

BCL ep358 Rhetoric in Action: The Senior Thesis with Dr. Tom Vierra

For most classical Christian schools, the capstone of a student's 12-year journey is the senior thesis. It's an impressive and intense assignment that brings together their years of education, proving the best of a student's writing and speaking and reasoning skills. It is so much more than just a big paper.

It is what the world needs now more than ever. A generation who knows how to research carefully, think well, speak with clarity and courage while articulating truth with conviction and grace. That's what we're talking about in this episode of Base Camp Live.

Join us now. 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 Base Camp Live. Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode of Base Camp Live.

Davies Owens, your host here on the journey of raising the next generation. Thank you so much for tuning in today. I recognize every time that I do this podcast that there are thousands of people who are saying to themselves, gosh, I've got a busy day in front of me.

I've got a lot of things I could listen to, a lot of things that could distract me, but you hit the play button on Base Camp Live and I am so very grateful. And I mean that not because I want people to listen to me. I really am humbled by the number of people that tune every week.

I'm more excited about the fact that we're together doing what is often said to be the last best hope for Western civilization. Ultimately, of course, it's Christ, but it's the work that happens day in and day out in our schools and our homes and our churches together to raise a generation that can stand against the currents that are swirling ever faster around us with big tech algorithms and a world that is pushing all kinds of narratives around us. We do need a generation that is able to think well.

That's what we're really talking about in this episode with the senior thesis. I can't wait to jump into this interview. Before we do is always a heartfelt shout out to the many of you that are listening each week and in many schools that make Base Camp Live and Zipcast a part of the everyday work of the school and the conversations that get stirred up in this podcast become conversations that happen in faculty meetings and in parent conversations.

So big shout out to Ron Hoke, head of school at Redeemer Classical School in Kieselstown, Virginia, as well as to Darren Kloper, head of school at Three Oaks Christian School in Decatur, Indiana. Thank you both as well as your faculty and parents for listening to both Base Camp Live and being a part of the Zipcast community. In this episode, I want to thank our sponsors,

Wilson Hill Academy, as well as the partnership with the Herzog Foundation and the great work they do training and supporting Christian education, as well as the Champion Group and their very effective Feed the Need fundraising program.

Zipcast, as you know, is continuing to grow and there is a really special opportunity if you're listening and you're not in a school that is using the Zipcast platform to connect and communicate and really to build culture, which is the ultimate value of a Zipcast each week. You can learn more at [Zipcast.media](https://zipcast.media), where we have opportunities for schools to join us in the early part of 2026, so it's not too late. Dr. Tom Vieira has been involved in classical education as a teacher and administrator for over 20 years.

He holds a PhD in philosophy and has taught a wide variety of subjects, including modern and ancient humanities, logic, composition, and literature. He is the current Senior Thesis Coordinator and Instructor of Humanities at Wilson Hill Academy. His primary courses focus on some of the most central works of modern Western thought, including the writings of Milton, Pascal, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Chesterton.

He and his wife, Tracy, have eight children, and they live on a farm in the middle of Tennessee, where a love of learning and of God's creation keeps their lives full of joy. Join me now for this conversation with Dr. Tom Vieira. Dr. Tom, welcome to Base Camp Live.

Davies, thanks so much for having me on. I appreciate it. You are most welcome.

It's a joy to have you, and I'm excited about this topic of senior thesis, the capstone pretty much for every classical student on their journey into their senior year. But before we get to all of that, Tom, back us up. I want to hear a little bit of your story and your own discovery of classical Christian education, how you got involved in it.

Sure. I was not classically educated. I went to a public school, like many of us who are in the classical Christian education world now.

I was just starting my journey as a philosophy grad student. There was a small classical school that opened up in Phoenix, Arizona. And my wife at the time, still my wife, but at the time, she said, you should apply.

It looks interesting. There's these really interesting philosophical-looking texts that you would probably enjoy teaching, and it would be a good side gig. It was a startup school, and it became the very first of what are now known as the Great Hearts Academies, which are all over Arizona and Texas and coming into other states as well.

That's how I got started back in 2003. I was at Great Hearts for a number of years, helped start up another school, a couple schools there, and I eventually realized that I wanted Christ at the center of the classical education that we're offering to kids. My time at Great Hearts was wonderful.

A lot of friends there over the years, but I wanted to move out of a charter school context. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but out of that context, and really be able to have Christ and the scriptures at the center of classical learning. And so I made that switch around 2011, went online at that point, and I've been in the classical Christian world ever since.

That's great. Well, 2003, you're part of the gen one, almost early adopters into all this. It's about the time that I got involved when people were even more perplexed as to what in the world you're doing in this classical thing, as it was once called.

But yeah, what a great journey. And then your work now, so Wilson Hill Academy online, so we're going to talk about that experience. But talk about your role there at Wilson Hill.

Sure. So I came on to Wilson Hill in the second year of the school. And so I don't know, I'm sort of, I guess, a little addicted to startup opportunities.

Something about that really has always intrigued me. But so yeah, I've been at Wilson Hill for, I think, just my 11th year. And I've been a teacher the entire time, but I was also the director of academics at the school, headmaster at the school for a period of time.

But my heart's in the classroom. And part of my story at Wilson Hill really was shaped by an unexpected event. The person that we had hired to really kind of help build our rhetoric program, his name is Scott Baker, is a wonderful man.

He suddenly passed away right as we were starting up a new school year. And I was in an administrative role at the time. We were about to start school.

Well, it was orientation classes, I think, started the next day or the day after that. So it was certainly a challenging season for us. So that's when I moved.

I volunteered to take up the senior thesis task to teach the class. And I'd done rhetoric prior, but it was my first go at senior thesis. So I've been essentially coordinating, driving the senior thesis program ever since.

So it's probably been seven or eight years ago, I guess now. And I also teach modern humanities. I teach logic at the school as well.

So it's actually what I've done. Now, that's great. I mean, so you've really been integral at forming senior thesis.

And I don't know of any school that doesn't have some type of capstone senior year, maybe even junior year of really this senior thesis. But you came in early. You've had a lot of time to think about it, to formulate it.

But I want to really unpack it. For those who are listening, maybe for some, I know there are a lot of startup schools and they're like, we're just trying to get started in kindergarten. We don't even know what a senior thesis is.

Talk a little bit just in terms of just helping folks to define what is a senior thesis at the most basic level. Sure. I mean, it's really unlike any... Well, Russell, let me say it.

At Wilson Hill Academy, senior thesis is an actual course. So we call it rhetoric two. And it's a senior level course.

I know different programs run it in different ways. But I say that because from very early on, from the very beginning of Wilson Hill, the founders, Bob and Nancy Donaldson, and others who were involved, senior thesis was a top priority. It was never an afterthought.

It wasn't something we just need to sort of add on. It was always a top priority. And so we made sure that it was a course that students take, they need to take it to graduate.

And so what it is, is something that has really taken on shape. And I suspect that that's probably true for a lot of schools, that it takes on its sort of own shape as you go along. But it's applied rhetoric.

We're talking about a student that takes a particular topic of importance to that student and to the culture broadly. And they learn how to do research on that topic. So it's an entirely academic pursuit in the strict confines of senior thesis.

They learn how to produce a 12 to 15 page... At our school, it's a 12 to 15 page research driven paper, thesis driven paper that they then present publicly at the end of the school year with a defense component as well. So they answer questions. So there's... And that, the pattern of senior thesis really does mimic work that they do at the graduate level when they move on to college, even sometimes at the undergraduate level.

So it's not unknown at the higher levels of education, but it's something that you'll see at classical Christian schools. Now, what that really means will differ depending on which program you're talking. That's kind of the rough idea of senior thesis.

Yeah. And you have some school, I know like the Ambrose School here in Boise would often do a junior thesis really kind of as a preparation for it. And even all the way back in freshman year, walking students through just basically the principles of writing, you know, the six parts of rhetoric, you know, really to try and build the habits and the training to again, culminate in the senior year.

So do you see it as it's not, even though it's a class, the early, there were earlier phases or steps in the process, I would assume as you look at it. Yeah. We have sort of a, you know, a sequence, right? So students take composition courses at Wilson Hill.

There's a logic course at Wilson Hill we call honors logic that feeds into rhetoric one, which they take as juniors. Rhetoric one does have a junior thesis component to it. It gives them a little taste of what it would be to do the senior thesis course.

And then they take senior thesis at the end. And, you know, when we call it a capstone experience, we really mean that, that it, you know, it, it is the opportunity that the students have to pull together the tools of learning, you know, the grammar, the dialectic and the rhetoric to pull that all together and to apply it to particular topic. And to do that with, with strong logic, with reason and argument to do it winsomely, to be relevant in the way that they engage an audience, all those sorts of things.

So it's a fulfillment in some way of the, the career of education that they've had up until that point. And, you know, a capstone and it's sort of metaphorical meaning, it's the structure that's incomplete without the capstone. And we see it that same way.

So if you, if a parent were to say to you, so this is really just a big paper, how might you, how would you maybe clarify that statement? Because there's more to it than just, it is a big paper, but there's more to it than that. There's certainly more to it than that. I mean, one of the challenges that I, I experienced as a senior thesis teacher is convincing my students, usually it's my students more than the parents, but convincing students why this is worth it.

Because yeah. So what do you say? Longer than any paper I've ever written. Right.

And I've got a lot of things that don't look very appealing at first. I have my eager beaver students who have known their senior thesis topic for three years. But, you know, I have a number of students who are, are, are frightened by it and maybe some parents aren't sure.

I think, I think the idea of senior thesis is, is out there with the classical Christian world to the point where a lot of, a lot of parents really, really get it. But what I wish I could convey is how important this is in preparing students for a bigger goal. And it's not just college prep.

I mean, when just narrowing it to college prep, it's invaluable even there. We're talking about a student who learns how to manage themselves, how to be disciplined, how to research, how to think carefully, how to think critically, how to think biblically to really apply the biblical worldview in a, in a relevant way to a particular topic, and then how to communicate that to an audience, both in writing and in a live audience. So all of that is the kind of preparation that very few students entering college ever get.

I mean, they are much, much, much further ahead than, than the, than, than most other students entering college at that point. But just think about the ability to speak coherently, to give a thoughtful response in a job interview that you didn't really anticipate you were going to have, right. Or a chance conversation with somebody that, you know, that you weren't really anticipating being able to speak into various situations in life.

To me, this is all part of rhetoric being grounded in our nature. Rhetoric is not just some, you know, skill that, you know, is, is academic. It's part of us being human beings, learning how to be excellent in the way in which we talk to people.

And that's a great way to look at it is, because I think sometimes it's perceived as like, it's

almost like what classical people do when they haze their students on their way out. Like, let's see how hard we can make it one more time, eat more gravel as you head out of the classical school. So hold on a minute.

It's not just hard for hard sake. It's hard because it's actually challenging you to be the best person you can be. And I love your example.

You know, you sure you go off to a job interview and you're quite comfortable and confident able to, you know, with your rhetoric skills of speaking and articulating and reasoning. Well, I remember my, my oldest daughter, Hannah, was looking at colleges back in the day and we were looking at an honors, a college offered an honors program and I won't name the college, but she was amazed talking to the students. Like they were complaining because the hardest paper they're writing their freshman year was about three to four pages long.

And she was like, are you kidding me? I just got through doing this senior thesis. And so it not meant, it's not meant to be elitist or arrogant. It's just to say we can do a lot more than maybe we think we can when we're challenged to do what you're calling a capstone.

I mean, it's the ultimate example of the education. Is that a fair way to frame it? I think that's, I think that's just spot on. Yeah.

But I think you're right. I think we do, there is a hurdle there. This isn't hard for hard say.

And we're not really trying to do some kind of exercise that prepares them well for the 18th century. We're trying to prepare them well for the 21st century. How do we do that? That's, that's one of the challenges.

Well, you, what you said before is just, I think everyone listening would immediately agree, I believe that, you know, we live in a time of, you know, shallow, unthoughtful soundbite, everything's emotionally driven. And so to raise a generation up that has to, you know, can confront a real problem with deep thinking and discourse. I mean, this is, this is what civilization is built on that is so lacking today.

So, I mean, this is a, when we talk often, you know, we'll say somewhat provocatively, but I believe it true. I think, I think it's true that classical Christian education is the last best hope for our civilization. And I mean, certainly it's Jesus, but I think at the key is we're raising a generation up that can do just what you're describing, which is actually dissect questions and problems.

And I mean, I can't imagine many adults that would be comfortable standing in front of a panel of other adults who have studied the topic that you're now presenting on and really asking hard questions. I mean, that is, that's not easy for anybody, but boy, it sure does build some mental and thought calluses in a good way. One of the things that really try to emphasize to our students is the counter-cultural nature of your thesis.

We read a part out of Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, to kind of help us out a little bit of the darkening of public discourse and why what they're doing really matters. We live in a, I mean, it's post-Christian, but it's also post-truth. You know, Nietzsche saying that God is dead.

When we open up and read and think and communicate, there's with a common search for truth, there's something that the culture vitally needs. Absolutely. Well, why don't we take a quick break? We're going to come back and we're going to continue on the conversation.

I'm also gonna be interested in hearing maybe a couple topics that come to mind of students over the years that have just really worked through some big challenging content pieces that were done well. So I'd love to hear that story. We'll take a quick break and come right back and continue our conversation.

If you're seeking an education that helps your child thrive academically and spiritually, Wilson Hill Academy has spent years developing a model that I want you to know about. In their free guide, you'll see how their thoughtfully sequenced curriculum prepares students for college and how a biblical worldview helps them understand the world around them with clarity and how their discussion-based classes teach them to think critically, not just what to think. You'll also discover how their teachers equip students to live purposefully for Christ.

With accredited live online classes, your child can learn from master teachers anywhere with an internet connection all within a community that has transformed families like yours. Download their free guide today at wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/guide or in the link in our show notes. During this short break, I have a special invitation to all school leaders, administrators, and teachers.

I want you to imagine for a moment stepping away from your everyday routine at school and diving deep into the rich foundations of Christian education surrounded by world-class scholars, seasoned classroom teachers, and administrative experts with years of experience running schools with a lot of wisdom to share. That's exactly what the Herzog Foundation's Institute is offering. I've had the joy of serving as a training coach for the last few years, leading their two and a half day training on spiritual formation and another one on parent engagement.

They offer close to 50 unique training events ranging from board governance to marketing to classroom best practices. They even offer a training on how to teach the great books. And the best part of all, well thanks to the generosity of the Herzog Foundation, these training events including lodging are completely free for Christian educators.

Institutes are located around the country in beautiful locations including at the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara. Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at theherzogfoundation.com. Well Tom, over the years I'm sure you've seen some pretty impressive proposals for topics and then you've seen students

work through writings that I suspect would make really good fully published books knowing the amount of effort that goes into these.

Give some examples of some of the works that the students have done. And by the way, folks should know and please feel free to brag a little bit. I know I've been a part of the ACCS's Christossism Awards over the years and Wilson Hill's students have done real well in that environment.

But maybe share some of those topics. Yeah, we've had a couple of winners of that award in the last two, in the last three years, I think. One of the topics that won the award is she argued essentially that people of all ages should listen to classical music because of its unique ability to reveal God through its form and beauty and what not.

So that's another one of those topics, similar actually, but in the area of creation and the appreciation of art, cultivating that, that we have a responsibility to be artistic in another, to put it another way. We have a student this year that's working on AI advancements in medicine and is there a way in which that could give us a sort of a glimpse of God's perfected creation. We have a student working on hereditary monarchy and whether that's a good thing.

So we have Tommy, you know, and while students are amazingly ambitious, sometimes that's actually something we need to deal with. It's 12 to 15 pages, right? And they turn in a 30 page draft. I've had that happen.

And then, you know, we have topics that, you know, as a school, I think it's important to say we're committed to a biblical worldview when it comes to the topics that our students take on. And so sometimes, you know, when we get a topic, we approve and I highly recommend, we approve topics. We don't just let students take on whatever they want.

Those are, that's just kind of gives you a flavor. Yeah. Because part of it is you want to let them really have the freedom to pursue something they're genuinely interested in.

And yet at the same time, it needs to be something that's got depth and substance and not just a kind of base level topic and something that is appropriate to classical education. And of course, part of it is that, and I want to hear your thoughts on how one structures senior thesis because back to, it's not just a big paper. There is a really classical framework that you're training students.

And part of that is that refutatia. So they're actually having to figure out kind of the counter arguments to the thing that they're advocating for, which I think is a really important skill for anyone to have, which is to really think oppositely the way that you maybe naturally want to pursue it. So mentioned some of that structure, maybe where things like refutatia are part of that important framework.

Sure. So, so our students are, they're expected to write according to the six part framework. So, you know, exordium, neurotia, partitia, et cetera.

And you're right. That refutatio really is a key corrective to just the simple five paragraph essay, because in the five paragraph essay, all that's required as a student defend their own view on a particular thesis, right? They don't have to really engage another perspective. You lose the neurotias as well.

There's a component where, you know, the classical speech, written verbal classical speech really involves dialectic and involves the voices of other people. And so that's a, that's a key part in a well-written paper is that a student is participating in an ongoing conversation on their topic. They're not the first voice on this topic.

This has been discussed for many, many years, sometimes many centuries. And so for them to really weigh in on a conversation that's been on it, it makes for more effective, more compelling rhetoric when you bring in the voices of Dante and Aristotle and contemporary scholars, people who are working on this very issue right now. So we're working this week, in fact, on refutatio.

How do we really begin to think through that? We require our students to write what we call, it's an antithesis, if you were to say pregnant, we stress anti-thesis, right? This idea of an anti-thesis paper where they have to write a five paragraph essay that goes against the thesis they intend to defend for the project. Wow. And that's, you know, we're talking earlier just about the need for this more than ever in our cultural moment.

I mean, so much of typical traditional education today is because you can't judge anything and everything is okay. It's really just go write about something you like or you care about. And so you're just creating this, you know, kind of an echo chamber within the student's own head of the things that they think are right and true.

And you're not, to your comment, they're weighing in on a conversation that has preceded you instead of the test of time. And so you're learning to submit yourself into the conversation and you're learning to see counter perspectives in the conversation, which to me is one of the greatest needs again in our culture, just for civil discourse and perspective. So these are profound skills you're teaching students.

Absolutely. And if I were to stress one thing with those six parts, I really emphasize with my students that they're not just sections in a paper. These are tools.

Narratio, for example, is a tool. We've all, if you've taught writing before, you probably know what a quote dump is. And, you know, just all of a sudden, here's a quote with no context at all, right? So when you set up a quote, when you introduce who the author is, for example, you know, what the situation is in the passage and you're teaching students how to think in terms of context, that's a tool.

That's a tool of thought that they're going to take with them. Narratio isn't just a part in the paper where you're defining your terms and giving some key historical background or something. Same thing with reputatio.

When you insert textual evidence, you know, stating what you think the passage means, but what does it not mean? Who has maybe argued against your understanding of the passage and why is that an incorrect view? Those are, these are excellent skills for thinking and communicating in various instances, not just in the kind of the macro sense of a big paper like this, but in every area of life. Yeah, it's really good. I want to take a break here in a second.

I want to kind of set up a question that I'm sure people are asking is, this sounds great, but we're in a crazy world of AI. How in the world do you navigate a senior thesis where you are maybe allowing it to some usage, because there's probably a balance there and I'm really curious how you navigate those critical waters today. So why don't we take a break and we'll come back and you can hopefully help us have some wisdom on this critical question.

Be right back. I know as a school parent and administrator that like many of you, when I hear the word fundraising, it can make me feel a little bit uncomfortable, but there's good news. Our friends at the champion group have created something different, a fundraiser that is simple and effective.

The good news is there's no selling of cookie dough, wrapping paper, light bulbs, and it's one that actually brings in significant support for our schools. It's called Feed the Need and at its core, it's a peer-to-peer fundraiser, but it's so much more than that. The campaign builds toward a powerful service event where students pack and ship 10,000 meals for families in need, both here at home and around the world.

These meals don't just meet a physical need, they open the door for the gospel to be shared. That's what makes Feed the Need so unique. It's not just a way to raise money, it is a discipleship experience.

Giving students a hands-on service project at your school provides them an opportunity to not only connect your community to a greater mission, but it does provide your school with real financial resources that you need to thrive. Feed the Need is a fundraiser with eternal impact, practical, purposeful, and Christ-centered. To learn more about how your school can be a part of Feed the Need, visit thechampiongroup.com or check out our partners page on the Base Camp Live website.

Every school year tells a story. The big chapters, like the first day of class or graduation, are easy to see. But the real heart of the story is often written in the quieter pages.

A science experiment that sparks wonder, a class pausing to memorize a psalm, a teacher encouraging perseverance when the work gets hard. Those are the moments parents long to hear. That's why we created Zipcast.

Each week, families receive a short 10-12 minute episode, local updates from their school leaders, paired with syndicated wisdom from trusted national experts in both Christian parenting and education. Parents can listen in the rhythm of daily life, on the drive to practice,

while making dinner, or during a quiet walk. Nearly 100 schools are already using Zipcast this year to strengthen trust and community, and fall or winter isn't too late to sign up.

It's often the time to begin. Save your spot at zipcast.media. Zipcast, encouraging you on the go with what you need to know. Tom, right before the break, we were talking about just the rise of AI, and that's definitely a question that I know people ask.

How do you navigate that with your students? That's a million dollar question, isn't it? You know, I mean, it may just be an ironic result that AI turns out to help prove some of the necessity for rhetoric, because we're really teaching students how to be thoughtful, excellent in their communication, but in original ways. So, you know, I didn't mention this earlier, every student, they have senior thesis as a course, but they're paired up with one of our teachers as a faculty advisor with whom they meet, and they work on their projects. And so along the way, I mean, you know, one of the questions with AI is, how do we make sure that they're doing honest work? And we can, you know, talk about that.

But I personally, I think it's far from sufficient to try to keep up with the technology, be always having the right kinds of filters and the right, you know, to implement those sorts of things is necessary, you might say, but not sufficient. And so, you know, I chatted a little bit already about, you know, maybe there's ways that, you know, AI could be used in creative ways with schools in terms of students doing research and exploring what AI can do and how that contrasts with the kind of original work of excellence that we want our students to be producing through a rhetoric program. But, you know, you can you can chat GPT a paper, there's nothing really very creative about that.

But when you have to turn around and stand in front of, you know, 50 people, 80 people, 100 people, or as our students, we have a year and gathering at our school. So our school's online, but we gather at the end of every year. And every year, we pick two students as our senior thesis award winners.

And they present their thesis in front of the entire gathering. It's 500 plus people every year. So I mean, it's this huge room full of people.

And it's amazing to me how well these students do. So what we do online, by the way, does translate into the quote, real world. Very, very well, you know, super proud of these kids, but that just sort of goes to show why we need rhetoric all the more because you can't AI everything.

No, and that's obviously the tells if you've somehow done the written portion, maybe a little harder to figure it out where the sourcing might have been. But boy, yeah, you're right. Orally, it's why oral testing is such a great antidote to AI, you know, or the old, here's a prompt and get out the blue book like we did in the old day and write that, write that paragraph, you have to kind of your true colors would come through.

So it is a gift in terms of research. And but at the same time, it has its limitations that is very helpful. And speaking of just sort of, you know, rhetoric is as far the form of rhetoric and our engagement with these great minds and great thinkers.

Of course, one of the things we love about classical education is we're not afraid to, as we talked about earlier, look at perspectives from other vantage points or even other worldviews. And so clearly, the use of a lot of pagan literature and in the research we do is a critical part of it. So again, just is not a lot of time here, but just speak into, you know, why do we why do we care so much about the great the great minds of old, especially if they're not coming from a pure biblical worldview? Sure.

I mean, Augustine once said that all truth is God's truth. And we take a very Augustinian approach to to the way that we handle the classical tradition of rhetorical literature, you know, pagan literature contains wisdom and insight. Augustine famously compared it to the way the Hebrews plundered the Egyptians before believing in the Exodus, right? We have a similar approach, but always taken into account within the biblical worldview.

And so just to give an example, Aristotle, of course, you know, the high bar, the goal, the tail loss of rhetoric is the, discovering the available means of persuasion, persuasion is really the key here. And it's interesting, you move forward in the in the tradition a little bit, Cicero will add and Augustine picks up on this, that we're, you know, the the speaker, the orator is really about three things, actually, there's to instruct, and there's to delight, and there is to move. And so persuasion is certainly part of it, we want to move people.

But we also want to, you know, audiences need things, they want to learn things, people want to learn from somebody who's speaking. And they want to be, in some sense, entertained by the beautiful use of language, by a beautiful, well done presentation, and people want to be persuaded. So in the, you know, we use these elements.

When we think about persuasion, in particular, I think we have to be careful, because we certainly want to persuade people of the truth of the gospel, we want to, we want to persuade an unbelieving world, no doubt there. We want to be also, we also want to be careful that we don't set up a sort of, if you, if you do these things in rhetoric, with perfect excellence, the persuasion automatically follows, right, as though, you know, you nail the art and you get the results. You know, I really like the word compel, because compel, or to move, right, because when we, when we engage the world effectively, we want our students to engage the world effectively such that people can't remain where they are.

The Pharaoh of Egypt didn't remain where he had to go further into darkness, we want people to repent and come into the light, absolutely. But that's the spirit's work, you know, we want to make sure that we understand the spirit is at work in people's hearts. Our job is to be a faithful witness.

That's a great image of the power of persuasion, and ultimately what we're doing, the rhetoric.

Just the final few moments, Tom, thinking about, first, parents are listening, and we talked earlier, for so many of us, we didn't have this education, and we're looking at our child already, probably oversubscribed in their schedule to so many things, and now all of a sudden, what does the school do right when it's supposed to be senior year and it's time for fun? Yeah, I don't know where that came from. Now we're being asked to do more than we've ever done before, so what encouragement do you have to a parent as they're thinking, gosh, this just seems like so much, we've talked about some great reasons why, it's so worth it.

Any final words of encouragement to parents? Well, I'm with you. I'm also a father. I have eight kids, and some are old enough to have, hang in there.

It's not enough to say hang in there, but it is absolutely worth it. To me, the kind of vision that brought us into classical education in the first place, it's a bigger vision than just the desire for our kids to have good jobs someday. We want our kids to be effective for the kingdom, and to give them this opportunity to invest in a project like this, to demand things of themselves that bring about growth and responsibility, self-management, articulation.

All of this, you just can't get it another way, and it's going to serve them for the rest of their lives. That's a great reminder. Well, and then finally, for those educators who are listening, maybe for some, as we've indicated, and know to be the case, or in smaller startup schools, this is sort of a whole new world to get their head around, or maybe they've been doing senior thesis for a while, and maybe want to look at it with some fresh eyes.

Where would you point them? What resources do you have? How can they connect with you? What advice do you have to your fellow educators? Sure. I don't know if there's a way to share my contact information, but I would be more than happy to receive an email, a phone call, and we can chat about it. I would say this.

Rhetoric, or what we call rhetoric, senior thesis can't be this thing that we're just going to get to eventually. It has to be something that's fully built into the very core identity of who you are as a school. I've seen it where senior thesis is just something that's kind of added on, something that you're sort of supposed to do, that kind of a thing.

When you build it in the core of who you are, I think that shapes your priorities. It matters early on. You and I talked a little bit offline here, Davies, about not reinventing the wheel.

We're at the point now in classical Christian education where there's a lot of schools that have been doing this for a long time. We're not in that early phase anymore. There's a lot of resources out there, so don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Like I said, we've had our own commitment, our own taste of, I guess, a little bit of success at Wilson Hill. We're very, very thankful for what God has blessed our school with, and we're happy to help others as needed. That's great.

Wilson Hill does such a great job. As we've talked about, I think it's amazing because the world

of online education has so many benefits, certainly challenges, but to be able to now reach out literally around the world to students and to invite them into conversations and senior thesis work even remotely, it's still a remarkable moment in history that we can afford that. I love that you're there.

We will definitely put your information in the show notes, so if people do want to reach out to you and learn more, I appreciate you being available for that. Thanks so much, Tom. This is inspiring and I think certainly an encouraging word here in the midst of a culture that continues to aim to the lowest common denominator to continue to raise up a generation that can think and speak well.

Thanks for your contribution. It's been a delight, Davies. Thanks so much for having me on.

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See you back next week.