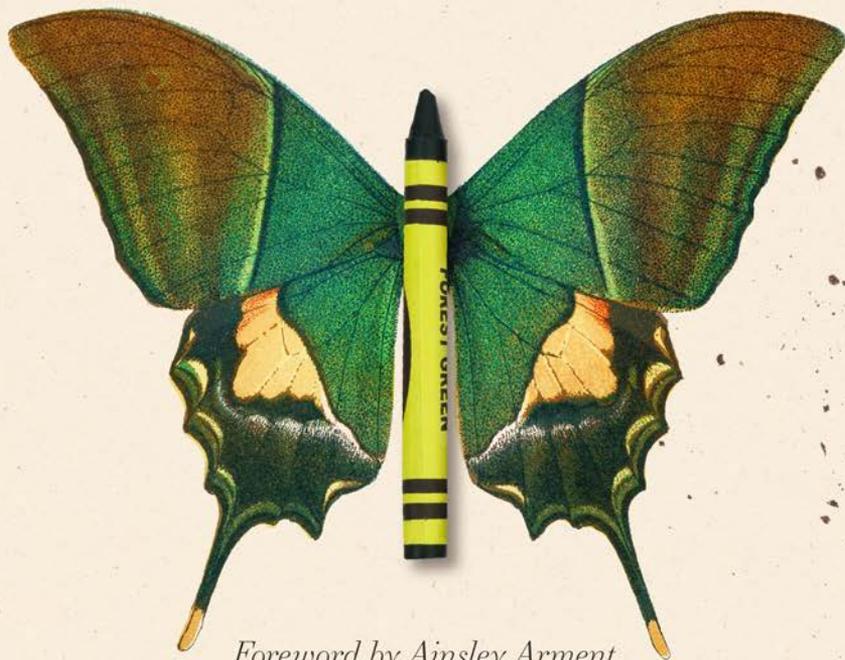


*Discover How Charlotte Mason's
Revolutionary Ideas on Home Education
Can Change How You & Your Children
Learn & Grow Together*



Foreword by Ainsley Arment

Modern Miss Mason

LEAH BODEN

Leah companions us as a friend leading us through the profound ideas of educating our children, loving them well, drawing out their intellects, and recognizing their potential. This book will gently encourage you that you are exactly the mother your children need. Then she equips us to move forward with confidence. Highly recommended.

SALLY CLARKSON, author of many inspiring books, including *Awaking Wonder*, and host of the podcast *At Home with Sally*

The friend and mentor that you have always wanted at your side as you educate your children, Leah's book will speak life into your home learning. Both encouraging you and giving you the practical tools that you need to bring a Charlotte Mason-inspired education to your own home, Leah reveals the remarkable wisdom and philosophy of a Charlotte Mason education. This book truly is the *For the Children's Sake* of our time.

LYNN SEDDON, founder of Raising Little Shoots

What a joy it is to remember that children are born persons, that a little masterly inactivity creates space for learning, and that a feast of ideas is the true animating force of education. I wanted to linger on these pages remembering my children's homeschool journey with Charlotte Mason as a guide. In this timely new book, Charlotte is revealed as a whole person whose ideas are here to stay—ideas validated by a century of research since! *Modern Miss Mason* is the Charlotte Mason book for our era. Boden captures both the essence of Charlotte's revolutionary approach to education while liberating her from ideological hot takes that leave parents overwhelmed and self-critical. Written with a lyrical voice, sharing a wide array of fascinating examples and personal experiences, Boden offers the weary parent and home educator a cozy nook to relax, reflect, and recharge with Charlotte's comforting voice to guide us.

JULIE BOGART, author of *The Brave Learner* and founder of BraveWriter.com

Modern Miss Mason is a beautiful call to freedom in our literature-based homeschool. Leah Boden offers inspiration to take the life-giving philosophy of Charlotte Mason and adapt it to our own interests and callings, so that instead of being bound by a rigid framework, we are given the tools to lay a feast of learning. In *Modern Miss Mason*, Leah helps us curate an education for our children that will empower them to be lifelong learners and will bring us joy in the process.

JENNIFER PEPITO, author of *Mothering by the Book*

Leah is a wise mentor and gentle guide who leads her reader into a way of engaging with education that is also a real immersion in wonder, imagination, and joy. Her work here is a gift as she offers a way of learning and education that will craft rich, rooted souls.

SARAH CLARKSON, author of *This Beautiful Truth* and *Book Girl*

Like a breath of fresh air! Free of the usual “musts” and “shoulds,” Leah Boden lovingly invites us to the Charlotte Mason philosophy, an education and life where everyone is welcome.

DR. GEMMA ELIZABETH, writer and podcaster, *Our Muslim Homeschool*

Leah invites us all to become modern Miss Masons, and I’ve never felt more inspired to do so. She seamlessly weaves the inherent freedom of a living education into each chapter while describing the inner workings of a lifegiving home. I feel seen, known, and valued as Leah expands the bounds of tradition to embrace Charlotte Mason’s principles within the context of today’s vibrant family life.

AMBER O’NEAL JOHNSTON, author of *A Place to Belong: Celebrating Diversity and Kinship in the Home and Beyond*

Modern Miss Mason breathed excitement and inspiration into me while simultaneously enveloping me in peaceful confidence. In her own beautiful way, Leah showed me how Charlotte Mason’s ideals could have a profound effect on my children, their education, and my mothering. My only wish is that I could have had this book at the very start of my motherhood journey! *Modern Miss Mason* is a gift that will impact whole families for many years to come.

GRETA ESKRIDGE, author of *Adventuring Together: How to Create Connections and Make Lasting Memories with Your Kids* and *100 Days of Adventure: Nature Activities, Creative Projects, and Field Trips for Every Season*

Leah Boden’s lovely book and lovely life embody all that Charlotte Mason stood for over 100 years ago. Her deep understanding of Charlotte’s principles and her commonsense approach to real children make this book just the new vision we have needed to continue passing these ideas to generations to come.

CINDY ROLLINS, Morningtimeformoms.com

Modern Miss Mason

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LEAH BODEN



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This book is dedicated to my husband, Dave, who voluntarily entered my world and sought to find his own understanding of Charlotte Mason's work in support of mine.

Also, to my children: Nyah, Joel, Micah, and Sienna-Raine, who have patiently pioneered Charlotte's educational ideas alongside me.



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A Note to the Reader

I've never been one for titles, either being given one or using them for others. (There are, of course, exceptions; anyone who has worked tirelessly for a PhD gets "Doc" from me, whether they like it or not.) However, I am an advocate of honour being given where honour is due. I suspect the two hundred pages of words you're about to read give Charlotte Maria Shaw Mason the absolute credit and dignity she deserves, so I also think you'll forgive my impertinence for referring to her as "Charlotte" throughout this book!

Modern Miss Mason isn't an academic paper, so I wanted to avoid applying the much-used "Mason" as her title throughout my writing. And as beloved as the name is, I also wanted to avoid focusing too much on her marital status by referring to her continuously as "Miss Mason." Charlotte has become a friend, a true mentor, someone whose work and words have walked alongside my mothering and educating journey for many years. So, there we have it: Charlotte.

And though she be but little, she is fierce.

SHAKESPEARE, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Foreword

I had never heard of Charlotte Mason when I started homeschooling twelve years ago. I was only familiar with the big box curriculums and reading regimens I assumed all good homeschoolers used.

But it soon became apparent that homeschooling and I were never going to make it if something didn't change. I needed our daily practices to align with the values of my heart.

I knew that reading great literature with my children created meaningful connection and opened the door for incredible conversations. I knew that giving them plenty of time in nature awakened their senses and opened a whole new world of discovery and exploration. And I knew that play was a masterful way of learning, that late is better than too early, and that childhood was worth preserving.

I also knew that I couldn't stick to a curriculum to save my life.

The books were wonderful, but everything else felt too scripted. I found myself coming up with creative lessons on the fly each day, despite the huge investment I had made in all those resources.

But then one beautiful fall day, I was sitting in the backyard talking to my friend Stephanie on the phone. My kids were building a

teepee out of branches, and I was relishing the freedom this lifestyle offered us.

I told Stephanie about our recent adventures and favorite activities together, which included nature journaling, handcrafting, and visiting museums. I confided to her that I was skipping the worksheets and textbooks.

She said, “You’re so Charlotte Mason.”

I had no idea what she meant by that, but I jotted down the name to research later. When I did, I was forever changed by what—or shall I say *who*—I discovered.

Charlotte’s writings embodied everything I believed in my heart about education but had not been able to articulate. Her insight into childhood affirmed everything I had sensed when I observed my kids. She was able to see that children need wonder and “a quiet growing time” all while holding the capacity for a rich thought life and for grasping meaning from books and experiences.

From that day forward, Charlotte, my children, and I set out upon a journey together. We devoured living books, took our nature journaling supplies to local parks, and spent countless hours in nature, allowing curiosity to be our guide. She not only gave me permission to nurture childhood, but she also empowered me to follow my mothering instincts.

In fact, it was Charlotte who inspired a whole movement I started called Wild + Free. Through my work with this beautiful homeschool community, I met Leah Boden.

My friendship with Leah came about, as many relationships do in these modern times, on social media. I was captivated by this lovely English woman living out the principles of an early twentieth-century Charlotte Mason education in the twenty-first century from her own home in Coventry. Her book-lined school cabin tucked behind her house became famous in online communities such as Wild + Free.

And we followed her to her new home by a park where she takes her morning walk every day and regales us with stories of the seasons and sounds of birds in her iconic British accent.

Leah once captivated over a thousand ladies at our Wild + Free conference in Franklin, Tennessee, by reading a passage from *The Secret Garden* in its original Yorkshire dialect. Her inspiring presentation left us speechless and had us all clamoring to return home to read the book aloud to our children once more.

Leah seeks to live an authentic life, to be a student of life, and she follows Charlotte's advice to "do for herself as she would do for her children." She fosters her own growth and knowledge as she seeks to encourage her children to do the same.

I often receive messages from Leah when she visits the Lake District where Charlotte Mason once lived and where Beatrix Potter imagined the world of Peter Rabbit. Leah has read Charlotte's original texts in Ambleside where William Wordsworth once worked and where Charlotte established her House of Education.

This book could just as easily be called *Leah of the Lake District*.

Although Charlotte Mason greatly honored motherhood and offered many an exhortation for mothers throughout her texts, she did not have any children of her own. Leah, unlike Charlotte, is a mother. She understands the great challenge that is being both parent and educator.

Leah is truly a modern Miss Mason because she understands how to integrate Charlotte's principles into our messy, modern-day mothering life. She knows how to balance the ideals of Charlotte's methods within the realities of our complex twenty-first century world.

Leah believes, much like Charlotte did over a hundred years ago, that our job is to cultivate an environment in which our children thrive. To create the kind of homeschools our children need, not the ones in our heads.

It's not easy to homeschool in a society that assesses the merits of education based on the volume of information accumulated, which is precisely what makes Charlotte Mason a true renegade. When I read her works, I find the principles inside aren't antiquated ideas we hope to apply today but rather they are ahead of her time. Perhaps they even transcend time.

You see, people have and always will seek to measure, assess, and put children in a box. We like things neat and tidy, predictable, controllable. But children's minds, hearts, and souls are anything but orderly. They are wild and full of wonder. Curious and full of questions. Passionate and full of possibilities.

If there is one thing children teach us, it is that learning is not linear, and the building blocks of education are not facts and figures but knowledge and ideas.

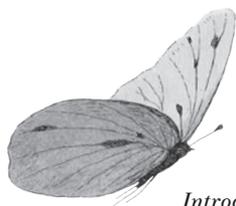
While several homeschooling pioneers in the US have shed light on the beauty of a Charlotte Mason education over the past thirty years, I believe the modern Miss Mason herself is here for such a time as this.

There is something uniquely compelling about Leah Boden's relationship with Charlotte Mason as an educator in the UK and the fresh perspective she offers us as we endeavor to honor childhood, education, and motherhood in the midst of modern culture. Leah's understanding of Miss Mason's words and ways is a beautiful, ever-growing, ever-evolving work in and of itself. But it is transforming the way home educators experience the joy, awe, and wonder of learning.

Hers is a voice for our generation.

Hers is a message for the world.

Ainsley Arment
Founder of Wild + Free



Introduction

Walking with Charlotte

*It may be that the souls of all children are waiting for
the call of knowledge to awaken them to delightful living.*

CHARLOTTE MASON, *A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION*

It's 1:50 on a Tuesday afternoon, and the remains of the morning are sprawled across the schoolroom table: books piled up, a scattering of coloured pencils, a couple of notebooks, and an art gallery postcard of Walter Langley's *Never Morning Wore to Evening but Some Heart Did Break*. Even after over fifteen years of homeschooling and four children, we still haven't perfected this tidying-up-after-lessons thing. My younger two children have helped themselves to lunch, I'm brewing my fourth cup of tea of the day, and I quickly check my appearance in the mirror as I'm about to go on a video call!

At 2 p.m. I have a coaching call with Holly from Ohio. We've never met before, but I know from her questionnaire that she has three children under nine, she's been homeschooling for four years, she's halfway through reading Charlotte Mason's first volume *Home Education*, and pre-children she was a history teacher. We've agreed on some talking points before we get on the call. I press start on the Zoom call, and her name appears in the waiting room; I take a deep breath and check that

my hair doesn't look too scary and that the angle of the camera masks the morning's destruction of our learning space.

Our faces appear on the screen, and I smile my biggest smile to welcome her into this strange digital space. Then I raise my mug of tea to show it's all quite relaxed here and say, "Holly, it is so lovely to meet you. How are you doing?" We exchange pleasantries and begin by working through her preconversation questionnaire before we settle into what she really came for.

"So, Holly, tell me about your homeschooling. What are you doing well?"

Silence.

Holly's eyes are big, and I can see a slight panic on her face as she wasn't expecting this question.

I give her time and tell her it's okay, and she eventually says, "Well, I don't know. I guess I'm good at reading aloud to my children. We love our daily walks around the local park, I'm slowly figuring out the best places to buy living books, and I'm finally getting to share my love of history with my children, and they're not bored!"

We laugh, and I respond, "It sounds like you're doing a really good job."

I see the tears fill up in her eyes. No one has told her that in four years.

In her book *Dare to Lead*, sociologist and author Brené Brown states, "I know my life is better when I work from the assumption that everyone is doing the best they can."¹ I've tried to view every woman who comes to me to learn more about homeschooling and Charlotte Mason through this lens. When I speak to them with kindness and understanding, I see them begin to grow and develop in amazing ways. Between the lines of every questionnaire I've read, in the undertones of every conversation I've conducted, the plea is the same.

Every mother is calling out for confidence.

From Humble Beginnings

I was never the girl who picked her baby names by the age of thirteen, dreamed of motherhood, planned to homeschool, or who had a four-ring binder full of magazine articles in readiness for the perfect wedding. I walked the era of teenage heartache and angst but quickly learnt at a young age to hold life lightly, with gratitude and with great intention. After graduating with a somewhat disappointing degree classification (which you'll read about in chapter 10), I set sail for the Americas (or rather, jumped on a plane to St. Louis—but that sounds much less romantic). There, I embarked on a yearlong faith-based programme equipping me in leadership, preaching, campus ministry, and a myriad of other skills that I'm sure I've used here and there over the years. I wiped the floor with my whole cohort in the "Preach-off," and as much as that triumph rates very highly in my memories of my year in Missouri, little did I know that a seed would be sown there that would change my life forever.

It was probably on a Friday, because great things happen on Fridays; they were serving sloppy joes in the associated daycare cafeteria, and my friend Pam and I headed down there to grab lunch. Pam was on staff, was from St. Louis, and had the most beautiful red hair that you had ever seen. She knew everyone, knew what was going on, and most importantly, knew what sloppy joes were!

As we headed to the small kitchen area, a group of older-looking children (older than the daycare children) were milling around in the corridor. Pam knew them and stopped to chat.

"Hey guys, what's up? This is my friend Leah. She's from England."

One of the girls looked me right in the eye, smiled, and replied, "Hello, Miss Leah, pleased to meet you. How are you enjoying your time in St. Louis?"

I kind of stuttered my reply, as I'd never been addressed by a child in this way before. Pam went on to talk to them about a book they

were reading; they discussed mutual friends, passed on their regards to each other's parents, and were on their way.

As Pam and I sat down on plastic chairs at the white, metal-legged banqueting tables to a feast of ground beef on bread, I said, "So, who were those children and how do I get one?"

Pam replied, "They're homeschooled but come here to DaySpring a couple of days a week to take subjects they may not do at home."

To which I replied, "They're what?"

For the remaining time left in our lunch break, whilst I was sipping iced water and wishing there was something else for lunch, Pam told me about homeschooling. I was wide eyed and ready to learn, not quite realising that five years later as a wife and new mother to our baby daughter Nyah, I would return to that conversation.

I never ate sloppy joes again.

Remembering St. Louis

Fast-forward to the early 2000s. I had two children at this point, and my friends and I were discussing baby clothes and wooden toys. Then we got onto the topic of school places. Whenever we discussed this, I couldn't shake the conversation Pam and I had in the cafeteria that day, and moreover, the impact the children had on me. I'd bat the thought of it off frequently like an annoying fly, as my husband Dave and I hadn't even discussed it, nor did I know anyone who had embarked on homeschooling in England.

Nyah was given a spot in the local primary school, and with that niggling itch of "something isn't quite right," I went about preparing her to start. I'd begun reading blogs about homeschooling; one of our friends had started by now, and my curiosity was growing. The day came for Nyah to start pre-school. She was dressed in a little grey skirt, a white polo shirt, and a red jumper embroidered with the school logo. The school was not even a five-minute walk from our home, so with

her empty red book bag in one hand and my hand gently holding the other one, we set off together to embark on her new adventure. I wasn't teary, I wasn't anxious; Nyah even had a skip in her step, and we chatted as we walked, but I knew, I just knew I didn't want to do this.

In Comes Charlotte

I had so many tabs open on our green Dell laptop that I was sure I was about to cause system overload. I had searched everything from "Is homeschooling legal?" through to "Do homeschooled kids get into university?" I was pregnant with our third child, and between playing Mozart to him in the womb and emailing Dave links to a slew of blog posts about why we should homeschool, I was ravenously reading everything I could get my hands on about teaching my children at home.

Somewhere between the Post-it Notes, computer tabs, folded pages in books, and conversations with friends (who were now homeschooling), I was introduced to Charlotte Mason.

From my first reading about her, I loved how my early (blog) teachers portrayed Charlotte's take on life and education. These simple articles revealed Charlotte's holistic view of children, her freeing methods of finding and applying knowledge, and the vital place of parents in their learning journey. All my hope for my own children's childhoods to be filled with good literature, nature, beauty, and truth was staring at me from blogspot.com! I knew straight away I'd found a suitable travel companion.

We wanted the opportunity to home educate to give our children the chance to learn according to their own stage, not necessarily their age. We wanted to explore a world of learning without standardised testing, star chart reward systems, or classroom seating plans. We wanted to offer our children a wide and varied curriculum of subjects; for them to be able to have the time and space to explore their interests, grow slowly, and discover who they are in their own precious time.

We knew homeschooling would be a sacrifice—financially and time wise—but after many months of work, we were all in!

With Dave and me fully convinced, one million articles on homeschooling read, decisions made, and family told, Nyah wrapped up her one year's experience in school and we then set out on the adventure of a lifetime. The Boden Academy began!

Why Charlotte Mason?

Charlotte Mason's work and words matter. They mattered then, in the early twentieth century when she was moving and shaking ideas up in a stiff Victorian culture, and they matter now as we are submerged in a digital age which is distracting and diverging our attention from the past and quickly deeming old educational ideas out of date or irrelevant.

Charlotte breathed life and wonder back into childhood, and she opened the eyes of parent-teachers and the hearts of students.

Orphaned at seventeen, Charlotte found herself having to forge a path alone. Already experienced in self-education, she had her sights set on teaching, and with the help of supportive adults in her life she continued her journey of working and training to teach children. The Victorian classrooms of England appeared broken to Charlotte; children were raised to work down mines in coal pits and in factories rather than receiving education for life and delight. Charlotte was saddened to see this. She began to write about her findings, hold lectures about her research, and over time gathered a following of parents, teachers, and educational leaders intrigued by her idea of a "living education."

This revolutionary educator, who at the turn of the twentieth century was brave enough to push beyond the norms of educational and societal boundaries, made her mark as a leader in a time when women's voices in society were only just beginning to be heard.

Charlotte built a legacy that still manifests itself in homes and schoolrooms all over the world today. She was an author, speaker, and

businesswoman; a teacher and a friend to many; but most of all, she was a faithful advocate for children—and she did all that she did for their sake.

I formed my own timeless bond with Charlotte whilst reading about her life and work. There was something about her approach that reminded me of my 1970s schooling in Pudsey, Leeds. It invoked memories of my childhood connections with nature tables, reading corners, and the freedom to explore outdoors. My initial explorations led me to mostly American websites, complex prescriptive curriculums, seemingly random things tagged with the words *Charlotte Mason*, and books packed with Victorian illustrations. I gleaned as much as I could whilst being slightly baffled that I couldn't find many British followers of this revolutionary British educator (we all found each other eventually). I decided that I would need to go back to the source to truly understand how to move her concepts from page to practice.

Before I knew it, Charlotte's six pink books on education lined my shelves and sat in my lap day after day. These original volumes have formed the foundation of my pedagogy ever since. Our family started slowly resting in a rhythm of nature observation, reading living books, and loving and telling back our tales of poetry, fables, and heroes. We filled pages with pictures of our history adventures; we scoured maps, recited verses, and copied out our favourite lines from our favourite lives. We didn't tick boxes, fill in paperwork, answer rows of questions, or prove what we knew, but instead began to feel alive in our learning together. It was not and still is not a perfect picture. I have come to realise there is no guarantee or magic formula for success, but I feel like we have found a framework for person-centred learning that works even in our modern world.

A Warm Welcome for All

Charlotte Mason designed her ideas to inspire an education for all. This means whatever your family circumstances, whatever the unique and complex needs of your children, and whatever your faith background is, you are welcome here. This is for you. Though she often addresses her advice to parents as a couple (as you will see in this book), I know single homeschooling mums and dads will benefit greatly from it as well.

Woven throughout Charlotte's words are the clear convictions of her faith and Christian practices. Whilst I share Charlotte's faith in Jesus Christ, my expression and experience of the Christian life looks quite different from hers. I didn't come to this pedagogy due to it being a *Christian* education; I was drawn to it because of the freedom I saw for a child's development, and I just so happen to also be a Christian.

Back in 1893, Charlotte visited the Spanish Chapel in Florence, Italy. On the wall of the chapel was a painting with the title *The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas*.² The image in the painting is often interpreted as showing the Spirit of God hovering above a myriad of great painters, philosophers, teachers, and educators, inspiring and guiding them to creatively express who they are and bring their contribution to the world. Charlotte wrote about this illustration, saying it depicted the *great recognition* that every educator is destined to make—namely, the recognition that at the deepest source of origin, God is the helper and educator of all mankind and the source of all creative expression. As a Christian, this idea is deeply meaningful to me—but I don't think it is meant to be a barrier for those who don't share my faith. Rather, it is a generous invitation for all to engage with the beauty of education—whether you have a religious background or not.

Like Charlotte, my faith is the cornerstone of my life, and therefore it cannot help but influence every practical, emotional, and relational thread that weaves through our family culture. But we have ultimately

established rhythms around faith and practice based on our own biblical convictions, not just the teachings of an educationalist. Whilst we can have heroes and inspirational figures pointing us to truth and freedom, we must go to the source of our own faith to find hope in our home. For me that ultimate person is not Charlotte but rather Jesus Christ. You get to decide who that will be for you.

It's important to me that anyone can come to *Modern Miss Mason* and find their place at the table. Whilst I'll never hide from you who I am or who I follow (you may find the odd Bible story used as an illustration dotted throughout), this book is a spacious place where hopefully you can kick your shoes off, help yourself to a cup of tea, and feel completely at home, whoever you are.

It's like Cooking!

Looking back on those early days of homeschooling discovery, I am reminded of the film *Julie and Julia*, directed by Nora Ephron. The movie tracks the stories of two women from different time periods told via flashbacks and defining moments. The 1950s narrative is about the life of the world-famous chef and cookbook writer Julia Child, played by the inimitable Meryl Streep. By contrast, the 2002 story line follows modern New York blogger Julie Powell, perfectly portrayed by Amy Adams, as she attempts to recreate Julia's delicious recipes in a contemporary context.

As Julie seeks to conquer every meal in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*³ from her tiny kitchen in just one year, she begins to form a sense of kinship with Julia Child even though they have never met. It doesn't matter that the modern recipes aren't perfect replicas of the past successes; what matters is the discovery of a generational and universal love of the process of cooking. It has been just like that for me as I have walked with Charlotte over the years. I have been inspired to learn with my children from the wisdom of the woman who pioneered before me.

Not that I have yet recreated in real life the words she laid down on the page, but I have tried to fill my home with the atmosphere and flavours of Charlotte's intentions.

Finding Your Freedom

Whilst writing about the value of Charlotte's methods for today, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay says, "Miss Mason's educational philosophy is not about what someone thought as a Victorian; it is not tied into the past, as if trying to hark back to a golden age. . . . These ideas, being true ones, have an unchangeable underlying pattern (form) and yet give freedom for individual life and practice."⁴

It is through these *unchanging underlying patterns and practices* that my family has navigated our own path and found true freedom. And freedom is the crucial word for me in what I want you to discover here. Whether you have come to this book as a Charlotte Mason newbie or as a homeschool veteran ready for a refreshing, I want to remind you that you are the expert on your own family. You know what's best for your context and culture. You may even be here and have no intention to educate your children at home at all, and I have no doubt you will find plenty of inspiration from these pages for how to build deeper learning connections with your children. I have always believed that the parent is the primary educator of their child, and they get to choose which parts of this responsibility they delegate to others for a season.

This book is your invitation into an adventure; a call to turn a corner on your already incredible journey of parenting and to see the fresh face of an age-old perspective on motherhood, childhood, and education. I believe you have a passion for mothering and are trying so hard to give your children a beautiful childhood. Whether your children are being taught by you or others, I trust that you are joyfully creating a home atmosphere that cultivates curiosity and wonder.

Let me take your hand and show you what I've seen and experienced firsthand through the work of Charlotte Mason. I'll suggest ways you and your children can explore learning through experiences, teach you vocabulary to describe your own learning journey, and help you practically incorporate Charlotte's life-giving philosophy into your home every day.

Charlotte may be a friend of yours already, or this may be your first meeting. May you find meaning in her work and words expressed through my story.

This book is not your how-to guide, but it will be both philosophical and practical. If you look across the internet, there are already huge amounts of readily available instruction on how to use Charlotte's methods; from prepared dictation to picture study. The challenge with this approach is that if we don't start with the big picture and understand the *why* behind the *what*, then we may become proficient at tasks but end up missing the point with our children.

This book is more of a *how to be* than a *how to do*, although I do help ground ideas through a series of "Mason Moments." I'm confident that you are all intelligent, innovative educators who are able to lovingly outwork what you need to in your individual context.

This book isn't a memoir, although I do share personal memories. It doesn't cover every idea, concept, and method, as I don't want to merely replicate the writings of Charlotte that are freely available to read. It's not an academic manifesto, and it most definitely isn't a curriculum. I'm not trying to prove that I'm an expert or that you should do it my way. In fact, I want to say quite the opposite; this book is a signed permission slip to do it your way. This is not a detailed map, but a travel journal to help you choose your own adventure.

Despite my obvious passion for her approach to life, this book isn't intended to be a shrine to Charlotte. Like you, I am free to exclude, include, agree, or disagree with any element of Charlotte's writing and

ideas. This doesn't dishonour her work or disrespect her personage; this honours *my* children and the family culture we're creating. She was a human being, albeit a brilliant one, but only human. I am wary of those who interpret her words into shouts of *must* and *should*. If the advice of ancient or modern experts becomes a shackle in our homes, it loses its purpose and intent. We are creative, progressive parents who can weave innovative twenty-first-century ideas and outwork our own application of Charlotte's methods.

We are all Modern Miss Masons. This is about your story, not mine.

Thankfully, you don't need a master's degree in education to start implementing this approach: Charlotte wanted every mother to understand what is possible for them no matter their starting point. You don't have to live somewhere amazing like the Lake District in the UK to put these ideas into practice (but if you do, I am very jealous and would like an invite). You don't have to wait for your ideal set-up or circumstances; you just need to have your own vision. Let's not overthink our life with our children; we have the privilege to walk alongside them as they look, learn, and grow. Let's not compare or complain when our bookshelves aren't colour coded, our printables aren't always bound, or we don't have a rotating display showing off this season's nature finds.

Our family began home educating with very little money (I had to sell books to buy books) and very little space, but we had a huge amount of passion and creativity to use what we had to plant the seeds of a life-giving education. From the moment a child is placed in your arms, whether through birth or adoption, you begin the important role of facilitating their education experience. If ever I ask someone the question "How long have you been home educating?" and the parents answer, "From the beginning," then I know I've found a kindred spirit!

Reframing Childhood, Education, and Motherhood

Charlotte's faithful tenacity to serve children has not just influenced my own homeschooling practice, but it has reframed my understanding of childhood, education, and motherhood. Throughout this book we will unpack these three areas and reframe our understanding through the lens of the Charlotte Mason philosophy.

Childhood

Charlotte has helped me reframe my perspective on childhood by recognising that each child is unique, and thus we can plan their learning journey accordingly. As parents we can create atmospheres, rhythms, and environments that help inspire our children's lives. When we capture the attention of our children, it will help capture the attention of their hearts. And if we can just have the faith to stand back and let children feast on the table of learning we lay before them, it can change their childhood forever.

Education

Through the application of Charlotte's approach to education I have come to understand that we can use tools like narration to encourage personal relevancy and to deepen the child's connection with any subject. We can find treasure in living books that stays with us for a lifetime. We can go outside to explore nature and allow it to be our teacher. As we expose our children to the best of music, art, theatre, and literature, we not only help create lifelong learners but enrich their lives for the better.

Motherhood

Charlotte has inspired me to reframe my perspective on motherhood by recognising that when mothers go out to play and refresh their own bodies and souls, it leads to happier households. We need to see

that when we invest in our own minds and stay intellectually alive, we are investing in our children. As mothers discover the power of community, we don't just overcome individual isolation but keep moving the whole Mason movement forward together. By laying a consistent, firm foundation today, we are preparing to impact the next generation tomorrow.

It is these wonderful ideas about childhood, education, and motherhood that we will explore in depth in the three sections of this book.

More Than Just the Ingredients

During this writing process I have conducted countless hours of research beyond my repeated reading of Charlotte Mason's volumes to add flavour and variety to your experience. Some of this work has influenced large elements of the chapters you'll read, some just made it into a sentence. I have found that reading widely around Charlotte Mason's work (practitioners' perspectives, academic papers, modern books on education/habits, etc.) only deepens my understanding of her ideas and has enabled me to put the philosophy into practice uniquely and creatively. My hope is that reading this book does that for you.

Quite ironically, I encountered one of the most poignant articles I read in this process whilst at the hairdressers. I was reading my favourite magazine called *The Simple Things*. The article I found myself reading was about the secret of Syrian cooking:

There are two indispensable ingredients in Syrian cooking. Sumac, the deep-red spice brought to Syria on the Silk Road, and *nafas*, which literally means "breath"—but in relation to food means "the art of cooking where ingredients combine harmoniously." *Nafas* is knowing how to get the best from the season's harvest or how to use a perfectly ripe tomato. *Nafas* is the highest compliment you can give a Syrian cook. *Nafas*

is found in the heart of the person at the stove and in the essence of a well-prepared dish.⁵

Upon exploring this concept further, I discovered a *New York Times* article about how the heart and soul of Syrian cooking is derived from childhood memories; the *nafas* here is described as “energy” and “intimacy,” and is all about what the individual imparts to the food.

A concept used mostly to describe home cooks, not chefs, *nafas* speaks to a certain intimacy that stretches beyond the physical attributes of a dish. It is about the person preparing it, and what she imparts to the food. It is the time and energy spent selecting and preparing the ingredients; the patient dance back and forth with seasonings until every flavor is just right; the generous presentation and warm hospitality; and, above all, the love of cooking and the desire to feed others.⁶

This beautiful word, *nafas*, has helped me understand my ongoing journey with Charlotte Mason as a growth agent for how I view motherhood, childhood, and education. My aim has always been to learn all I can, then bring the elements together harmoniously.

I have come to realise that homeschooling, like Syrian cooking, is more than just the sum of its ingredients. We can have all the Charlotte Mason books on our shelves, and we might even read them. We can share the same pretty planning pages, curriculum choices, or joy in using old educational methods, but as the saying goes, “the proof is in the pudding.” The heart and soul of moving freely comes from slowly sitting with the tools and ideas, growing alongside our children, and observing their whimsical ways. We learn to freely accept what comes naturally and reject what doesn’t fit with our unique family expression and values. Educational *nafas* is found in the heart of the person in the

homeschool room and in the essence of a well-prepared educational feast.

When I talk about finding your freedom, I might be misunderstood as implying you should have no structure or intention, or even be misconstrued as being against using set plans or curriculums. Those who know me and have followed along with my journey over the past two decades of being a parent know that this isn't necessarily the case! I'm all about the "whole person" experience for the parent and child. I'm an advocate for you not being baffled or bound by the *shoulds* of the educational world; rather I would encourage you to be well read, informed, inspired, and led by the family and context you experience every day. Therefore, I want you to embrace *how to be* before you commence with your *what to do*. I am not against using other people's recipes, but I am for you finding your *nafas*.

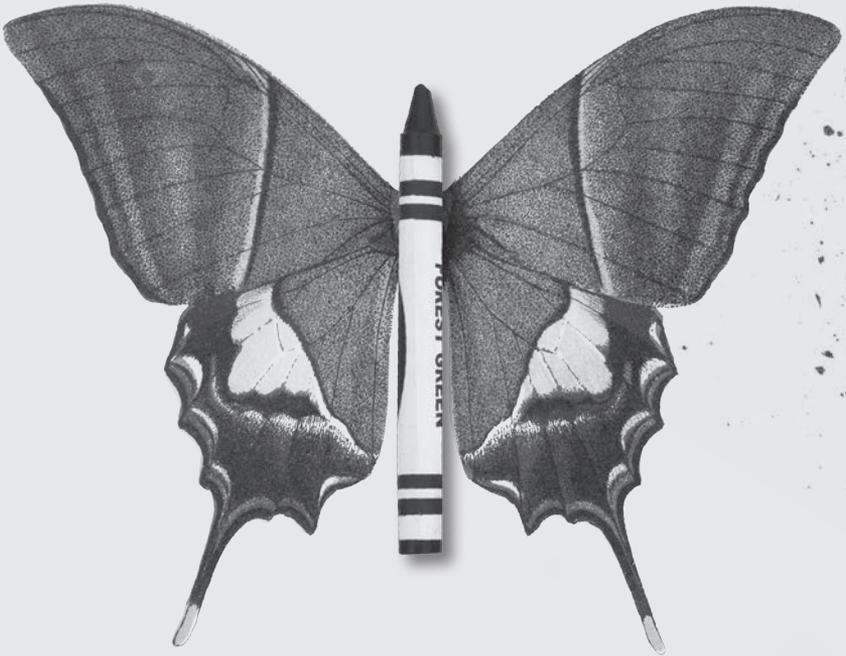
The future of Charlotte Mason's ideas won't be found in a prepackaged curriculum, someone else's ideas, or printed sheets that can be ticked off. These elements may help set us on our way, but finding our freedom and firming up the future for ourselves and the next generation lies with the "home cooks," not the experts and academics. It's about your heart, soul, and physical preparations and what you impart to your child's learning days. It's the time and energy you spend selecting and preparing the environment, the books, and the experiences. It's that patient dance back and forth, from one child to another, from one subject to the next, until every aspect is placed with peace and offered with warm hospitality. The secret ingredient is found in the love of the family and your desire to lay out the opportunity for a unique but incredible, full life for your children.

My greatest hope is that no matter how you find your way, what you use to guide your days, or what you hang your rhythms upon, you too can find your *nafas* with the help of this book.

Through these pages, may you truly find the confidence to continue.

Part 1

Reframing Childhood





Chapter 1

Raising Humans

Children are born persons.

CHARLOTTE MASON, *A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION*

Charlotte Mason's first transforming principle argues that children are born persons. Each child is born unique with character, innate personality, gifts, and raw abilities. As parents and educators, we must learn to be curious about who they are in order to help them become who they are destined to be.

Changing Our View of Children

Every baby has an origin story. The day my parents brought me home from the hospital for the first time, lightning struck our next-door neighbor's chimney. It was a hot August afternoon in 1975, and I had clearly made an electric first impression on the world! I am lovingly told that I was born with a tooth, a gorgeous mop of hair, and was considered "a good weight." This was the beginning of my story, and my parents have retold their first impressions of me affectionately time and time again.

Each of my four children has their unique tale of arrival, which they still secretly love to hear about. There are story beats we reutter around birthdays and milestones to mark their starting point. For my first-born daughter, it was me blurting out spontaneously, “I knew it was you!” through exhausted tears as I held her for the first time. For our youngest son, it was the midwife’s loud exclamation upon his sudden entrance into our living room, declaring with excitement, “Wow, he has so much hair!” My husband even proudly recounts that he cut the umbilical cord of each of our children, as if it allows him to take credit for the births themselves. He somehow edits out the fact that straight after our third child was born, he went down with a fever and was laid in bed for three days straight.

Understanding our origin story is important for shaping our sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. Whether our story starts with tears of pain or joy, most of our personal history is passed down to us like an oral tradition or a family recipe. In a culture where parents live-stream moment-by-moment accounts of their child’s birth across social media, it is comforting to be reminded what an intimate experience it can be to hold our offspring in our arms and tell them the tale of their birth.

Our journey into this world starts with us blindly unaware of ourselves. As our life story unfolds by oral recollection, the voices we listen to begin to draw out who we are and influence how we will play our part in the world. By contrast, when parents neglect the practice of recollection and storytelling, children may experience great pain whilst wrestling with a lack of identity, since it has not been shaped by a trusted parental figure. These initial years of a child’s life are critical in laying the foundation for the years to follow.

Charlotte believed the uniqueness of every one of our babies must be the foundation of reframing childhood, education, and motherhood. The first important principle that shaped her educational theory was the phrase: “Children are born *persons*.”¹ Out of the twenty

principles that her philosophy hinged on, none was considered more vital than this one.

The essence of the *born person* concept is that when a child comes into the world, they are not a project without a blueprint, a raw piece of wood to be whittled, or a lump of clay to be moulded. They are instead born as a *whole person*: full of life, personality, and the capacity and capability to engage with the world. In simple terms, every child comes with preloaded software that cannot be ignored or easily overridden. Each unique character is born with innate personality, a set of talents, gifts, and raw abilities. We must work with what the child has, not against it; or, in Charlotte's words, we "are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon, whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire."²

The born person approach sees children as complete human beings from the moment we hear their first cry. Rather than dictate who they should be, we learn to participate in who they already are. In this, we give children value and a voice. We honour them as human beings from day one, which has a transformational impact on both their present and future selves. This idea is crucial, as it shapes Charlotte's entire educational approach. Without viewing children as born persons, we cannot fully engage in her teachings.

I have had the privilege of guiding many mothers into home education over the years, and for any who desire to integrate the Charlotte Mason approach, I always start with the born persons idea.

Believing our children are born whole and as a complete person doesn't mean we suddenly let go, throwing our arms up in the air and exclaiming, "Whatever will be will be." As we hold that 8 lb., 3 oz. bundle of gorgeousness in our arms for the very first time, we're not just holding a person, but also the responsibility for their possibility. We can't control or manipulate their lives, but we can lay down tracks

of love, apply rich stimuli, and foster an environment for them to think and speak up, grow, and explore. Mothers are privileged to get a front-row seat at our born person's great unveiling.

Transforming Our Perspective on Education

Whilst there have been many modern advances in science, technology, and psychology since Charlotte Mason's day, current evidence continues to reinforce her notion that every child has an innate ability to think, to communicate, and to be curious as a fully formed human. However, it seems that society still needs reminders of this at times.

Parents may believe in principle that their child is uniquely formed, yet in practice they can succumb to society's pressure to dictate what their child needs to know and who their child needs to be. We default to teaching our children disconnected facts rather than helping them build a personalised knowledge base tailored to their own specific personality and future pathway.

Two children can emerge from the same public school with widely disparate results—demonstrating that the same input can lead to totally different outputs. Mass education has led to shortcuts and assumptions and a standardisation that doesn't work for every child, because the way every child learns is different. Rather than ignore differences and seek to homogenise childhood, we as parents and educators can instead become curious to understand the wonder of our child's diversity. In short, we study the child to help the child study. Many parents realise too late that their child does not fit the box they've spent years constructing for them. We can avoid this by attentively curating the atmosphere of a child's life to help draw out who he or she already is.

Back in the nineteenth century, children were supposed to be seen and not heard. The first modern education system had an inherent babysitting mentality, intimating that students' real value began when they entered the factory workforce or the local coal pit. Classrooms

were set up with the view that all children began at the same starting point. Educators aimed for a standardised outcome of information retention, not individualised learning.

Some parents today would argue that little has changed since the Victorian era. Some might say we still live in a babysitter society where institutions, digital technology, and even Sunday schools are seeking to do the work for us or, at the least, keep a child occupied, entertained, and busy until the child becomes useful. Yet having such low expectations of children leads to simplifying their learning environment. We can unintentionally keep children at a stereotypical age rather than an individual learning stage.

Our methodology is always a reflection of our ideology. We must ask ourselves, What do we really believe about the nature of children?

Whilst much of the Victorian era's education prepared young people for the workforce, school looked different for children of wealthy families. A governess would offer the upper-class children lessons in music and art and languages that, in turn, benefitted the child's education and understanding of the world. Meanwhile, the children in the lower classes received only the minimal basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

An important premise of the born person approach is that people of every background and status should have access to a wide curriculum and the freedom to search for knowledge. Each child is worthy of "a liberal education for all,"³ which includes a spacious environment to learn in, books and toys to explore for themselves, and adults around them ready to listen and engage with their learning journey.

In the last two decades of her life, Charlotte published volumes on education and poetry and wrote inspirational living books for children. She pioneered a national education union and started a training college for teachers and governesses in Ambleside, and her work was being recognised all around the world. Charlotte desired to bring a

transformational shift to the nature of education itself. She was on a mission to close the gap between the rich and poor, creating a system that worked for the whole of society, not just the handpicked elite. She wanted all children to be exposed to great art, inspiring music, and the best thinkers of the time. Every child should be offered the opportunity to feed their curiosity in whatever direction their natural inclinations might take them. Charlotte's questioning of the status quo was founded on her revolutionary thinking about children and their place in the world.

Charlotte knew if the educators, parents, and influencers changed what they thought about children, it could ultimately liberate generations to come. No matter if children came from wealth or poverty, they would know they were whole and they had a voice in the world. They would see they were free to learn from the same thinkers, writers, and creators as anyone else.

Adopting a born person approach deeply challenges our thinking and motives about education itself.

If you're visiting our home and need to use the bathroom facilities downstairs, you are required to walk through our home library/home-schooling space. One weekend a friend came to visit and noticed a few books still out and open from Friday's reading; she spotted *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare* by Edith Nesbit on the desk and exclaimed, "You read Shakespeare to your children already?" I quickly responded with a "Yes, why wouldn't I?" and began enthusiastically sharing the delights of the Shakespearean language and lessons from his stories. I would have gone on for longer until her body reminded her why she was walking through the library in the first place! Our conversation challenged my friend's ideas about her children being "too young" for seemingly advanced literature or ideas, yet a born person approach lays down limitations and opens up children to a more generous world of learning.

Within a few weeks my friend had bought a set of Shakespeare stories for her children, who were devouring them at bedtime.

Developing Childlike Curiosity about Children

As a young mother, I felt quite overwhelmed at the thought of raising and educating four different individuals.

In the first few weeks of homeschooling I discovered a Charlotte Mason–style programme that “everyone” seemed to be using. I scoured the website, created an Excel spreadsheet with each child’s name at the top of a column, and attempted to design a bespoke, individual timetable of study for each child. If I told you I got to week two, I’d be stretching the truth; I think by day three I opened my spreadsheet (already behind) and felt immediately overwhelmed at my own expectations. I closed my computer, told the children to grab their wellies and coats, and we headed to the park to explore the park instead. On returning we made hot chocolate and snuggled up around E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, followed by oral retellings, creative play, and the children enthusiastically asking, “Mum, when are we going to read the next chapter?”

What I learnt over time is that I could offer the same stimuli, read the same books, and ask the same questions of each of my children, but I couldn’t expect the same outcome. Each of my children interacted with themes, poets, composers, artists, and great thinkers with individuality. One would see the detailed background in a painting, whilst another would find hidden meaning in the wider picture. One would delight in dates, descriptions, and the details of a story, and another would focus on the behaviour of a character. As we give the same inputs, we learn much about who each child is by observing and hypothesizing why they express such different outputs.

Charlotte referred to the early developing years (we may know them as preschool) as a “quiet growing time.”⁴ This period of a child’s life is

full of accelerated learning and development. We see a child progress from a milk-hungry babe in arms to a walking, talking (opinionated) small human ready to take on the world. Charlotte encouraged us to stand back and allow these developmental stages to take place without ineffective parental prodding, pushing, or provoking. We learn to trust our children to learn on their own.

I was recently speaking to a first-time mother who was processing with me the wonder of watching a little human discover everything for the first time. “I’m just fascinated by her!” she exclaimed. “I could watch her forever.” The wonders of childhood and motherhood are so intrinsically intertwined. Just as a newborn child is curiously discovering their new environment, so we must develop curiosity about our children. It is from this place of wonder and attention that we can actively create an environment where they can fully become who they were born to be. As our mindset around children adjusts, our actions will inevitably follow.

No matter how long I have been a parent, I’m still fascinated by not only my children’s personalities and how they work (or don’t quite work) alongside mine, but I’m also fascinated by how my friends’ growing children develop before our eyes. A born person attitude changes how we celebrate children themselves, whether they are ours or not. I have a friend called Ann who is loved and adored by children. Whenever I am around her, I am always struck by how she talks about and to children. She refers to them as “little people,” looking them in the eye and giving them both value and a voice. This phrase “little people” acknowledges their need for protection but still marks their individual presence and personhood. No wonder the children love her so much—they always feel seen and heard around her.

The born person perspective has shaped all of my interactions with children; I now try to make it my mission to be interested in other people’s children, not just my own. Consider how often we default to

speaking babbling nonsense to a child or reducing them to decoration by saying, “Isn’t she cute,” and then move on with adult concerns and conversation. The children often sit around us rather than *with* us. We can build a positive parenting culture by talking to children directly and taking time to enter their world. Remember our opening story with Pam and the sloppy joes? The nature of the children I met that day in the cafeteria may indicate that the significant adults in their lives were acting on this advice.

When we ask a child how they are doing, we can build deeper connections with the child quickly. And when we ask fellow parents what they are enjoying about their children and what they notice about them, we motivate those parents to feel more curiosity themselves about their young ones.

We were recently spending time with another family, and after eating dinner in the garden, most of the younger children were engaged with outdoor games. Their youngest daughter, however, was more interested in hanging out with the adults. This three-year-old explorer began collecting unripe damson fruits that had fallen from a tree and bringing them to me. Any attempts at adult conversation were soon overtaken by child’s play. We sat and arranged the growing number of fruits on the table. Each time, she would slowly count them out and proudly announce the number to me with a grin on her face. This went on until we had over ten damson fruits laid out before us. The game only finished after we hid the fruit in different-shaped garden pots. This wonderful little girl was then happy enough to go and join her siblings. Nature had just given us a free lesson in mathematics. Meanwhile, I had a lesson from a young girl who was growing into an inquisitive, confident little person who would no doubt make use of whatever she could get her hands on in the future.

Attentively observing young personalities can help us foresee what kind of persons they might become as teens and adults. Charlotte

suggests that spotting our children's distinct character traits early helps us observe how their behaviours could have "possibilities for good and for evil."⁵ A tenacious stubbornness in a young child could either wreak havoc in future relationships, or it could be a catalyst for change in the world through social justice. Artist and dancer Stacia Tauscher is known for saying that, when considering our children's potential, "we worry about what a child will be tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."⁶ Our role is to help children navigate childhood today, whilst learning to discern who they are to help bring out the best in them in the future.

Such curiosity will lead to acknowledging our children's perspective on the world. My children are completely different from me; I love their growing personalities and characters, but I often find their differences stark. My children don't think like me and don't always see the world like I do, but that doesn't stop me from showing it to them. They are growing up in a world seemingly more complex than I ever experienced, but they are resilient and observant, and I am learning to pay attention to *their* world, so I get to walk alongside them in it.

Trusting That Seeds Will Bear Fruit

I've always wanted to live in a house that had fruit trees in the garden. My mother wisely mentored me not to wait until you buy the perfect house in the future, but rather just plant something right where you are. So, a couple of years ago, I planted cherry, plum, apple, and pear trees around our home. The trees are correctly labelled, and I've faithfully tended and watered them at the right time. And now I wait patiently for the blossoms to appear each spring. To be honest, thus far my only yield has been a couple of perfect-looking pears growing in readiness for an autumn harvest. But I haven't lost heart. The trees are growing, they are firmly planted and rooted, and I trust fruit will

come. I guess in both planting and parenting, trust plays a huge part in allowing fruit to come forth.

Take sunflower seeds, for instance. Every packet is labelled with detailed planting instructions. If we follow them correctly, we'll enjoy the fruit of our labour, but we can't change or control the outcome of the seed we planted. If you plant a sunflower seed, you'll eventually get a sunflower growing in your garden. If you plant an apple tree, you'll eventually get apples. There is no guessing game here; you get what you plant! We simply need to water what is already there. This is key to the born person approach to parenting and education. As Susan Schaeffer Macaulay puts it, "Do not see him as something to prune, form, or mold. This is an individual who thinks, acts, and feels. He is a separate human being whose strength lies in who he is, not in who he will become."⁷

During the summer months, I try to get into the daily routine of an early morning walk in the park that sits at our doorstep and is accessible by our very own secret garden gate. As the late June sun takes its place in the sky, the local wildflowers always catch my attention much more than linear, perfectly planted flower gardens. There's something endearing about the dispersal of scattered seed—the surprise of their varied shapes and colours and the freedom of their movement in the wind. The flowers stand strong and beautiful, feeding and nourishing both the bees and my soul every morning.

We can learn a valuable lesson about raising children from the wildflowers in our park. Many times, we obsess over how our children will turn out, as if our internal worry can somehow reorder their external behaviour. We try to overcontrol the "soil" of their environment to keep them from being choked by life's weeds. We endlessly try to prune and shape their growth to look according to our plan or the blueprint of culture. Yet the real planting of our children simply requires an

atmosphere of scattered love, some wildly colourful nurturing, and the ability to trust their roots will let them grow.

Cultivating Their Divine Spark

Christians believe that children (as all humans) are created *imago Dei*, in the image of God—a divine spark from the source of light. It's fair to say that the parents' mindset, convictions, and belief system will have a huge influence on how they apply Charlotte's principle that children are born persons. As Charlotte was a woman of faith, it would be remiss of me to describe her first principle without touching on her encouragement for us to never separate the life of a child from their Creator. She believed that from the moment of their divinely appointed entrance into this life, every child has instant access to God's world, to observe and interact with it in wide-eyed wonder.

Our convictions, faith based or otherwise, don't change the core of who the child is, but they do impact the atmospheres we create, the daily rhythms we lead our children in, and the feast of education we lay out. In this sense, it is important to know what we believe, as our personal mindset can help or hinder a child's growth.

Children often emulate what they see those around them doing. They pick up on our perspective. If we're sleepily going through the days, keeping children entertained or busy and counting down to bedtime, then our children will feel like an inconvenience. But if we're joyfully reading with them, engaging in their world, and relishing their company, they will see life is for them to live and interact with too.

Believing our children are "born persons" is liberating and comforting even when it becomes stretching and uncomfortable. It encourages a sense of awe and wonder as we stand back and watch their God-given potential unfold. Belief in who they are is the essence of this approach to raising humans. I can't control, I can't compare, and I must see them in the context of who they are, not through my idealised (or

rose-tinted) glasses. Through this lens, I am learning to let go but love deeper; love with hindsight and foresight; love with their life in mind and not mine; love with hope, not idealism. I'm raising a person, not a prototype that I can adjust and tweak along the way if it doesn't go to plan.

Childhood is not a waiting game. These young minds and lives are not merely passing time until they are "useful" to the world, as believed formerly by some Victorian educators. They are to be very present, whole, valued, and celebrated right now.

We shouldn't hold our hands up and surrender all responsibility to fate. We don't throw caution to the wind and mutter, "Whatever will be will be." We let go of pressurized dictation and embrace active participation. We seek to be sources of inspiration who walk alongside children and help them find the treasure of knowledge that was meant for them with solutions they can tie into the story of their lives. As we observe the divine spark in them, we begin to understand who they really are and the valuable part they play in the world. We learn to celebrate raising humans who will add to the grand story of all our lives.



TAKE A MASON MOMENT:

Suggestions for Embedding a Born Person Approach

- Become an observer of your children; it seems obvious, but getting to know their personality traits from a young age is fascinating and fun! Take some time to write down what you see in each of your children, what you enjoy about them, and what you see developing in them.
- Speak to children about their individuality: encourage them with words such as "I love how curious/observant/creative you are!"

- Listen to a child's questions. Write them down if you can't answer them straight away; it's a helpful insight into what's going on in their mind.
- Consider your children before you consider your curriculum.
- Listen and pay attention when your children are narrating their day; as much as it's tempting to fold laundry whilst they tell historic tales, it doesn't convey how important their retellings are.
- Remember, one rule doesn't fit all. Consider this when making decisions about varying aspects of your children's lives.
- Share each child's "story" (birth or beginnings) with them; it develops a wonderful sense of individuality and uniqueness within a family.
- Allocate time in your schedule for each child to practise something that expresses their individuality; for example, learning Adobe Photoshop, attending a drama club, or riding a mountain bike off-road.
- As your children get into their teen years and express ideas around future careers or pathways, begin to orientate parts of their learning focus to specialize in subjects relevant for their journey.
- Read through Charlotte Mason's original six volumes over an extended period to gain a deeper understanding of how seeing your children as born persons can truly transform your home.