we weren't really easily in the classroom in the last election, but, but this comes up every now and then it's just like these big questions about like society and unity of a country and people together.

And I think that classical schools, the draw towards classical schools are people trying to say, wait a minute, like how do, how did our nation form? How do we, what holds people together? I think there's a big draw to be able to go back to the source material, not just going back to like the constitution, the declaration of independence, but looking back at the other documents that informed those things. Going back to learning about the Roman empire, all of these things to say like, Hey, how, how have societies weathered massive changes? Cause I think everybody sort of intuitively feels that we're in a massive change, whether it's a, you, you spin it in a positive way that we've got technology that is making our lives better and easier, or you spin it in a negative way that these rapid changes, our institutions aren't keeping up with these rapid changes. I think people are kind of feeling that desire of the return to sources or return to old.

You see it in like online movements towards like wanting traditional rural lives, or you see it in, in kind of this, this longing for, for the old days. And I think the wise classical school is one that doesn't just sort of cater to that cartoon version of wanting to go to the old, but is sort of continuing to do that rich tradition of, you know, educating people in these, in the source material of society so that we can, that people can be orient themselves in the world. Yeah.

And I think it's a great way to say it. I think, and we're going to again, get into some of this

because I think sometimes the, the perceptions were just kind of the nostalgia people were the throwback people. We just like old, cause it's kind of, it's like, you got a cracker barrel and it's got old stuff on the wall and it kind of makes you feel something inside.

It's like, wait, this is, there's so much more to this here. So AJ, what about you, what are you seeing as far as just sort of shifts in the movement? I mean, my experience is mostly with our listeners and with parents who bring their kids here. Right.

And I easily see three reasons for wanting to run to classical education. One is a gap of values and what's being promoted in education. Right.

So if I'm a Christian parent, I don't necessarily like what's being taught in the public schools. I don't have a lot of options. And classical education is one that you typically aligns with Christian ethos that, or just general dissatisfaction with the quality of education.

I think COVID was a big wake up call for a lot of people who got to firsthand experience over zoom calls, what their children were being taught and just watching generally the, the quality of education, at least in the U S take a nosedive as you know, kids aren't held accountable and the curriculums are dumbed down and their requirements are reduced. Like I think dissatisfaction there drives people to different options. And then with our listeners, typically what it is is people that are either teaching their kids and trying to, you know, because they're dissatisfied with what education is doing or they listened and they're like, Oh, just like, you know, the experience we had where it's like, I kind of got, got gypped and they are enlivened by sort of diving into old things.

So I like that, you know, Graham's theory is like big and theoretical and all, all encapsulating in mind is like, people just don't like stuff. And so they're looking for other stuff. I like that you were there.

I, I, I think it's great. The title of, I mean, the name of your podcast is the classical stuff. You should now say it's not, you know, the classical Piedeo.

You should, it's the classical stuff. It's just, it's just stuff. It just means we can talk about whatever we want.

As long as you want, you're right. Yeah. Well, as long as you can call it a classic, as long as you can call it, like I could talk about a Corvette for an episode and like, I think that's our classic Coke is stuff.

I mean, you could go anywhere with this. It's quite, quite nimble. Well, let's, before we get our breakout, let's, let's actually kind of focus in a little better on this idea.

Cause we're not just talking about general stuff. We're talking about in particular, kind of the Canon of Western literature. It's where you guys spend a lot of time taking these, the quote, great books that have formed Western civilization that most of us maybe have heard about, or

maybe read an anthology excerpt from, and you're really helping to bring those works alive.

And we're going to get into some examples of kind of connecting the dots of the old world to the current world, but just in general, with somebody stopped you and said, Hey guys, why are we reading all these old books? Is there nothing new that we could go find? I mean, what's sort of your simple answer to that? Why is this Canon of Western literature so important today? I've got a few reasons that I, that I like the first is that like, you are, you're like a fish, right? You're swimming in water that you don't really realize is there. And the Western Canon is the, is like helping you to realize, to recognize the water, right? Graham is maybe going to talk about some old books. Uh, I don't want to like steal his thunder.

He's gonna talk about Plato, but like, that's where it all starts. Plato, Socrates into Aristotle, all the medieval folks would call Aristotle, you know, the philosopher. Um, and, and knowing these things changes the way that you view the modern movements, knowing where they come from, knowing why they are the way they are, knowing why the U S constitution looks the way it looks, how it found its foundations in Rousseau and the, you know, the French revolution.

And like, just having the Western Canon like means that you can recognize your world for what it is. Like, that's what, if that's what wisdom is, then it gives you wisdom. So that's reason number one.

Um, reason number two is I'm going to steal from the abolition of man here. That book is essentially about how there is no education without values. There's an off quoted piece of Lewis where it says like an education without values, as good as it may seem serves to make man a more clever devil.

Lewis never said that. That's not Lewis. That's somebody else.

That's like Lord Worthington or something. But Lewis wouldn't have said that because he didn't believe you could have an education without, without values. There's no such thing.

Every education imparts it somehow. And so connecting you to the Western Canon is connecting you to like a, a S a set of values that have been recognized by humanity for 2000 years. And then adhering you to those, it's what CS Lewis called the stable sentiments, right? When you see someone in trouble, you go help that kind of thing.

Or, um, cultivating the land that you have possession of is a positive thing. So sort of inculcating or like to use a, to use a word that's often a bad one, indoctrinating children into good things that are widely renowned as good and recognized as good by humanity. Like that is the point of classical education.

And why do we read the originals? Well, one, because they're the original, I mean like, why not just go straight to the source? And two, because to me, my experience has been that they are far more lively than what you think, right? Reading Plato is a hoot. It's hilarious. It's fun.

Um, it's, he's got some crazy ideas. He's got some good ones. It's not nearly as dry as people think.

And that has been all my, my experience, almost universally. Like I just finished doing a series on Genghis Khan and I read the secret history of the Mongols. That thing is like a 200 page story of a bunch of frat bros that go and conquer an empire.

Like it is absolutely out of control, has crazy stuff about talking heads and voodoo spells. And it is the most fun. And it's sort of my experience with academia a lot of the time had been incredibly dry, right? Dry, lofty, lots of ethereals, hard to understand.

But when you actually start interacting with the literature at its base, it's incredibly lively and fun. So that's, that's one of the reasons I keep on going back to that. That's a great point.

Cause I think like so often, it's not that the material itself isn't faulty. If there's a fault, it's just too often the way we were educated to your point, which it was sort of, it was the, the old sage on the stage, giving you the facts and the dry information. And, uh, and it, it just didn't, it didn't connect with the world around you.

And so why don't we take a break? I want to come back. We're gonna jump into some examples of that. Cause this really is the, the encouragement that you guys bring is just sort of awakening us to the reality is there's nothing new under the sun.

And so this, this basic question of, you know, why am I here? I think there's a Mark Twain quote that sort of asked, or Twain said, you know, two most important days in your life. One is the day you're born. And the second is the day you figure out why you're here.

And so that question, you know, why am I, why am I here is really what every young person's asking. And these great books is we're going to talk about, have a lot to do with answering those questions well against the backdrop of scripture. So this isn't, you know, we're going to dig in and unpack some of that.

Why am I here? And what now, what do I do? Like, and now what do I do with it? Right. Not just, I filled out the bubbles on the, on the scantron and got my answer. No, like this is actually going to affect how you, how you navigate this very crazy world.

And, and, and I was just going to say, one of the things you made me think about is just, you know, if you're going to deconstruct, if you're going to destroy a culture, if you can, if you can detach people from, in our case, the richness of this literature and these ideas that have formed almost every aspect of our culture, you know, again, the script, the scripture next to it or with it, but obviously if you can, you know, convince the world that this is a, just a bunch of old dead white guys and it's irrelevant and we need to upside down the Canon and come up with the latest, you know, Barnes and Noble top book and stick that in there, it changes the culture. So good stuff. We'll be right back and we'll dive into this conversation a little bit more.



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 slash Basecamp](http://wilsonhillacademy.com/slashBasecamp). Hey, Basecamp Live listeners, a recent Pew research study revealed that only 30% of millennial and Gen Z parents live within a 100 mile radius of extended family.

That means that many families are missing the wisdom and support of older generations. And more than ever, we need strong, consistent school communities to walk next to us, providing rich connection and helpful weekly tips. That is exactly why I created Zipcast.

Zipcast gives schools a proven platform to communicate more personally and effectively with their parent community. Imagine as a parent receiving a short weekly audio message from your school leadership, not just announcements, but real insights into what's on their hearts and minds paired with practical wisdom from national parenting and educational experts like Keith McCurdy and Justin Early, along with experts on classical Christian education. We even include short testimonials and parenting tips from fellow parents all around the country.

You can listen anywhere and at any time. And now with Zipcast 2.0, schools can customize their messages even more, offering a truly personal and engaging way to build connection and shared vision. If you're a school leader not yet using Zipcast, I want to encourage you to consider it for the 25-26 school year.

And if you're a parent at a school that is not yet using Zipcast, take a moment and encourage your leadership to explore it. It's easy to use, affordable and effective. And in today's fast-paced world, Zipcast is a proven tool used by over 60 schools this past school year to deliver encouragement, insights and connections in just 10 minutes a week.

We like to say it's about encouraging you on the go with what you need to know. Check it all out at [zipcast.media](http://zipcast.media) to hold your spot as we have limited spaces available for the upcoming school year. So guys, we were just talking about before the break, the reality is these are anything but old works with dust on them that we just sort of have to gnaw our way through.

The idea of rigor in classical schools, it's like a rigor mortis and we just eat, we just chew gravel and we read books without pictures and we just do mental push-ups and it's good for us somehow. And it's like that's not exactly the understanding at all we should have. And you guys have done such a good job of bringing alive in a way that really makes sense for the world and it actually answers questions that we're asking every day, we as adults and our children.

So as you unpack that a little bit, you started talking about Lewis's book, *Abolition of Man*, and just sort of how you see these timeless words being even probably more relevant today than even when they were written. So *Abolition of Man* is one of those books that I think is a must read for every educator probably once a year. I try to do it once a year at least.

And it's not too big, which is not a giant book either. So it's readable. It's 60 pages.

Yeah, parents can read anywhere and read it. Yeah, yep. Yeah, it's a little dense, so it's worth doing it with a buddy.

But the easiest way I can break it down is in chapter two, *C.S. Lewis*, and there's only three chapters, so this is like a third of the book. He talks about what he calls the Tao, which is the way. It's essentially the foundation of human morality throughout the ages.

He's probably what you would call a moral universalist. At the core of every human experience is a set of values that are expressed in every culture. And even the exceptions kind of prove the rule, right? Like if we can point to a culture that was like, yeah, but they stole the Spartans, right? They encouraged their kids to steal.

When you look deeper, you rediscover one of the values. They did that because they would have to travel as an army. That was a way to hurt the enemy army and support themselves and essentially protect their homestead, their children, their family, and their culture.

So anyway, he talks about this idea of the Tao, and it basically provides the premises from which all syllogisms are taken, right? If nothing is assumed, nothing can be proven. And so the Tao is like essentially human morality as it is unquestionable. And even to say like, I don't think that's true.

You are admitting that knowing good, true things is better than not knowing true things, which is a moral judgment, right? So that's chapter two. And then chapter one, what he does is he talks about this grammar book that these two educators have made. And they relate this story about Coleridge looking at a waterfall with these tourists.

And one tourist calls this waterfall pretty. And the other one calls it sublime. And Coleridge goes and laughs and makes fun of the tourists and stuff.

But the point is that one of those people is having an actually appropriate reaction to the waterfall, right? That it is sublime. And in return, they feel humble. And that is the appropriate reaction, not calling it merely pretty.

The educators in the green book say that each of those people is merely having a feeling and are talking about how they feel rather than making some judgment about the waterfall, right? They are saying like, I am having sublime feelings or I'm having pretty feelings. C.S. Lewis points out that that's ridiculous. If you're having sublime feelings, you're not actually feeling like... If I say that Graham is an idiot, I can't say I'm having idiotic feelings.

That doesn't make any sense at all. That's the dumbest. I'm not having idiotic feelings.

I think he's an idiot. I'm having contemptible feelings. So what C.S. Lewis points out is that in this little grammar book, they're not teaching grammar.

They're teaching philosophy. And the philosophy is that your feelings about the outside world can never be appropriate. They are merely self-contained.

And so without actually teaching any literature, they have disconnected anyone who is actually just trying to do grammar from the world around them, from having any sort of idea that there can be a correct response to external stimuli. Like I see a river, I feel enlivened or humbled or at peace or connected with nature. You're just talking about your own feelings there.

And C.S. Lewis says we can't do that and then ask them to feel patriotic or to be virtuous in any way. We basically say that your feelings are self-contained, which now I think that it is incredibly apt for our current situation because that's the culture we're living in now. That any of our feelings, any of our moral judgments are simply judgments that we are putting on everybody else.

And we can only talk about our own feelings, which in my opinion has unmoored man from his environment. Like we are disconnected from a world that should be alive to us. And there's something about the way that, well, and what a great example of just the way, I mean, the way I think we learn as humans is it's often less threatening if we're doing it, kind of allowing this sort of third party thing to be happening in front of us.

So you're hearing Lewis kind of key up real world situations where there is, there are, as you were beginning talking about just sort of moral inconsistencies. I think Lewis talks about, you know, you're, you go to the, it's like going to the ball game and somebody sits in your seat and you have the ticket for that seat. Well, there's no one on the face of the earth that's not going to complain about that.

Or even the modern moment we're in where everybody claims, you know, injustice or something like, where are these terms coming from? And you're obviously, you're, you're declaring a moral absolute, but it's a subjective moral absolute. So again, this is the exact moment that we're living in and what an advantage for our students to have had a chance to, you know, not hear, hear it maybe directly in the modern context, but backing up to, to Lewis's description of the world. And that creates conversation.

And then we kind of in that moment, connect the dots and go, Oh, wait, that's, that's what's happening today with the feelings ruling the world. That's pretty interesting. So that's just to draw that back to your question about literature and reading the old books.

The reading of the old books is the training of those sentiments is the training up of, so when you were going and you were reading Achilles filled with rage and removing himself from fighting at Ilium. And you asked the question to the students, like, is this, is Achilles doing a

good thing? Is he, is he justified in what he's doing? The answer to that is important, but the exercise of making the judgment about the action, and it's going to be that exercise that that child is doing in the classroom is the same exercise that countless students have been doing for asking that same question for 2000 years. And wrestling with that idea is something that then well, opens the world to the child, as opposed to locking the child in a world of just their own feelings.

And so, I mean, that's, that's one, that would be sort of one of the, the, the, the other reasons why you would say that this is an important endeavor is to read these old things. And it prepares them for a situation where their manager makes fun of them in front of their co-workers, right? Well, they've already talked about what do you do in this situation? You take, you just, you just sit by your boat outside. And I'm gonna go home.

I'm gonna go home. Take my fighters and go home. Yeah.

Well, I think this is, again, a very kind of basic level, I think, as parents who put their children in classical Christian schools, again, that the connection of, and I remember a family leaving one of the schools I was a part of. And with all sincerity that the dad just said, I don't get this. I don't get why you guys are so fixated on people wearing togas and robes and funny sandals.

Like, I mean, that was literally his, as he's walking out the door. And there may have been some other reason, but that's what he voiced. And I thought, well, we've just not, we've not helped you understand this.

Cause it just sounds like we're just a, somebody told me, you know, use it idea of air classical school is just fusty sentimental school. We're just, we just like that old stuff. No, no, no, no.

This is the actual, these are the real questions that have, have been at the front of humanity from the very beginning. And while the Greeks maybe pose the questions, they may not have had it fully answered. The gospel answers a lot of these in ways, but I mean that just, I mean, maybe kind of going right back to this term of the, of the idea of training of the sentiments.

I mean, what a great way to think about what we do every day and then pressure testing or inoculating. It's like getting a little bit of that small box, you know, in your arm and that your body builds the immunity to it. So I wait, I've heard this before.

There's a problem with that argument you just made. What are some other examples of anything else from abolition of man? And we can go into some other pieces, but I just think that's such a great example. Um, I mean, abolition of man, you know, it doesn't have a whole lot of extra points.

A good example would be Epic of Gilgamesh, right? One of our oldest books. And the biggest question is what do I do with the fact that I'm going to die? Okay. You know, that's, you know, I feel like it's our oldest book and it's our deepest question.

So if that's kind of fun, it's always a hoot to bring that into the ninth grade. Oh man. I, I do this thing where I like, I sit there and I actually kind of bring it home and I'm like, you, this breathing creature that is thinking about me and sitting in a ninth grade classroom seat will one day cease to exist.

And some kids just, I can see them like the, for the first time they're like, Oh no, we had some, yeah, doing it again next year. There you go. Shocking.

No, but that's, and what, again, you're, you're introducing the real questions. We ought the serious questions, the thoughtful questions, and you're doing it in a way that's kind of, I guess, maybe I think I was thinking about, you know, prophet Nathan and David, it's like, let me come tell you a story about kind of a, an ethical situation. You kind of get wrapped up in it.

Your mind and heart is spinning and then you're convicted. Like, wait, wait, wait, wait, that's me. Oh my gosh.

Like I'm living that. That's the genius of it. I love that indirect approach that the stories and narratives bring to students.

Like the kids don't realize it, but they are the ones that are being, they're discovering themselves. Like they are the ones that the landscape they're walking through is not the landscape of the book. It's their own internal landscape where they're, where they're learning what it means to be a human person.

So that indirect approach that literature brings, I think is kind of like the powerful reason why we do this. This isn't a direct like, uh, indoctrination where we say, here's, you know, this, this, um, top down vision of what we want an American citizen to be given to us by some outside authority. And we are going to, uh, drill this into the child until they are, you know, stamped grade a done, right.

They are, um, there's that confusion where they're like, why do we have to read this book? Uh, and then as they read it, um, when they realize that Dante or, uh, uh, or a Hamlet is as relevant to their lives as any, any person that is their contemporary, then all of a sudden, like world is a bigger place. And so that's, um, yeah. And so Lewis kind of makes that argument in the third chapter of abolition of man.

His is a lot more, a bit of a bummer, which we don't need to get into. But, um, but he sort of is making that, that argument saying like, we can't just rely on the present moment to teach everything to everybody. Um, we need to be able to, uh, go into, uh, history or civilizations that are long past to be able to find blind spots that we may have.

You know, as you're saying that it's very well put Graham. I think I was talking to some school leaders yesterday about a school. I'm going to be going to speak, um, to their student body and their, and their parents.

And they were, they're kind of listing some of the concerns and they just said, we just, especially in our high school, we just don't feel like our high schoolers, we want them to be more virtuous and have more character. I'm like, well, that sounds like it's right off the, you know, of course, of course, I mean, it's right off the front of your webpage for what you claim to offer. And they're like, but it's not working as well as we thought it would.

And obviously there's lots of things, technology and when all those things are coming at us. But what I, when I think about what's the antidote, it's not, let's just go memorize a bunch of facts and who's the lead character and all this stuff that many of us probably experienced in literature. It's what you're describing right now, which is just so exciting because it's inviting them into a story where they kind of lose themselves for a moment and then discover a bigger, a bigger situation, bigger story that then reforms their sentiments.

So that's, that's powerful and really good. Why don't we take another quick break? We'll come back on with you guys. I think there's probably no end to examples.

That's why you've had so many episodes because you guys take a single book like that and really peel it back, which is incredible. And I do hope people will dive into your podcast. Let's take a quick break.

We'll come back and unpack a few more pieces of literature. So guys, there's so many pieces of literature and our works of literature that, that, that we could talk about right now. And I just, it's, you know, it's kind of like going from a 2D world to a 3D world.

And I think most of us look at, kind of yawn and look at the great books and go, yeah, if I can't sleep, I'll go grab one of those. And what an unfortunate reality, because that was the education so many of us received and yet to be in classical Christian schools where you were describing Graham, just a situation, you can see those middle school boys. You actually have a really good middle school boy voice, by the way, you did that really well.

That little, it's true. It's a born after years of observing them. You're pretty good at it.

So, all right, well, let's get back in. Let's jump back into this. So, I mean, you know, I gave the example of this dad that, that decided the sandal wearing toga wearing, you know, non-technical schools, probably not the best choice for their, you know, 2024 child.

And I, you know, maybe how would you have answered that? Or what example would you have given to him, you know, of how the sandal wearing people had something for today? Sure. I, so when I get questions like that, or when we have a student that says, why on earth do we need to read this book? Or they say, I already know what I want to do. I want to go and like, you know, go into real estate, like my dad's in real estate or whatever.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

The answer I always give is, well, there's a number of ways that I take it. One is sitting outside

my classroom. We now have, we've got art hanging up around Veritas and sitting outside my classroom is a Thomas Cole painting.

And it's Thomas Cole does all of these paintings. He has a series of four or five depicting the life cycle of an empire. And the one that I have is his famous one, the destruction.

So it's, it's clearly a picture of Rome or some sort of antiquity empire, just falling into chaos. And when students sort of ask me questions and they say, why on earth do we need to read these books? I could go off and I could be totally fine in my life without having to read this. My answer is like, you're probably right.

You probably could. Maybe, maybe 40% of students in this class, maybe everybody in this particular grade could not take English this year and they could go off and they could have some kind of, they could go off and have a life where they could be productive for society. But eventually if nobody ever learns any of this, if there is nobody that is believing in the offer, which is if by reading these books, by studying this, by learning this it it develops you into a life of virtue.

If nobody does this, we're not going to have people that are going to be able to shoulder the responsibility of keeping complex societies around. So not that classical education is merely for creating statesmen who are going to be involved in some sort of like level of government or whatever, but every great statesman of history, if you want to go back, if you go back to Churchill, you can go back further. The founding fathers, every great statesman of history has had some kind of education that looks like the kinds of educations that we are doing at classical schools.

They are not, they did not just do technical things. They learned about what a Pyrrhic victory is by studying the Punic Wars or studying the wars, pardon me, of Greece. They went back and they had these kinds of education and it's usually, so for parents or even for my older students like in high school, a lot of people pretty quickly can say the quality of leadership in the world, whether that's corporate or whether that's government or whether that's at churches, whether that's in my local community, the quality of leadership I think a lot of people are concerned about and to be able to say to a family or to a child like there is a responsibility out the world.

The world is not just a toy for you to enjoy yourself with, that there are potentially people, maybe people that you will never even meet that are counting on you to have a level of competency in this life and this is the path that has been well trodden in creating those kinds of men and women for 2,000 years. Not only is that like an incredibly exciting thing for a kid, I think it also communicates the depth and gravity to a family. So it's like, oh my child is just going to go be a programmer, although they might and that would be great and if they're programmers and they can donate to the school, but the stakes are really high when it comes to education and so trying to communicate those stakes I think is an important thing and not just being like, not just trying to find out what the parent values and then try to like cozy up against that and say like, Plato can help you be a better stack engineer.

But saying that like the stakes are incredibly high for society to have people that are down this path. And I think again this kind of as we round out our time because I know we could go for a long time on these topics, but what I call kind of connecting the dots because I think you're right, I absolutely agree with this idea of sort of at a more universal level like if we read and we understand these ideas and the way they were discussed it sets us up to be a thinking, engaging human which is employable anywhere. I mean Google I know is actually looking for liberal arts students these days.

I mean because people are now coming back around and go wait, you guys actually know how to think, you're not just... So that broadly, but in a very pragmatic, you guys are in the classroom. Let's go back to Plato. We've talked about him a couple times.

I always joke, you know, most of us grew up in a world where Plato was like, you know, the green orange squishy clay stuff and you know, and then we discovered he was some philosopher guy with sandals and there's something about a cave. But beyond all that, like what, walk me through like where does that dot get connected to the world we're in today? Sure. Not only just to steal one of AJ's points, for students they think Plato's kind of boring and then they meet Socrates and Socrates becomes their hero because he is this like sassy guy who is... He's the Reddit troll of the ancient world.

Well I mean he's one level below Diogenes, but yeah, he's still the... But he's the sassy guy who's like calling people out for being doofuses and he's right. And that appeals to 15 year olds. So just generally there, Socrates ends up being kind of a hero, which does mean the classroom can get a little unruly because you can have students that now all of a sudden are skilled in logic and they're like calling you out on your mistakes.

So that can be kind of fun. But then just going through and giving students, we can use Socrates of Plato's hero, giving students that kind of hero is incredibly appealing, especially to young guys. The young men in my class love Socrates when he's presented to them because he is focused, he's dedicated, he's on mission, he even has this like strange divinely appointed sense that God has called him to be this person that holds to a higher set of values even in the face of death.

That is where virtue is starting to be formed in the hearts of people, is when students are given responsibility, moral responsibility, when they're given sort of, they take possession of their own souls, to steal a phrase from another classical educator. And I think any of the books of the canon in the hands of a teacher can do, can be the vessel through which students are able to do that. Whether that's Shakespeare, whether that's Plato, whether that's Gilgamesh, whether that is Milton, Dante, any book that has survived the thousands of years or the hundreds of years to be in our hands means that it has that quality of universality that speaks to people.

So it really ends up becoming like the mirror for the kid to see themselves in and what it means to be a human person. So giving heroes to students, Socrates is a great hero, would be, yeah, that's sort of one of the ways that I would take it. There's other real practical reasons why you



would read Plato's Republic.

He talks about how society can go from the rule of the virtuous, of the aristocracy, to the rule of tyranny, the rule of the worst, in a very short period of time and in a very troubling set of steps. In three easy steps, you too can make a tyranny. And I think when students read that and realize, wait a minute, things are at stake.

Societies don't just self-perpetuate. You need to have people who are invested in continuing this. And this is actually why I'm sitting in this desk right now.

People are concerned that if you put the stakes on a kid, on a student, that you're going to freak them out. And it's quite the opposite. When you show the stakes to a child about why society needs them and needs them to be virtuous and needs them to be educated, you almost don't have to do reading quizzes anymore because they want to read the thing.

They want to know it. They want to get into it when they can see that it does have this practical meaning in their life. Maybe they're not going to be able to really connect all of the dots of how this is going to create a career and a path, but they realize that doing this builds up a competency.

And when somebody realizes that they are competent and they can take what the world throws at them, that is like an incredibly intoxicating thing. You know, as you're talking, I think about the British educator, Charlotte Mason talks about the importance of great books versus twaddle. I love that word.

There's a lot of twaddle out there in the modern education system. So if you have a living book, then she talks about this idea of a mind on mind engagement, where the student is, the mind of the student is, is like teleported into the mind of this great thinker. And these living ideas are so compelling and drawing.

And you talked about heroes. I mean, isn't that the part of the problem of the world today? I mean, who are our heroes? They are YouTube influencers and, and these sort of, you know, very shallow, unattractive in many ways, individuals. And, and, you know, another thing just to connect, connect points back to I think, you know, one of the other challenges that we often hear is, you know, it's classical Christian education for boys.

And I think again, yes. And the way that you just described, you know, let's bring alive these, these characters that are very, you know, very manly and heroic and, and, and you would want to emulate them if you understood them in their full color and their full moment in time in which they're in. So there is a lot of work to be done on the part of the educator to make sure that it's not, you know, stripped of everything, but the driest facts and brought to life in a way that invites the student in.

But once they see it, that's incredible. And I appreciate you guys sort of helping us understand all this stuff. So it's good stuff.

I'm going to be saying stuff. I know it's gotta be in Latin word stuff, stuffclatus or something. It's got to be very important, make it good.

So for folks that would do want to, I do encourage folks to spend some time listening to you guys, because you do help kind of like we've just, I feel like we just did the movie trailer for the long version. So you guys take a book, like we just described and peel it back and look for those stories and those ends of life life application. So how can people find out more about what you guys are doing? Yeah, I mean, they can listen to the podcast.

It's called classical stuff you should know, and you find it on every podcast thing. And granted, there are a couple episodes are probably classical stuff. You don't really need to know.

We're not going to tell you which one they are. So you have to find out for yourself, figure it out. We've got, and then if you're really into it, we have a Patreon page where we have extra episodes.

We have in between episodes where most of our episodes are pretty much created in such a way that they are not like tied to any specific cultural moments. We're not going to do like classical stuff does the 2024 election. Like, you know, that's not right.

We are doing episodes that are standalones. Now that in between stuff often drifts into talking about maybe contemporary things. We're talking about some of the even, I don't know, like hot button topic topics in the classical world, if there are any.

Olympics. So those in between are a little more casual. And we have a starting to get a community of people all around the world, frankly, who are really into this and, and are sort of, it's starting to, to, to gather some steam there.

So there, there's that as well. We have a Twitter page that none of us interact with, the guys at classical stuff, but the best way is just to go for it. Yeah.

I've been the one naming the episodes and I didn't really know that it was going to last for a really long time and that people would have trouble finding what episode was which. And so like our naming system is arcane nonsense. SEO is never going to fight.

If you're like, I want an app, a podcast on Chaucer, you're not going to find it. I mean, we did one, but you're not going to find it. Yeah, I did it.

You're going to have to email us and I'll tell you which one it is, but just like dive in, jump in, find something. Plato ones are clearly named, I think. But other than that, sometimes you guys, I found one you guys did a number of years ago, quite a bit more of just a general level tackling the question.

What is classical Christian education? I thought you did a great job on that. So sometimes you'd go narrow and sometimes you go a little bit broad, but I really appreciate what you guys are

doing and getting to be a part of this podcasting world and continuing to educate people on the go. So thanks so much guys.

Look forward to continuing conversations with you in the future. Awesome. Thanks so much.

Well, you did it. You stayed till the very end of the podcast. Thanks so much for listening to this conversation and a special thanks to our sponsors who make this episode possible.

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What's on your mind? Help us tell stories that may be reflective of what you've seen impacting in your personal life or as a teacher in your school of what classical Christian education is doing again around the world. We appreciate you as a faithful listener. Hey, we're going to be back again next week for another episode.

Please join us. We wouldn't want you to miss.