

## **BCL ep373 Alumni Interview with Neeya Toleman**

The next time you're driving down the road and you notice those giant high-tension power lines that often stretch across the landscape, you might want to stop and wonder who actually manages these massive power grids that keep the lights on across the country. Well, you might be surprised and encouraged to know that one of the key decision makers is a graduate of a classical Christian school. Join me as we continue our series highlighting alumni on this episode of Base Camp 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 Base Camp Live. Now your host, Davies Owens. Welcome to another episode.

Davies Owens, your host here with you as we raise the next generation. I have just come back from an amazing classical Christian conference at the College of the Ozarks where so many of you gathered to be encouraged in this great work we're doing of starting new schools and continuing to grow schools that are part of the movement, whether they're collaborative or they are part of a full five-day-a-week program. There are so many folks who are saying we've got to do something different.

I was thinking of that C.S. Lewis quote where he says, when we've lost our way, the best way home is to turn and go back from the direction from which we have come. For so many, it's a rediscovery of the way really everyone was educated in the West up until about 100 years ago. In this episode, we have the joy of sitting down with Nia Tolman, who I didn't know until one of you emailed me and said, hey, I've got an alumni who I think you want to talk to.

Her story is compelling and encouraging to us. I would ask, again, if you have alumni in your community that you think would have a story that we would all benefit from hearing, I'd love to learn about them, be introduced to them. Reach out to me, info, at Basecamp Live and let me know.

That'd be very helpful. Hey, in this episode, a special shout out to a couple of folks. As always, grateful for the partnership as we work together with Basecamp Live and Zipcast.

Heather Baker, head of school at Haw River Christian Academy in Pittsburgh, North Carolina. A big shout out to you. Thank you for listening, for being a part of our community here, along with Amy Walker, head of school at Heritage Oak School in Tehachapi, California.

Our guest today, Nia Tolman, currently works as an engineer at a utility company helping to develop new transmission lines across the United States and has spent her career in the energy space. She's a graduate of John Brown University and Coram Deo Academy, a classical Christian

K-12 school in Texas. She currently resides in Florida and enjoys traveling and volunteering with her community and church when she's not hard at work.

This episode is brought to you by our great friends at the Herzog Foundation, along with Wilson Hill Academy, The Wise Phone, and Dr. Robert Littlejohn and Chuck Evans, who have recently come out with an amazing book for parents called *Wisdom and Eloquence*, and I encourage you to take a look at it as well. Without further ado, here is my conversation with Nia. Nia, welcome to Basecamp Live.

Hi, thank you for having me. It is wonderful to get to talk to alumni. I love hearing stories, so let's just jump right in.

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? What school did you go to? What was that journey like for you back in the day? Yeah, I grew up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. I was raised there my whole childhood and only went off to college in Arkansas.

I had the privilege of going to a private classical Christian school called Quorum Deo in Flower Mound in the DFW area from first through twelfth grade, actually. There's a little bit of a blip during one school year, but otherwise I was there the whole time. That was a very formative experience, obviously in my educational background and how I was raised, but then also how it's for what life has thrown at me as well.

Yeah, well, we're going to jump into all that. Tell us a little bit about your family. Do you have siblings or what's your family makeup? I am the oldest of three.

I have a younger brother who's just a year behind me and then a younger sister who's, depending on how birthdays fall, six or seven years younger. My brother and I are both adopted from China and that's also a big part of my story. Yeah, well, and so you're first born.

Are you a typical first born? Painfully. Some would say recovering. Yeah.

Typical type A, to be on time, to have a plan, all that. Right. There's some great virtues that come with all that.

Well, share a little bit more. You started talking about your family story. I want to hear that before we get into school.

So share a little bit more. Yeah. So I was born in Yiwu, China, which if you have heard the thing about China looking like a chicken, it's kind of the neck area.

I was adopted and then my brother was adopted about a year after me. So my parents did it. Boom, boom.

And then my sister came along as the surprise. And that's actually the reason why we ended up at Coramdeo. And even in that school model is my parents were pretty firm that they didn't want to go full public or at least at the beginning.

But also with a new baby and small kids, my mom didn't feel like she could do full-on homeschooling either. So then what would be a good compromise or something in between? And that's how they found CDA. And so for your parents, was this their first experience? I assume with classical Christian, they didn't grow up in that type of world educationally.

Correct. They were public school through their grade school, high school, and also college. Wow.

So what was the, how did they discover Coramdeo or what was their first awareness of this new model? So I think they, they did some online research and I think it was also some mutual connections helped them find the school at the time in, I guess, the early 2000s. There were some other private Christian schools in the area, but this was geographically close to where we were at the time and also very, very distinct as far as the model. And I think my parents really valued the fact that Coramdeo was intentionally hybrid.

So the parent maintained a strong role as far as being an educator and a co-educator alongside the classroom teachers, as opposed to something like a five-day program. Yeah. Which by the way, I think is the fastest growing segment within classical Christian is the collaborative hybrid model.

So you get to experience it pretty early on. I mean, if you started that way back in kindergarten day. So what year did you graduate? 2014.

Okay. 2014. Wow.

So you've had, and we're going to get into it. Yeah. The scheme of life is a minute, but it's more than a decade.

So it'll be a good to hear in a minute, some more about kind of life after graduation, but let's, let's kind of continue on this, I guess, do it a little bit sequentially. So full K-12 experience, any, if you could highlight a moment, maybe think back to, or another way to maybe frame the question is if you could, you know, time travel back to like a moment there in that K-12 journey, that was just a really meaningful moment for you and your education, anything stand out. I guess one thing that I think about is senior year, and this is more on a relationship level, but it just speaks to the school model.

I got a pretty substantial scholarship with John Brown, which is where I ended up going. And they surprised me at my internship to give me the award. But then my elementary principal showed up at the office too, because she wanted to help co-award and be there to help celebrate because she had seen me through, you know, so much of my early years, and my mom taught at the school for a period.

And so she was also just a close family friend. And so the fact that I had so many people around me who had seen me grow up and pour into me, who were there to celebrate big life milestones was really meaningful. Yeah.

So kind of this literally graduation moment of everything kind of coming together for you. What do you think about, yeah, so as you think about that, again, the journey that you were on, are there other kind of moments where, you know, maybe a grammar school, like speech meet thing or anything that was sort of a big, maybe even framing it as a really, gosh, this is going to be tough moment that you had to kind of press through. CDA was definitely academically rigorous.

Yeah. I mean, one thing that is kind of a hallmark of what students have to do in their senior year is something called senior author, where everybody gets an assigned author for the year, and you're supposed to take the first semester and basically do a ton of research, read anything you can about their works. And then in the spring, everybody has a full class period where then you present and become the teacher for that full 50 minute segment.

And while that obviously took a lot of work, it was also very rewarding to be able to stand back and see everything that you had learned over that process. And it was more than just the academic. I know a lot about the author, but I've then spent the time to research and prepare how to then I communicate the knowledge that I've learned in a way that my peers can understand and in a way that my teacher can appreciate all the knowledge that's condensed into something that's just 50 minutes when it was a lot of work.

Yeah. That's, I mean, by standards of so many today, that experience in high school would almost be like a college level assignment or experience. So you were really, yeah.

And you were really, you're really being pushed. Are there times that you thought this is just too much? And I don't know. I mean, and again, I want to ask that sort of in the context of just other, maybe other social life or other voices that the neighbor kids down the street going, gosh, why are you having to do all that? You should come out and play.

I mean, did you sometimes wonder if this is just maybe a little too much? Yeah, that's a good point. There are some things that we did that I'm sure my peers could never fathom. But I think also coming up through the school that helped you get ready for things like that.

I remember in as low as second grade, we had to give two to three minute speeches, mostly by memory with a little bit of note card action. And those were intentional places where we had the parents come in, we did a little party sort of thing, but then you had to come with something prepared. And even as young as eight, that was something that they were training us and getting us ready for.

And so when there were bigger moments like senior author, it didn't feel like a step change. It was just a progression in what they had been preparing us for. Yeah.

Well, as you're describing that, I think about, as I often speak with groups of parents, I think it's hard for those of us who didn't grow up in the classical Christian education. We hear things that you're describing and think, gosh, that just sounds really tough. I mean, because it would be

tough for us as adults today to do, we always laugh, most of us can't even remember our phone number.

Actually, nobody knows their phone number anymore. But to have to memorize, even in second grade, these large passages or to have to prepare at that level. And yet, as humans, God's made us with these great capacities.

We often just never tap into them. So for you, it sounds like this was just normal. I mean, normal was we're going to work hard and we're going to learn to think deeply and we're going to memorize things.

And that felt pretty normal. But so there were moments where you engage with others outside of the world of school and recognize this is a pretty unusual way to educate compared to most people around you. Is that fair to say? Yeah, we definitely had friends who were in other private Christian schools or they did homeschool or they were public school.

And when you're sitting around talking at piano lessons or something, you chat and hear, oh, what do you do? Oh, what do you? Oh, my. Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure that's the case.

Well, talk a little bit from a social standpoint, because this is a question that we often get is love all the great virtue and wisdom training and love the academics. But gosh, the schools are kind of small. And is this going to my child maybe to not have the 800 people as I had, they would say in their high school class back in the day? I mean, how big was your class there at Corbin? Yeah.

So my graduating class was I think 40 to 45 maybe. And also with the hybrid nature of it, we had people who were primarily Monday, Wednesday in classroom and then other people Tuesday, Thursday. So then actual people in my class that I saw day to day were that was roughly half that.

So 20 ish. So is there a stigma like, oh, you're the Monday, Wednesday people? Like, did you have a little rivalry going on? A little bit, yeah. But I think it was healthy.

Weird things that happen in collaborative schools like, oh, the M.W. people stand away. Yeah. So but the point is you had 20 and people.

So again, the question is, did that what was that like for you socially, especially as you contrast it with going off to college, like, whoa, there's more than 20 people in my school. What did that what were the advantages or disadvantages of that smaller size? I mean, the I think the advantages are that you can be better known by both your classmates and your teachers. You're not lost in a crowd or in a shuffle.

And I feel like I made very good friendships because of the tight knit circles that we had. And then as far as how could that be a I think that's a testament to my parents and how they did it and that they were very intentional that school is not our only setting to interact with people

and do other things outside of school. So, yes, while the class sizes are small, we did other things and at church and in the community to where the outside social interactions that I was getting were more than just my 20 peers.

Right. But you also I'm sure or let me ask, my assumption has always been I've seen it with my own children is that by having to learn to befriend and work with people that you might not naturally have picked out. If you were in a school of 300, you might have picked a few people that are more like you.

And yet the reality is, is we'll get into your current work world. I mean, you don't get to pick the people in the cube next to you or down the hall from me. So you've had to learn how to, quote, get along with a broader array of people.

Is that fair that kind of your experience in K-12 kind of prepared you maybe to just learn how to navigate and be a better friend to people that maybe you're not you would naturally befriend? Yeah, I think that's totally true because there's not a whole lot of places that you can hide and there's only so many ways that they can mix up group partners for projects before. Right, exactly. You run out of people.

So yeah, I think that's totally true. Okay, well, good. I think that's, again, one of those it's easy for parents to go, this is concerning because it's so small, but there is a real upside to that.

And as you said, you also had friends that were outside of school work. And so it wasn't like you had never left Mayberry to see the rest of the world, which is important. So let's take a break.

I want to come back and I want to explore a bit of your faith formation and just the intersection of the school and your home and church and how those three work together in your life. We'll be right back after the break. 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, D.C. and the Reagan Library in Santa Barbara.

Don't miss this incredible opportunity. Check out the details at [theherzogfoundation.com](http://theherzogfoundation.com). 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](http://wilsonhillacademy.com/slash/guide) or in the link in our show notes.

Nia, we think about the relationship between the classical Christian school and our homes and our churches. We often use the model of the three-legged stool, and we need all three of these. In fact, biblically, it would be the home and the church that are most responsible for faith formation.

But in reality, the school often dominates some of the most highest proportion of time in our lives. So for you and your own faith formation, how did those three work in terms of forming your faith? Yeah, I think that's a great question. Obviously, a private Christian school is going to be the most supportive environment for reinforcing your kid's faith outside of your home or church.

There were things that CDA did that were intentional, things like I remember we had to memorize all of John 1, and I think that was maybe third grade. Not all ones, you know, week by week adding on verses, but that was very much an emphasis as far as scripture memory is important, and then we would talk about the verses and what they meant. And then smaller things would even happen where things like I've fond memories of algebra class in eighth grade where we would start off with a devotion every day in Proverbs 20 or maybe it was 22.

It wasn't a long period, but our teacher was very impactful to some of us because he would always make sure that we had a moment to speak about what was going on in our lives and what was the scripture telling us as well as the academics being important. But we always made sure that we had a space to talk about our verse of the day basically, and that was a way that in a way we also went through and memorized it together. And there were various assignments and projects that were also faith-oriented and centered, even things like whole classes on apologetics where we could have forums to ask deeper questions.

Maybe that wouldn't come up at home or at church if they were more academically leaning, but there were intentional spaces created either through just informal discussions and then also classwork that were meant to make you more critically think about your faith, what does the scripture actually say, what do we feel that God is trying to tell us through this and really wrestle with that. So what I'm hearing, you talked about the kind of intentional moments that are throughout the life of the school. One of the contrast points I see in a classical Christian

school and maybe a more traditional Christian school is that every moment is fair game for Christian formation.

It's not just Bible class on Thursday and then chapel on Friday for an hour. It's much more integrated, and not that other non-classical schools don't integrate, but it sounds like from your experience, that's where these moments often occurred were not in a Bible class necessarily. It was much more in just the course of you're actually dealing with living ideas and big questions, and those things just naturally prompted the richer discussion.

Is that fair to say? Yeah, and I think that's a testament to the teachers and the teachers' attitudes as well that our faith, we interact with it in all aspects of our lives, and so that should also be reflected in how we treat and manage the classroom. Yeah, and I think that's the, which is actually how life works because we don't, you know, we're hopefully Christians not just for an hour on Sunday, but it's integrated into all of life. And so how we are facing whatever question or in a math class or in a work environment, that is the hope.

So that's very encouraging, and obviously your parents and your church played a role in that, but it's a distinctive, and I think for, you know, parents listening, that's one of those, certainly an attractor of a classical Christian school is that there is an intentional effort to form faith. So it sounds like that was very formative to you, the environment at school. Yeah, that's really good.

If you were to think about the school, kind of looking back on it, and if you could get in a time machine and be, you know, I don't know, head of school or head of the board for a day or even a month, would there be anything that you would want to do differently? Were there things that, gosh, I wish we did more of that, or gosh, we didn't really need to do that, or do you have any, and again, feel free to be as honest as you want to be. You've been out and whatnot for 12 years, so, you know, you have freedom to speak. So what do you think looking back? Yeah, I guess I think back on some of the things that I did outside of school, things like an internship or different sports that or things like music lessons that were not necessarily part of the school curriculum, and I think encouraging that even more because that is, I feel like, what helped make me be more well-rounded as far as getting the academics and then some non-academic things at school, but then also having the opportunity to explore and the encouragement to do that in different maybe non-academic or even non-faith settings that, for me, I feel like I learned a lot through.

So you're saying you would, that it was, that the school could have done more to promote that, I mean, was there an area of needing improvement? It sounds like just by nature being collaborative, you naturally had more time in the week that your parents could get you involved in different things. So you're just saying that was a high value. Yeah, I guess I'm trying to think about things that were required versus encouraged.

Things like volunteer hours, not necessarily required, definitely encouraged, but maybe a formal program with structure, so that way students could have a better idea about what options are even available for them to participate in, say, the community, and then also have a

network of, oh yeah, I volunteered with this organization and let me tell you about it, and, you know, we've got the stream of students and alumni who are involved and a very strong network to plug you into sort of thing. Yeah, that's, I think, just encouraging that exposure, and one of the things that just happens naturally, I remember my son ran a track in middle school, that was not something that our classical Christian school had, we didn't have a track, so he got to, in Idaho, if your private school doesn't offer it, the public school, you can participate in that one activity, which became quite interesting because it was kind of a data point for him on, wow, this is life in the public school down the street, and it gave him a chance to do something athletic, so that's a really, I think, good point of just helping students see the broader resources that are there. So anything else, if you were, you know, had a school for a day or a month that you would say do more, do less of this or that? I think this is something that they've gotten better at as time has gone on, just from what I've heard about different electives and things that they've added as far as more STEM integration, like I know there's a robotics club now that was definitely not around when I was there, and my nerd self probably would have loved to be a part of it, and that's something where I think they are also making active improvements.

Do you think, one thing that I hear sometimes when I interview alumni is just, and I don't know this is the case at Coram Deo, but a lot of classical schools will literally, until the last day before graduation in May, just continue to go deep, go deep into the great books and the great discussions and all that, and maybe miss an opportunity to prepare the students for the real, quote, real world they're going to be going into, meaning there are so many contemporary issues, whether it's, you know, students struggling with gender dysphoria or, you know, the worship of environmentalism as the end all be all. I mean, all these things that are just sort of the religion of the culture around us. Do you think the school could have done more to help integrate the great ideas and your theological, spiritual formation with sort of the modern moment? Did you get to college and realize, oh man, wow, there are a lot of things I'm now having to sort through that would have been helpful to have maybe been forewarned or prepared better for? Would that have been helpful? I think the school did a good job from a philosophical standpoint, explaining Christianity, apologetics, what does the Christian faith mean, but then what you're talking about as far as the practical, how do I address a certain hot topic issue? Yeah, I feel like the school could have done stronger hands-on preparation, and where I got a lot of that was probably through other avenues, either at home or through different things I was involved in at church that then attempted to, you know, talk through those topics and questions.

Which is good, and I think that's the tension for the school. It's like, you know, at what point does the school need to let the parent be parenting and the church be the church? But I think more often than not, those harder issues are not, maybe left not fully addressed. And you have, especially in a classical Christian school, as we talked about before, such a rich environment for thoughtful discussion and conversation.

Why not be more intentional about kind of preparing for the deployment into the real world, if you will? So that's a good point of observation. I want to get to kind of where you are now and

hear your story of where you end up going to college and the impact 12 years now into full adulthood and looking back on education. Let's take one more break, and we'll come back, and I want to hear the rest of the story.

Today's episode of Basecamp Live is brought to you by my friend Chris Casper, who you heard on a recent episode. His invention, the Wyze Phone, is a much-needed third way, providing a solution from the dangers of a smartphone on the one hand and the limited capacities of an old-school flip phone on the other. His simple, distraction-free phone design for families who want technology to serve their real lives and give us and our older children a way to do basic essentials like calling or texting or maps without the web browser and the social media and the endless apps that can pull them and us into the addictive time-wasting aspects of a smartphone.

I personally have a Wyze Phone, and I can vouch that it is an excellent solution and an appropriate way to use technology that supports virtue and focus and healthy habits. Check out the link in our show notes and on our Basecamp Live website partners page, where Chris is offering Basecamp Live listeners a discount. Hi there, classical Christian parents, students, and teachers.

This is Robert Littlejohn, co-author with Charles Evans of *Wisdom and Eloquence*, a Christian Paradigm for Classical Learning, published by Crossway Books. We want you to know about our new book with well-known family counselor Keith McCurdy, published by Classical Academic Press. The book is titled *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents, How Classical Christian Education Can Transform Your Children, Your Family, and the World*.

We have written this shorter, parent-focused book specifically as an admissions and parent education resource for schools and families. We are excited to be proud sponsors of Zipcast and Basecamp Live, and we hope you are enjoying these two great resources for classical learning as much as we are. And we would invite you to visit our website, [wisdomandeloquence.org](http://wisdomandeloquence.org), to explore the various services offered by the authors of *Wisdom and Eloquence for Parents*, and to let us know how we can best serve you.

We look forward to hearing from you soon. Okay, Nia, so it's now 2014 and you are graduating and you're heading off to John Brown University. How'd you pick John Brown? So, I initially found out about the school because CDA did this college tour thing for freshmen and sophomores.

They would, God bless the administrators, they would take a lot of us and pack us up in a bus and take us on a two or three-day trip. I think it was over spring break. Wow.

And we would go and hit five or six different schools, and the intent was to start getting you to think about college and show you a wide variety of what is out there, big, small, public, private. Yeah. And so, JBU, John Brown University, was one of the schools on that trip.

It's in Northwest Arkansas. Even though I was in Dallas, not that far away, I'd never heard of it, so that was my first exposure to it. But when we were there for the group visit, going into classes, went to chapel, met different people and professors, there's just something about the school that really struck me.

It's hard to explain, but I felt a certain draw to it. And then when it came around to actually having to apply places, of course, I applied senior year, but I also looked at other places in the DFW Metroplex and Oklahoma and Arkansas. I would say a decent mix of public and private.

You really looked, I mean, what an amazing bus tour. You really looked hard at college. This was not a casual decision, it sounds like.

Oh, yeah. I mean, that was, again, to try to wet your mouth and get people to think about what is even out there. And then obviously did a lot of research and exploration on my own.

But then when it came down to, you know, where should I go? That was made very obvious by God blowing open the doors with scholarship money and making it very clear, this is where I want you to go. I love how God is associated with scholarship. Well, clearly the door has to be open and those are very practical reasons as well.

Well, that sounds wonderful. Well, again, I want to jump now to kind of where you are today. And then I know some of your decision of John Brown and the major you picked is influence.

So bring people up to current day. What are you doing right now? Currently, I work as an engineer in the utility industry. I help develop new transmission lines.

And they're the really big ones that you see along the highway kind of thing. Wow. Well, those are really important because we probably wouldn't be podcasting if those utility lines weren't working.

So you're doing something quite essential for all of us. How did you... Okay. So fill in the gap, John Brown, and now working in this very important industry.

What was the path or did you already... You mentioned STEM earlier. You mentioned an interest in science, engineering. So you kind of already had a bent towards engineering, right? Yes.

When I was looking at colleges and majors, I'd pretty much decided I wanted to do engineering. And I was thinking maybe electrical, just because I seem to really gravitate to the electrical stuff that we did briefly in high school physics. And so that was at least where I wanted to start with looking at my college career and then see where it took.

So that was pretty decided as far as looking for colleges. And then when I got to school into the classes, I definitely enjoyed it. It was challenging, obviously, because it's engineering.

But the coursework I felt like was interesting on a practical level, especially once I got into the upper levels. And then really junior, senior year where I started taking some electives,

specifically on power systems is where I started getting interested. Okay, maybe utilities would be interesting, what I would want to get into.

And then I ended up doing an internship at a utility company, which kind of confirmed, yeah, okay, I do find this interesting. Now it's just what aspect of it do I think I want to do. And then I ended up initially out of college at a place called Southwest Power Pool, which is in Little Rock.

They're like the air traffic controllers of the electric grid. They don't own any poles or wires, but they very much help direct and manage day-to-day and long-term usage of the grid. So conceptually, that sounded really interesting to me.

And then it also helped that I had a lot of college buddies who went there. So I was able to get the real scoop of what's your job like, what are you doing day-to-day and some offline information. I'm so tempted right now to ask about the stability of the grid and all that, but I won't because we don't have time, because I am really interested in that.

But to take on or stay in the topic at hand, what I love about where you've ended up as a career is that, again, I think the stigma that so often that accompanies the classical Christian school perception is that this is a great education for the kids that are more bookish, that love the humanities, that maybe want to grow up and work in a more liberal arts type of capacity. What you're describing is clearly a different direction. So how did your education, K-12, prepare you for your professional work in engineering and in the sciences? Yeah.

So while we maybe didn't have a full-on STEM magnet sort of program, I do believe that what we learned as far as how to learn was very much a foundational building block that then enabled me to then go to engineering school and still do well. The ability to self-study and self-teach to a certain degree, how to work with classmates. So we've talked about sometimes you're in a class setting where you get stuck with a difficult situation, being able to navigate that.

And things like time management, where you've got tons of projects. Which one do I do first? How do I manage professor expectations and what I can actually deliver? And teammate relationships. All of that still has to be a muscle that's flexed and grown over other classes and as you're in elementary, middle, and high school.

So that way then when you're given a different situation, you can pivot and use those base understandings and learnings. Well, that is a confirming of things that I hear all the time, which is that the perception is you have to be building robots throughout high school to even have a career like you're describing. What I hear often is that the problem is that the tech that built the robot you were using in high school is now completely antiquated and there's totally new AI-driven things out there.

So what you said is I think spot on, which is your ability to work hard, problem solve, discern through uncertainty. That adaptability is so valuable because you're going to constantly be

experiencing change around you. So that's very affirming.

Well, in our last few minutes, if you just had a moment to speak to a room of school leaders, administrators, what words of advice, encouragement would you give them? Well, I would say first to the parents, what you're doing is commendable and don't give up when it seems hard. The experience that I had definitely was not without sacrifices. I remember very vividly that there were many years where I had baggy school shirts because then I had to be able to wear it for a few years or I had to wear the men's so that way my brother could wear it the next year.

Things where my parents were very strategic about how do we make this work, but it was a sacrifice I think that was worth it. And similarly for the administrators and the educators, it's certainly not the easiest path because we know that the world offers things that are way easier. But quite frankly, the word of God and truth is worth the extra hours, the extra sacrifice, the extra conversations that you maybe have to have with students and parents to explain, okay, why are we teaching this curriculum? Why is it important? All of those are very, very worth having.

And it's so important for the students that you're working with and the next generation that they're trained and equipped to think critically, thinking back to the last thing that we were talking about, being able to rightly divide the word of truth, understand what scripture says, but then also apply that adequately to then the world around us, not just in your job and what problems you get thrown at, but then life situations as well. Those are some great words of encouragement. Yeah, I appreciate you giving that perspective because I think those of us who are in this movement and running a school every day, it's kind of easy to kind of keep your head down in that challenge, whether the challenge is as a student or as a parent, as you alluded to, or as an educator.

And I love the kind of stepping back a bit and going, well, let's talk about what this looks like 12 years later. And I really appreciate your affirming the work that the folks listening do every day, parents and educators. And I'm so grateful to hear your story and that you're flourishing out there.

And I can't wait to see where God takes you. We'll have to have you back at your 20th year anniversary. Oh no.

2034. So hopefully the grid will still be up by then. So I'm going to, if I have any flickering in my lights, I'm going to expect great things from you to keep us in this crazy world.

What you're doing is so important. So thank you for pouring yourself into some of these practicals, keeping the lights on, literally. I appreciate that.

Well, thank you for having me on and letting me share a little bit of my story and experience as well. You're welcome. I'm going to make a note.

I think it's year 2034. We will be following up with you here on the 20 year. Okay.

Let me put it on my calendar. Okay. Put that on the calendar.

All right. Well, blessings to you. Thanks so much for your time.

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See you back next week.