

A serene landscape featuring a calm lake reflecting the sky and surrounding trees. The sky is a mix of purple and blue, suggesting a twilight or dawn setting. The trees are mostly bare, with some green leaves still clinging to the branches. The foreground is covered in grass and fallen leaves. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

A Thinking Love

by Sonya Shafer

A Thinking Love

with Charlotte Mason

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Vol. 1: Home Education

Vol. 2: Parents and Children

Vol. 3: School Education

Vol. 4: Ourselves

Vol. 5: Formation of Character

Vol. 6: A Philosophy of Education

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Chapter 1

A Thinking Love

What job would you say is the most important to society today? A doctor? A reporter? A preacher? A farmer? What profession has the most influence on our world? I'm not asking which job the world considers important; I'm asking which job *you* think is most important.

Charlotte Mason answered that question right away in her very first book. In fact, her answer formed the basis for most of her writings: “That work which is of most importance to society is the bringing-up and instruction of the children—in the school, certainly, but far more in the home, because it is more than anything else the home influences brought to bear upon the child that determine the character and career of the future man or woman.”

It is an important profession that we mothers have been called to. You could say that we are on assignment from God to teach and train the children He has entrusted to us. The results of that assignment might affect many people's lives. “The parents of but

one child may be cherishing what shall prove a blessing to the world.”

The Mother Is Qualified

“But,” you may reply, “that’s a huge responsibility. I’m not sure I’m qualified to take on such a monumental task.”

Dear friend, remember this truth: God will always equip you to do the task to which He has called you. You are qualified to teach and train your child because that is how God designed it.

The first qualification for the job is love. God has already gifted us mothers with that quality. No one had to teach us to love our children. Love—and all that goes with it: protection, concern, grief, and joy—flow naturally from a mother’s heart.

The second qualification is not as natural for some, but it is certainly attainable and, what’s more, it is very necessary.

*Mothers owe a
“thinking love” to
their children.*

A Thinking Love

“Mothers owe ‘a thinking love’ to their Children.” Love is necessary, but a *thinking* love is crucial if we are going to teach and train our children intentionally. We cannot fulfill this assignment from God simply by warm and fuzzy feelings. He has given us our minds and expects us to use them in our task.

Any other profession usually has ongoing training and education available to help the worker keep learning and improving in his job. Charlotte’s writings were designed to do just that for the mother in her profession, “that the mother may know what she is

about, may come thoroughly furnished to her work.”

The chapters in this book are designed to keep you thinking, evaluating, and learning in your assignment as a mother. They are here to encourage you to have a thinking love for your child. We will laugh together, ponder together, and be challenged together by concepts that Charlotte considered important.

You may encounter days when you want to quit on your job; other days you may want to shout from the rooftops how great motherhood is! (Just don't let your child see you on the roof; he'll want to come up too.)

But through it all we will think and we will love. We will think about the best way to fulfill our assignment from God. And we will increase in our love for our children and for each other.

And we will remember that motherhood is the greatest profession on earth. Let's do it to the glory of God.

For more see Volume 1, pages 1–3.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“That work which is of most importance to society is the bringing-up and instruction of the children” (Vol. 1, p. 1).



“It is a great thing to be a parent: there is no promotion, no dignity, to compare with it” (Vol. 1, p. 1).



“The parents of but one child may be cherishing what shall prove a blessing to the world” (Vol. 1, p. 1).



“Mothers owe ‘a thinking love’ to their Children” (Vol. 1, p. 2).

Chapter 2

Lines of Law

When Rebekah was born, we had to do everything for her. We had to feed her, change her, comfort her, entertain her, dress her, bathe her, trim her tiny fingernails, . . . even clean out her little nose. But all of those tasks were done through a lens of love and aspirations. This child was ours. We were her parents and we planned to do it right.

As Rebekah grew she learned to do some things without us. She started to feed herself, to dress herself, to entertain herself, and to blow her own nose. She still depended on us for many things, and we complied, but we were proud of her accomplishments and liked to watch her individuality blossom.

Then one day her individuality showed an ugly side. As she was entertaining herself, a younger sister interrupted her plans and Rebekah's selfishness flared in anger.

It was time for a crucial decision: leave her to her own devices or step in and lay down the law.

Laying Down the Law

You see, the loving, giving, and allowing-room-to-grow parts of parenting are relatively easy. The hard part is laying down the law.

Charlotte put it this way: “The parent begins instinctively by regarding his child as an unwritten tablet, and is filled with great resolves as to what he shall write thereon. By-and-by, traits of disposition appear, the child has little ways of his own; and, at first, every new display of personality is a delightful surprise.

. . . The notion of doing *all* for the child with which the parents began gradually recedes. So soon as he shows that he has a way of his own he is encouraged to take it. Father and mother have no greater delight than to watch the individuality

of their child unfold as a flower unfolds. But Othello loses his occupation. The more the child shapes his own course, the less do the parents find to do, beyond feeding him with food convenient, whether of love, or thought, or of bodily meat and drink. . . . Nothing could be better for the child than this ‘masterly inactivity,’ so far as it goes. It is well he should be let grow and helped to grow according to his nature; and so long as the parents do not step in to spoil him, much good and no very evident harm comes of letting him alone. But this philosophy of ‘let him be,’ while it covers a part, does not cover the serious part of the parents’ calling; does not touch the strenuous incessant efforts upon lines of law which go to the producing of a human being at his best.”

This philosophy of “let him be,” while it covers a part, does not cover the serious part of the parents’ calling.

A Human at His Best

Well-meaning but misinformed parents may think that love means keeping a child happy, making sure she has whatever she wants. But a *thinking* love will make sure she has what she *needs*, including law, for her own good and the good of those around her.

Our children need our love; they will wither and wilt without it. But our children need law just as desperately. Rules and boundaries are good. Limitations are necessary in order to produce a “human being at his [or her] best.”

Did you notice the words Charlotte used to describe that part of parenting? “Strenuous incessant efforts.” It will take work on your part. But after all, this is your child, and don’t you want her to be at her best?

For more see Volume 1, pages 4–6.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“It is more than anything else the home influences brought to bear upon the child that determine the character and career of the future man or woman” (Vol. 1, p. 1).



“Father and mother have no greater delight than to watch the individuality of their child unfold as a flower unfolds” (Vol. 1, p. 4).



“The parents’ chief care is, that that which they supply shall be wholesome and nourishing, whether in the way of picture-books, lessons, playmates, bread and milk, or mother’s love” (Vol. 1, p. 5).



“But this philosophy of ‘let him be,’ while it covers a part, does not cover the serious part of the parents’ calling” (Vol. 1, p. 5).



“Nothing is trivial that concerns a child; his foolish-seeming words and ways are pregnant with meaning for the wise” (Vol. 1, p. 5).

Chapter 3

Fully Thought Out

When Stevie's great-grandfather was a child, the prevailing philosophy was Children should pull their weight.

When Stevie's grandfather was a child, the popular maxim was Children should be seen and not heard.

When Stevie's father was a child, the attitude of the era was Don't stifle your child's self-expression.

When Stevie was a child, the cry of the day was Do all you can to give your child self-esteem.

A Changing World

We live in a changing world. And as technology and environments change, so do child-training maxims and philosophies. Some of these changes are helpful; others are harmful. A thinking love requires parents to discern the difference.

Such changing philosophies are not new. Even in Charlotte's day the "experts" were overturning previous generations' counsel.

“That children should do as they are bid, mind their books, and take pleasure as it offers when nothing stands in the way, sums up the old theory; now, the pleasures of children are apt to be made of more account than their duties. Formerly, they were brought up in subjection; now, the elders give place, and the world is made for the children.”

With various voices coming at us from all sides, parents must stop and ponder what their goals are for their child and how they can best reach those goals. Will the popular attitudes of our day help us equip our children to be their best? Or do we need to buck the trends of today and use other methods to achieve those goals?

*A method of
education, fully
thought out.*

“How far the new theories of education are wise and humane . . . and how far they just pander to the child-worship to which we are all succumbing, is not a question to be decided off-hand.” It takes careful thought and intentional direction to discern among the voices of the day.

Now More Than Ever

Our goals will help us stay the course when others around us are chasing after the latest trends. Goals will give direction to how we educate our children.

Think for a moment about that word “educate.” Education, according to Webster, involves training by both formal instruction and supervised practice; it includes all that we do to help our children develop mentally, morally, and aesthetically; it entails

our persuading our children to feel, believe, or act in a desired way.

So, what are your goals for your child? What character traits do you want to instill in order to equip him for adulthood? What skills do you want him to master that will ready him to serve his family and others well? All of these components make up your child's education in your home.

Do you want him to understand the difference between responsibility and privilege? Is it your desire that he respect the elder and protect the younger?

With your goals in hand, you will be able to test each new bit of advice you hear and determine whether it will be beneficial or harmful. You will be able to keep the profitable methods and discard the frivolous ones.

“It is not too much to say that a parent who does not follow reasonably a method of education, fully thought out, fails—now, more than ever before—to fulfil the claims his children have upon him.”

Now, more than ever, we must think through how to teach and train our child effectively. A thinking love can do no less.

For more see Volume 1, pages 6–8.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Never was it more necessary for parents to face for themselves this question of education in all its bearings” (Vol. 1, p. 6).



“That children should do as they are bid, mind their books, and take pleasure as it offers when nothing stands in the way, sums up the old theory; now, the pleasures of children are apt to be made of more account than their duties” (Vol. 1, p. 7).



“Formerly, they were brought up in subjection; now, the elders give place, and the world is made for the children” (Vol. 1, p. 7).



“A parent who does not follow reasonably a method of education, fully thought out, fails—now, more than ever before—to fulfil the claims his children have upon him” (Vol. 1, p. 8).

Chapter 4

A System or a Method?

Joan wanted a garden. In her mind this garden would provide healthful fresh vegetables for her family. She could picture the crisp green beans, sweet onions, and bright red tomatoes. In fact, she could almost taste the fresh salsa!

But Joan was new to this whole gardening thing. She decided she needed some instructions that she could follow to the letter, something that would guarantee success. So Joan bought a book called *283 Easy Steps to a Healthy Vegetable Garden*.

She selected the right spot according to the book and tilled the soil like the book said to. The next step in the book was to add sulfur to the soil to make it more acid. Joan wasn't sure where to find sulfur, so she asked her neighbor who had a beautiful garden every year.

“Oh, no, Joan,” her neighbor replied. “You don't need sulfur for this soil; it's already acid. Put a little lime in there instead.”

Joan now faced a crucial decision: keep following the system in the book or deviate in order to better suit her circumstances. Joan decided to take a step away from the system and do what seemed best.

Several weeks later Joan was out watering her garden when her neighbor dropped by and asked what she was doing. “Well, the book says to water your garden for fifteen minutes every day,” Joan replied. The neighbor smiled and gently offered, “But Joan, it has rained every day this week.” Joan put away the garden hose.

*The educator has
to deal with a
self-acting, self-
developing being.*

Over the summer Joan learned a lot about gardens, and little by little she let go of the to-the-letter system in order to adjust to changing conditions. That fall her efforts were rewarded with a bountiful harvest.

A Method

What Joan learned over the summer was how to use a method. She had the picture in her mind of what she wanted to accomplish and she gradually acquired the general principles of gardening that she could apply in different ways amid varying circumstances.

A method is how Charlotte advised us to approach educating our children. Education (all we do to help our children develop mentally, morally, physically, and spiritually) should be a method that has the end goal in mind and can adapt to varying circumstances.

“The following of a method implies an idea, a mental image, of the end or object to be arrived at. What do you propose that

education shall effect in and for your child?”

Not a One-Size-Fits-All System

Education should not be a system that dictates the exact same actions for each child. A one-size-fits-all mentality cannot possibly be adequate in every situation.

However, isn't that what we all look for? We want a system, not a method. “A ‘*system* of education’ is an alluring fancy.” We want the 283 easy steps to an educated child.

But such an approach can never hope to achieve what a method can, because we are dealing with human beings who have their individual strengths and weaknesses.

“The educator has to deal with a self-acting, self-developing being, and his business is to guide, and assist in, the production of the latent good in that being, the dissipation of the latent evil, the preparation of the child to take his place in the world *at his best*, with every capacity for good that is in him developed into a power.”

So know your goals, keep handy the principles of educating, but don't get locked into a system. Ask God for wisdom, apply the methods, and adjust as needed for each child to grow and flourish.

For more see Volume 1, pages 8–10.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Method is natural; easy, yielding, unobtrusive, simple as the ways of Nature herself; yet, watchful, careful, all pervading, all compelling” (Vol. 1, p. 8).



“The parent who sees his way—that is, the exact force of method—to educate his child, will make use of every circumstance of the child’s life almost without intention on his own part, so easy and spontaneous is a method of education based upon Natural Law” (Vol. 1, p. 8).



“Though system is highly useful as an instrument of education, a ‘system of education’ is mischievous, as producing only mechanical action instead of the vital growth and movement of a living being” (Vol. 1, pp. 9, 10).



“It is worth while to point out the differing characters of a system and a method, because parents let themselves be run away with often enough by some plausible ‘system’ ” (Vol. 1, p. 10).

Chapter 5

For the King

Once there was a king who had a very special child. The king could not entrust this child to just any of his subjects to raise; he searched for a couple who, he knew, would raise the child after his own heart. He lovingly placed the child in their home with the commission, “I am loaning her to you for a short time. Raise her as I would.”

A Whole Person

God has entrusted our children to us. They belong to Him and we are merely stewards with the commission of teaching and training them. Most likely you already know this truth. But it is important to review it every now and then, for when we understand this truth, we know how to view our children. And how we view our children will have a profound influence on how we choose to educate them.

“And first, let us consider where and what the little being is who is entrusted to the care of human parents. A tablet to be

written upon? A twig to be bent? Wax to be moulded? Very likely; but he is much more—a being belonging to an altogether higher estate than ours; as it were, a prince committed to the fostering care of peasants.”

If we view our children as whole persons, entrusted to us by God, we will be careful to educate their whole persons: body, mind, will, emotions, soul. We will not isolate just the intellect or just the will. And we will keep in mind what our Savior said about interacting with children.

The Code of Education in the Gospels

“It may surprise parents who have not given much attention to the subject to discover also a code of education in the Gospels, expressly laid down by Christ. It is summed up in three commandments, and all three have a negative character, as if the chief thing required of grown-up people is that they should do no sort of injury to the children: *Take heed that ye OFFEND not—DESPISE not—HINDER not—one of these little ones.*”

Notice that all three are worded as negatives, giving us something we should not do. Charlotte

believed looking at the negatives would help us, “for if we once settle with ourselves what we may *not* do, we are greatly helped to see what we *may* do, and must do.”

*Do not offend—
By allowing him
what is wrong.*

*Do not despise—
By having a low
opinion of him.*

*Do not hinder—
By overlooking
his relationship
with God.*

In the next few chapters we will examine each command separately, along with Charlotte’s practical suggestions and tips for applying them.

- Do not offend—By allowing him what is wrong.
- Do not despise—By having a low opinion of him.
- Do not hinder—By overlooking his relationship with God.

These attitudes and actions form the foundation of educating the children God has entrusted into our care—body, mind, will, emotions, and soul.

It’s easy to dismiss all three with a quick, “I don’t do that.” But some of Charlotte’s nitty gritty applications may cause you to pause and think.

That’s good. Remember, that’s our goal: a thinking love.

So let’s hug our children tightly today and remember for Whom we are working. They are God’s children, simply on loan to us for a short time. Let’s be found faithful.

For more see Volume 1, pages 11–13.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Take heed that ye OFFEND not—DESPISE not—HINDER not—one of these little ones” (Vol. 1, p. 12).



“ ‘And He called a little child, and set him in the midst.’ Here is the Divine estimate of the child’s estate” (Vol. 1, p. 12).



“If we once settle with ourselves what we may not do, we are greatly helped to see what we may do, and must do” (Vol. 1, p. 13).



“And first, let us consider where and what the little being is who is entrusted to the care of human parents. A tablet to be written upon? A twig to be bent? Wax to be moulded? Very likely; but he is much more” (Vol. 1, p. 11).



“As it were, a prince committed to the fostering care of peasants” (Vol. 1, p. 11).

Chapter 6

The Meaning of Must

*J*oey, please pick up your blocks so Baby won't trip on them." That scene we can all relate to.

But what about this one: "Mother, please don't cause your baby to stumble by allowing him to do what is wrong."

"An offence, we know, is literally a stumbling-block, that which trips up the walker and causes him to fall. Mothers know what it is to clear the floor of every obstacle when a baby takes his unsteady little runs from chair to chair, from one pair of loving arms to another. The table-leg, the child's toy on the floor, which has caused a fall and a pitiful cry, is a thing to be deplored; why did not somebody put it out of the way, so that the baby should not stumble? But the little child is going out into the world with uncertain tottering steps in many directions. There are causes of stumbling not so easy to remove as an offending footstool; and woe to him who causes the child to fall!"

Unfortunately, we tend to think of offending someone as annoying that person or causing him to get upset. So we wrongfully think that we should never do anything that might make our children unhappy, when in fact, the opposite is true. More often we offend them, in the true sense, by giving them their way.

To offend a child is to allow him what is wrong, to let him think that something is all right when it really is not. And the very first way that Charlotte applied this principle is in teaching a child the meaning of *must*.

The Meaning of *Must*

“Who has not met big girls and boys, the children of right-minded parents, who yet do not know what *must* means, who are not moved by *ought*, whose hearts feel no stir at the solemn name of *Duty*, who know no higher rule of life than ‘I want,’ and ‘I don’t want,’ ‘I like,’ and ‘I don’t like’? Heaven help parents and children when it has come to that!”

*Do not offend—
By allowing him
what is wrong.*

But how does such a thing happen? We mothers certainly don’t make it our goal to raise children who think only of their selfish desires, who don’t understand the meaning of *must*. Charlotte reminded us that this mind-set does not happen overnight. “By slow degrees, here a little and there a little, as all that is good or bad in character comes to pass.”

Take, for example, a toddler who is trying to snatch a sugar cube from the sugar bowl or a cookie from the cookie jar. Our

attitude toward his actions can make all the difference in what he learns.

“ ‘Naughty!’ says the mother, again, when a little hand is thrust into the sugar-bowl; and when a pair of roguish eyes seeks hers furtively, to measure, as they do unerringly, how far the little pilferer may go. It is very amusing; the mother ‘cannot help laughing’; and the little trespass is allowed to pass: and, what the poor mother has not thought of, an offence, a cause of stumbling, has been cast into the path of her two-year-old child.”

Offend Not

A natural love tends to overlook, but a *thinking* love discerns what unspoken lessons are being taught. For, once a child learns that he can charm his way around a command, it is not many steps to the place where he disregards the command altogether.

“He has learned already that that which is ‘naughty’ may yet be done with impunity, and he goes on improving his knowledge. It is needless to continue; everybody knows the steps by which the mother’s ‘no’ comes to be disregarded, her refusal teased into consent.”

Yes, of course, sometimes it’s just easier to consent. But giving in may be Mother’s “toy” that causes her child to stumble.

For more see Volume 1, pages 13–15.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“We offend them, when we do by them that which we ought not to have done” (Vol. 1, p. 13).



“An offence, we know, is literally a stumbling-block, that which trips up the walker and causes him to fall” (Vol. 1, p. 13).



“But the little child is going out into the world with uncertain tottering steps in many directions. There are causes of stumbling not so easy to remove as an offending footstool; and woe to him who causes the child to fall!” (Vol. 1, p. 13).



“By slow degrees, here a little and there a little, as all that is good or bad in character comes to pass” (Vol. 1, p. 14).

Chapter 7

Mother Also Knows Must

When I was younger and did some babysitting, I was always relieved to find a list of instructions from the mother. That list made things so much easier for me.

If the children asked for dessert when they hadn't finished their peas, I could tell them No. Period. Their mother had said No dessert unless they ate everything on their plates, so that's the rule I could refer to. End of discussion.

I learned the hard way that any deviation from those instructions, any reconsidering based on "exceptional situations," only got me in a conundrum. Once the children saw that I was picking and choosing which rules to follow and which to change, they went to work with a will. They did everything they could think of, laid out every argument they could invent, and sent every pitiful look they could muster my way. And the rest of the evening was spent in a battle of wits.

A Matter of Choice

You see, if we pick and choose when we will stand firm and when we will give in, we teach our children that commands are arbitrary. They are based on nothing more than a whim.

“The child has learned to believe that he has nothing to overcome but his mother’s disinclination; if she *choose* to let him do this and that, there is no reason why she should not; he can make her choose to let him do the thing forbidden, and then he may do it.”

We all know what follows this reasoning: a weary life of constant friction and struggle as the child continually tries to get his way.

“The next step in the argument is not too great for childish wits: if his mother does what she chooses, of course he will do what he chooses, *if he can*; and henceforward the child’s life becomes an endless struggle to get his own way; a struggle in which a parent is pretty sure to be worsted, having many things to think of, while the child sticks persistently to the thing which has his fancy for the moment.”

*Do not offend—
By allowing him
what is wrong.*

I love Charlotte’s insight into a child’s ways. He *does* “stick persistently to the thing which has his fancy for the moment,” while we are distracted by many other things. So what is the secret to standing firm?

A Matter of Law

“The mother began with no sufficient sense of duty; she

thought herself free to allow and disallow, to say and unsay, at pleasure, as if the child were hers to do what she liked with. The child has never discovered a background of *must* behind his mother's decisions; he does not know that she *must not* let him break his sister's playthings, gorge himself with cake, spoil the pleasure of other people, because these things are not *right*."

The secret lies in our understanding that we do not have the authority to change a command simply because we feel like giving in. We are under God's authority and we do not have the freedom to allow our children to practice wrong-doing.

We have been given a list of instructions, if you will, as we raise our children. We are under obligation to follow God's Word and to teach our children to follow it. Period. End of discussion. Being under such an authority takes so much pressure off of us!

It's when we start to pick and choose which rules to obey and which to change at whim that we get into trouble. That's when we send our children a mixed message. We expect them to live under a sense of *must* while we live according to our own desires. Thus begins the battle of wits.

"Let the child perceive that his parents are law-compelled as well as he." It will save you from many a conundrum.

For more see Volume 1, pages 15 and 16.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“The child has learned to believe that he has nothing to overcome but his mother’s disinclination” (Vol. 1, p. 15).



“The child’s life becomes an endless struggle to get his own way; a struggle in which a parent is pretty sure to be worsted, having many things to think of, while the child sticks persistently to the thing which has his fancy for the moment” (Vol. 1, p. 15).



“The child has never discovered a background of must behind his mother’s decisions; he does not know that she must not let him break his sister’s playthings, gorge himself with cake, spoil the pleasure of other people, because these things are not right” (Vol. 1, p. 15).



“He is quick enough to read the ‘must’ and ‘ought’ which rule her, in his mother’s face and manner, and in the fact that she is not to be moved from a resolution on any question of right and wrong” (Vol. 1, p. 16).

Chapter 8

Simple Laws of Health

I don't know about you, but sometimes I get so focused on making sure I deal with attitudes and character issues that I overlook the obvious. That's when my husband's common sense comes to the rescue.

I'll tell him, "(This child) is really grumpy lately. Have you noticed? She's moping around and taking longer than usual to do her chores. I'm not sure if it's discouragement or laziness."

"She's tired," he'll reply. "She's been on the go this week and gotten to bed later than usual."

Sure enough. I'll go back upstairs to find the child in question asleep on her bed.

Charlotte challenged us mothers to keep an eye on the physical wellness of our children.

"She may cast a stumbling-block in the way of his physical life by giving him unwholesome food, letting him sleep and live

in ill-ventilated rooms, by disregarding any or every of the simple laws of health.”

Which laws? Here are some of Charlotte’s practical tips on four foundational guidelines: exercise, rest, meals, and fresh air.

Exercise

- Give children both physical and mental exercise every day. “Do not let the children pass a day without distinct *efforts*, intellectual, moral, volitional; let them brace themselves to understand; let them compel themselves to do and to bear; and let them do right at the sacrifice of ease and pleasure.”

Rest

- Alternate between rest and work. “Just as important is it that the brain should have due rest; that is, should rest and work alternately.”

- School work should be tackled after rest or play (and not after a large meal). “It follows that the hours for lessons should be carefully chosen, after periods of mental rest—sleep or play, for instance—and when there is no excessive activity in any other part of the system.”

- Use alternate parts of the brain and body to keep things fresh. “The brain, or some portion of the brain, becomes exhausted when any given function has been exercised too long. The child has been doing sums for some time, and is getting unaccountably stupid: take away his slate and let him read history, and you find his wits fresh again.”

*Do not offend—
By allowing him
what is wrong.*

Meals

- Nutritious food helps the brain work. “The brain cannot do its work well unless it be abundantly and suitably nourished.”

- Meal times should be pleasant. “No pains should be spared to make the hours of meeting round the family table the brightest hours of the day.”

- Serve a variety of foods. “But give them variety; do not let it be ‘everlasting tapioca.’ Even for tea and breakfast the wise mother does not say, ‘I always give my children’ so and so. They should not have anything ‘always.’”

Fresh Air

- Spend lots of time outdoors. “True, we must needs have houses for shelter from the weather by day and for rest at night; but in proportion as we cease to make our houses ‘comfortable,’ as we regard them merely as necessary shelters when we cannot be out of doors, shall we enjoy to the full the vigorous vitality possible to us.”

- Keep the indoors well ventilated. “We know what is to come in out of the fresh air and complain that a room feels stuffy; but sit in the room a few minutes, and you get accustomed to its stuffiness; the senses are no longer a safe guide. Therefore, regular provision must be made for the ventilation of rooms regardless of the feelings of their inmates.”

For more see Volume 1, pages 16 and 20–37.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Do not let the children pass a day without distinct efforts, intellectual, moral, volitional; let them brace themselves to understand; let them compel themselves to do and to bear; and let them do right at the sacrifice of ease and pleasure” (Vol. 1, p. 22).



“The brain should have due rest; that is, should rest and work alternately” (Vol. 1, p. 22).



“It is not a matter of pampering them at all, but a matter of health, of due nutrition, that the children should enjoy their food, and that their meals should be eaten in gladness” (Vol. 1, p. 27).



“No pains should be spared to make the hours of meeting round the family table the brightest hours of the day” (Vol. 1, p. 27).



“Is it easier to be amiable, kindly, candid, with or without a headache?” (Vol. 1, p. 37).

Chapter 9

True Education

*I*t's always fun to have a peek inside another mom's homeschool. I enjoy reading about the various ways different parents customize their schedules to fit their families.

But I must admit that some "inside peeks" leave me more inspired than others. Every so often I finish reading a mom's description of her homeschool and the thought flits through my head, *I'm glad I'm not her child.*

Usually the description was heavy on long hours of stuffing and cramming information into the child's brain. Charlotte did not believe such an approach was true education. In fact, she cautioned that another way we can offend our children is by the way we choose to school them.

Dreary, Dawdling Lessons

"The child's intellectual life may be wrecked at its outset by a round of dreary, dawdling lessons in which definite progress is the last thing made or expected, and which, so far from educating

in any true sense, stultify his wits in a way he never gets over.”

Here is a sample of the usual fare of lessons in a typical home schoolroom during the era in which Charlotte lived.

- Work long columns of numbers in addition or long division for one-half hour daily.
- Memorize pages of information.
- Read half a page of geography three or four times and then answer questions about it.

As Charlotte so aptly observed: “Many a little girl, especially, leaves the home schoolroom with a distaste for all manner of learning, an aversion to mental effort, which lasts her her lifetime, and that is why she grows up to read little but trashy novels, and to talk all day about her clothes.”

True Education

Charlotte had a much broader scope of all that contributes to a child’s education. She said that education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.

By “atmosphere,” Charlotte spoke of the environment our children grow up in. She knew that the ideas that rule our lives, as parents, will have a profound impact on our children. Some of those rules we are completely aware of; others we may not realize are controlling our lives. Nevertheless, “the child breathes the atmosphere emanating from his parents; that of the ideas which rule their own lives” (Vol. 2, p. 247).

By “discipline,” Charlotte emphasized the importance of

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what is wrong.*

training our children in good habits—habits that will serve them well as they grow. In fact, she likened good habits to railroad tracks that parents lay down and upon which the child may travel with ease into his adult life. Good habits are a powerful influence on our children and must play an important part in their education. “It rests with [the parent] to consider well the tracks over which the child should travel with profit and pleasure” (Vol. 1, p. 109).

By “life,” Charlotte wanted to remind us that “all the thought we offer to our children shall be *living* thought; no mere dry summaries of facts will do” (Vol. 2, p. 277). Here is where the academics come in. But notice two important points: first, they are presented as living thoughts; and second, those school subjects occupy only one-third of the big picture of education.

Charlotte Mason’s three-fold approach to education holds valuable help for our homeschools today. Education is not just about the academics. It’s about creating a God-honoring atmosphere in our homes. It’s about equipping our children with good habits that will help them in their futures. And it’s about nourishing our children’s minds with great ideas that make knowledge come alive for them.

For more see Volume 1, page 16.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Education is a discipline—that is, the discipline of the good habits in which the child is trained” (Vol. 2, p. 247).



“Education is a life, nourished upon ideas” (Vol. 2, p. 247).



“Education is an atmosphere—that is, the child breathes the atmosphere emanating from his parents; that of the ideas which rule their own lives” (Vol. 2, p. 247).



“It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the ‘child’s’ level” (Vol. 1, Preface).

Chapter 10

Playing Favorites

*M*y mother may still remember the night I posted this sign on my bedroom door: Now I know that you love my sister more than you love me.

We had been shopping that day and as we neared the end of our available time, my mother had to decide between finding material to lengthen my pant-legs (I was growing that fall.) or stopping at the eye doctor's to get my sister's glasses adjusted.

As a mother now, I understand completely her line of reasoning back then: The eye doctor's office was right on the way home, and it would take only five minutes to adjust the glasses to fit better. The fabric store was out of the way and would require more time to peruse all the possibilities and measure what was needed.

I would have made the same decision had I been in the mother's role.

But my childish mind was looking for any hint of "unfairness" between how I was treated and my sister was treated. (By the way, my mother handled the situation with tact and authority. She

calmly explained why she had made the decision she had, assured me that she did not love my sister more than she loved me, and told me to take down the sign.)

Now, let's face it. Sometimes our children will grasp at straws and place deep meaning on insignificant events no matter what we do. But Charlotte's main concern was that we parents not get caught in a trap of out-and-out favoritism.

Favoritism

“ ‘My childhood was made miserable,’ a lady said to me a while ago, ‘by my mother’s dotting fondness for my little brother; there was not a day when she did not make me wretched by coming into the nursery to fondle and play with him, and all the time she had not a word nor a look nor a smile for me, any more than if I had not been in the room. I have never got over it; she is very kind to me now, but I never feel quite natural with her. And how can we two, brother and sister, feel for each other as we should if we had grown up together in love in the nursery?’ ”

*Do not offend—
By allowing him
what is wrong.*

Charlotte asked us to consider the plight of the child who “is left out in the cold, while the parents’ affection is lavished on the rest.”

Blind Spots

I'm sure most of us do not intend to favor one child above the rest. But it's easy to develop blind spots in this area. We may not

blatantly express more love for one child than for another, but do we perhaps unthinkingly

- allow a younger child to get away with more than his older sibling did at that age?

- gravitate toward the child who shows the most interest in our own hobbies and interests?

- give more thought to one child's gift than another's?

- allow one child more grace in a weak area than his sibling receives?

- take advantage of one child's servant's heart by expecting more work from her?

- allow one child to disobey because of his special needs?

- have higher expectations for one child because of her gifts and abilities?

By definition, we don't usually see what is in our blind spots. So ask your husband or a close family friend if they have noticed any of these tendencies. Then prayerfully start rebuilding any relationships that may be broken or hearts that may have been offended.

For more see Volume 1, pages 16 and 17.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“The movements of the outgoing tender child-heart—how are they treated?” (Vol. 1, p. 16).



“There are few mothers who do not take pains to cherish the family affections” (Vol. 1, p. 16).



“ ‘How can we two, brother and sister, feel for each other as we should if we had grown up together in love?’ ” (Vol. 1, p. 17).



“ ‘My childhood was made miserable,’ a lady said to me a while ago, ‘by my mother’s doting fondness for my little brother’ ” (Vol. 1, p. 17).

Chapter 11

The Best of Their Mother

I enjoy e-mail, but I despise spam. It gets my attention only long enough to clear it out of my Inbox. In fact, it doesn't even get my full attention. I can hit that delete key while I'm on the phone.

To despise something means to attach little or no value to it, to have a low opinion of it. I think it's pretty safe to assume that you, also, despise spam. We admit it. Our hearts know it and our actions show it.

But Charlotte cautioned that it's possible for us to attach a low value to something that, in reality, we love. There may be things that, in our hearts, we don't despise but our actions tell a different story.

In the past few chapters we have thought about ways in which we might be offending our children. Next Charlotte moved on to ways in which we might be despising our children, ways that we

might be communicating a low opinion of them.

“However much we may delight in them, we grown-up people have far too low an opinion of children.”

Personal Growth

Charlotte believed that our children deserve the best we can give them—the best of ourselves.

One way that we can be at our best is to keep growing and learning ourselves. “Frequent change of thought, and the society of other people, make the mother all the fresher for her children.”

It’s easy to get bogged down in the daily grind. Frequent change of thought can add a fresh perspective to our mental repertoire, and a variety of interests can keep Mother’s mind sharp and engaging.

Besides, continuing to grow and learn sets a good example. Don’t we want our children to love learning and to continue learning all their lives?

I don’t think Charlotte was saying that we should neglect our children in order to chase our own selfish desires. I think she was saying that our children deserve a mother who is interesting because she keeps in touch with real people, real books, and real experiences that renew and refresh her own spirit and, in turn, those around her.

*Do not despise—
By having a low
opinion of him.*

Proper Priorities

Charlotte also pointed out that if we hold our children in high

value, “They should have the *best* of their mother, her freshest, brightest hours.”

Now, in Charlotte’s day, most mothers that she knew had nurses and governesses to take care of the children much of the time. (In your dreams, right?)

The reality for us is that homeschooling doesn’t always allow us to pick and choose which hours we will spend with our children. But we can do everything possible to try to present a fresh, bright face to our children, to give them our full attention and a happy disposition.

To be quite honest, those actions and attitudes are usually possible only when my priorities are in place. It’s hard for me to give my children those gifts unless I have made it a priority to get the rest I need, to plan my day or week ahead of time, and to prepare for the job at hand.

And while we’re on the practical points, let me venture to ask myself (You can listen in if you want to.) whether I’m being careful to present my best foot forward to outsiders at the neglect of my own family. Do I cook a delicious meal to deliver to a friend, then feed my family peanut butter and jelly? Do I add extra touches to the table only when company is coming? Do I invest more time preparing for the co-op class I’m supposed to teach than for my children’s daily lessons?

We love our children! We don’t despise them. Let’s show by our actions the high value we place on them.

For more see Volume 1, pages 17 and 18.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Despise: to have a low opinion of, to undervalue” (Vol. 1, p. 17).



“However much we may delight in them, we grown-up people have far too low an opinion of children” (Vol. 1, p. 17).



“Frequent change of thought, and the society of other people, make the mother all the fresher for her children” (Vol. 1, p. 18).



“They should have the best of their mother, her freshest, brightest hours” (Vol. 1, p. 18).

Chapter 12

Indelible Impressions

We recently watched a movie based on a true story. It was about a little boy who contracted a rare fatal disease, and how his parents wouldn't rest until they had educated themselves enough to discover and create a cure. Now that part alone is a great testament to the power of self-educating!

But the story is also a powerful motivator. It spurred me on to persevere and to do what is best for my children no matter what.

As the son slipped further into the clutches of this disease, he lost all ability to communicate or move. Yet the mother insisted upon treating him as a whole person.

One scene in particular stands out in my mind. The mother asks her personally-trained nurse to read a story to the son while she steps out of the room for a moment. The nurse reluctantly obeys the letter of the command but also manages to convey her low opinion of the son by reading with a flat voice and disinterested

countenance. The mother returns to the room and observes what is happening. She promptly fires the nurse.

When her husband asks why she dismissed a valuable coworker whom she had spent so much time and effort training, she explains that she needs someone who will care for the whole boy, not just his vegetable-state body but his living spirit and mind.

Charlotte would have agreed. “If the mother did not undervalue her child, would she leave him to the society of an ignorant nursemaid during the early years when his whole nature is, like the photographer’s sensitive plate, receiving momentarily indelible impressions?”

The Influence of Our Intimates

While we may not have a full-time nurse who is caring for our children, the same principles of influence apply to anyone who has close contact with our children. We show the high value that we place on our children when we are careful about who cares for them in our absence.

*Do not despise—
By having a low
opinion of him.*

How carefully do we screen any baby-sitters or care-givers before entrusting them with our children?

“For the child’s moral sense is exceedingly quick; he is all eyes and ears for the slightest act or word of unfairness, deception, shiftiness. His nurse says, ‘If you’ll be a good boy, I won’t tell’; and the child learns that things *may* be concealed from his mother.”

How well do we know the teachers at the co-op or at church

who are shaping our children's minds and hearts? What patterns are they setting?

“He shapes his life on any pattern set before him, and with the fatal tint of human nature upon him he is more ready to imitate a bad pattern than a good.”

What characteristics are our children's coaches demonstrating on the field and off?

“Give him a nurse who is coarse, violent, and tricky, and before the child is able to speak plainly he will have caught these dispositions.”

It behooves us to think carefully about all the personalities to whom we entrust our children. In Charlotte's words

- “Choose wisely,”
- “Train carefully,” and
- “Keep a vigilant eye upon all that goes on.”

For our responsibility is not just to protect their bodies, but to protect, nourish, and care for their spirits and minds.

For more see Volume 1, pages 17 and 18.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“His whole nature is, like the photographer’s sensitive plate, receiving momentarily indelible impressions” (Vol. 1, p. 18).



“The child’s moral sense is exceedingly quick; he is all eyes and ears for the slightest act or word of unfairness, deception, shiftiness” (Vol. 1, p. 18).



“He shapes his life on any pattern set before him, and with the fatal tint of human nature upon him he is more ready to imitate a bad pattern than a good” (Vol. 1, p. 18).



“Give him a nurse who is coarse, violent, and tricky, and before the child is able to speak plainly he will have caught these dispositions” (Vol. 1, p. 18).



“She is careful to choose her nurses wisely, train them carefully, and keep a vigilant eye upon all that goes on in the nursery” (Vol. 1, p. 18).

Chapter 13

Know Better By-and-By

One morning as we were sitting at the breakfast table, we noticed a large discolored area in the wood floor. This particular area of the floor is under an overhanging counter, so it's usually in the shadows, and we hadn't noticed the damage before.

After a little detective work, we realized that the kitchen sink and dishwasher pipes had been leaking water under the flooring. Once that space was completely sodden, the moisture had soaked up into the wood floor and caused the discoloration that we now saw.

Did we know the pipes were leaking? Yes. But it seemed to be such a small amount of water that we had simply put a towel under the sink near the pipes to soak up the moisture. We figured it was small enough that we would deal with it later when it got worse. Little did we realize the extent of the leak and the damage it would cause.

Charlotte gently warned us mothers that the same thing can happen with our children and their small faults.

But They're Small

“A little child shows some ugly trait—he is greedy, and gobbles up his sister’s share of the goodies as well as his own; he is vindictive, ready to bite or fight the hand that offends him; he tells a lie;—no, he did not touch the sugar-bowl or the jam-pot. The mother puts off the evil day: she knows she must sometime reckon with the child for those offences, but in the meantime she says, ‘Oh, it does not matter this time; he is very little, and will know better by-and-by.’”

Such a mind-set is only postponing the damage while allowing it to spread. We need to change our thinking. We need to determine that our children are worth our efforts to shape their characters right from the start.

*Do not despise—
By having a low
opinion of him.*

“If the mother settle it in her own mind that the child never does wrong without being aware of his wrong-doing, she will see that he is not too young to have his fault corrected or prevented.”

Forming Habits

You see, God made our brains to form habits automatically. When we do a certain action in a certain way enough times, it becomes a habit “trail” in our brains. And our children are no different.

Allow that child to do wrong for the first few years of his life and he will have set up the habit of wrong-doing. How much

easier it would be to stop that habit “trail” from forming in the first place! How? By dealing with his faults immediately and consistently.

“Deal with a child on his *first* offence, and a grieved look is enough to convict the little transgressor; but let him go on until a habit of wrong-doing is formed, and the cure is a slow one; then the mother has no chance until she has formed in him a contrary habit of well-doing.”

Of course our children look cute when they get into mischief. They’re good at that! But we cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances. We must look past the twinkling eyes and mischievous grin to the ugliness in the heart.

We cannot afford to ignore the small leak, because underneath the surface it is causing large-scale damage.

“What happy days for herself and her children would the mother secure if she would keep watch at the place of the letting out of waters!”

For more see Volume 1, page 19.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“What happy days for herself and her children would the mother secure if she would keep watch at the place of the letting out of waters!” (Vol. 1, p. 19).



“If the mother settle it in her own mind that the child never does wrong without being aware of his wrong-doing, she will see that he is not too young to have his fault corrected or prevented” (Vol. 1, p. 19).



“Deal with a child on his first offence, and a grieved look is enough to convict the little transgressor; but let him go on until a habit of wrong-doing is formed, and the cure is a slow one; then the mother has no chance until she has formed in him a contrary habit of well-doing” (Vol. 1, p. 19).



“To laugh at ugly tempers and let them pass because the child is small, is to sow the wind” (Vol. 1, p. 19).

Chapter 14

Help or Hinder

Hannah Tupper was a witch. At least, that's what everyone said about her. And those accusations colored Kit's thinking when she met Hannah near Blackbird Pond. All those descriptions Kit had heard about the Widow Tupper filled her mind and almost kept her from getting to know the old woman for who she really was.

Kit had received false information. Hannah Tupper had been misrepresented. And that false information and misrepresentation hindered Kit from forming a personal relationship with the Widow.

As anyone knows who has read *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, Kit eventually did form a friendship with Hannah Tupper, but that friendship grew in spite of what everyone around said about Hannah, not because of it.

What we say about other people can have a profound influence on what our children think about those people. And of utmost importance, what we say about God can affect what our children think about Him. We can help or we can hinder their personal

relationships with Him by both our words and our actions.

Teaching by Word

“Now listen to what goes on in many a nursery:—‘God does not love you, you naughty, wicked boy!’ ‘He will send you to the bad, wicked place,’ and so on; and this is all the practical teaching about the ways of his ‘almighty Lover’ that the child gets!—never a word of how God does love and cherish the little children all day long, and fill their hours with delight.”

Oh how careful we must be to represent God correctly in our words! How it must grieve His heart when we misrepresent Him to the children whom He has entrusted to us!

Of course, it goes without saying (but I’ll say it anyway) that, in order to represent God and the things of God accurately, we must be in His Word ourselves. How can we ever hope to teach our children what we do not possess?

*Do not hinder—
By overlooking his
relationship with
God.*

Teaching by Action

Yet Charlotte didn’t stop with just what we say to our children about God. She also reminded us parents that our actions can teach our children just as much as our words do.

Think of the child who has received false information about the Heavenly Father. Then “add to this, listless perfunctory prayers, idle discussions of Divine things in their presence, light use of holy words, few signs whereby the child can read that the things of God are more to his parents than any things of the world,

and the child is hindered, tacitly forbidden to ‘come unto Me,’— and this, often, by parents who in the depths of their hearts desire nothing in comparison with God.”

Though our hearts may be right, we may have some bad habits that are hindering our children from knowing God for Who He is. As Charlotte mentioned, have we slipped into the habit of same-old, same-old prayers, perhaps before meals or to start our school days? Yet we want our prayers to communicate the vibrancy of our own personal relationship with the Father.

Or have we fallen into the practice of casual sermon criticisms or religious clichés spoken without thinking while the children are listening? But in our hearts we want them to respect the things of God and value the teaching of His Word.

Let’s ask the Father to point out any words or actions that have crept into our lives and are misrepresenting Him. May our children know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have parents who “in the depths of their hearts desire nothing in comparison with God.”

For more see Volume 1, page 20.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“The most fatal way of despising the child falls under the third educational law of the Gospels; it is to overlook and make light of his natural relationship with Almighty God” (Vol. 1, p. 19).



“ ‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me,’ says the Saviour, as if that were the natural thing for the children to do, the thing they do when they are not hindered by their elders” (Vol. 1, pp. 19, 20).



“God does not make over the bringing up of children absolutely even to their parents, but that He works Himself, in ways which it must be our care not to hinder” (Vol. 3, p. 35).



“God does love and cherish the little children all day long” (Vol. 1, p. 20).



“It is as the mother gets wisdom liberally from above, that she will be enabled for this divine task” (Vol. 1, p. 348).

Chapter 15

As a Little Child

Children seem to have an inborn capacity to love and trust. Even my autistic daughter, who does not as readily demonstrate love and trust, every once in a while will give me a little glimpse that Mom holds a special place in her life.

We read a bedtime story every night when I am home, and usually she likes her personal space on the couch. She will sit next to me, but she pulls away if anything brushes up against her skin. However, I clearly remember one evening when I sat down with the book in hand and she deliberately sat close to me and even leaned against me.

It seems like a little thing, but I knew what a huge significance that gesture demonstrated about our relationship. I treasure that memory.

And I can't help but think that God treasures any gestures that our children put forth to demonstrate their growing relationships with Him.

Come Unto Me

“‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me,’ says the Saviour, as if that were the natural thing for the children to do, the thing they do when they are not hindered by their elders.”

In the previous chapter we talked about ways that we can hinder our children from coming to the Savior. I’m sure it is the desire of all our hearts that our children come at an early age to love and trust Jesus.

And just as our children demonstrate their love for us in simplistic and sometimes childish ways as they grow, they will probably be drawn to demonstrate their love for God in various ways as they grow in their relationships with Him.

By the way, don’t underestimate the depth that a young child can have in his relationship with God. Charlotte cautioned us against “the notion that the child can have no spiritual life until it please his elders to kindle the flame.”

*Do not hinder—
By overlooking his
relationship with
God.*

The thing we must be careful of is to make sure we show respect for those simple and childish expressions of devotion.

A Child’s Spiritual Life

Here are just a few areas for us to consider. Hopefully, this list will get us started thinking about the many ways that we can show respect to a child’s developing spiritual life.

- Prayer

Young children’s prayers can sometimes be amusing. But when we chuckle or laughingly relate his words to someone

else in his hearing, we are not showing respect for the child's communication with God.

- Worship

As children learn to participate in corporate worship, their early tries may catch our attention. Let's be careful to encourage their participation by honoring their efforts and their heart attitudes.

- Scripture Memory

Charlotte believed that young children are capable of memorizing long passages, and my experience over the years has confirmed this belief. Let's not undervalue their ability to memorize Scripture.

- Bible Reading

Charlotte also encouraged us not to limit the children's Bible lessons by using watered-down retellings. They can understand Bible accounts direct from Scripture.

- Answering Questions

When our children ask those inquisitive questions about spiritual things, let's do our best to give thoughtful and appropriate answers.

In fact, let's do all we can to encourage our children to sit close to the Savior, lean on Him, and keep developing a relationship of love and trust.

For more see Volume 1, pages 19 and 20.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“As the babe turns to his mother though he has no power to say her name, as the flowers turn to the sun, so the hearts of the children turn to their Saviour and God with unconscious delight and trust” (Vol. 1, p. 20).



“The child can read that the things of God are more to his parents than any things of the world” (Vol. 1, p. 20).



“Parents who in the depths of their hearts desire nothing in comparison with God” (Vol. 1, p. 20).



“This mischief lies in that same foolish undervaluing of the children, in the notion that the child can have no spiritual life until it please his elders to kindle the flame” (Vol. 1, p. 20).

Chapter 16

Common Sense & Good Intentions

As a young wife, I wanted to make each meal special. (That ideal lasted about one week, by the way.) So one evening I came up with this grand idea of creating a picnic on the living room floor. I would make egg salad sandwiches, and put a red-checked tablecloth on the floor, and it would be a wonderful, memorable meal.

Well, it was memorable. You see, I had never made egg salad before. Not to worry. I looked up the recipe in my illustrated cookbook. Only, I misread one small letter: instead of one teaspoon of pepper, I added one tablespoon of pepper.

Have you ever seen gray egg salad? It's not the most appetizing dish. I was able to force down only one bite. My brave husband politely ate two bites. Then we tossed the whole thing in the garbage and grabbed something else for supper.

I had good intentions and I used common sense in looking

for a recipe, but my common sense had not been educated in the basics of cooking. If I had learned a little more about pepper and its role in seasoning foods, that supposed tablespoon would have raised a red flag in my mind. As it was, my uneducated common sense hindered my good intentions.

“The reason why education effects so much less than it should effect is just this—that in nine cases out of ten, sensible good parents trust too much to their common sense and their good intentions.”

Common Sense

Was Charlotte saying that we shouldn't use common sense in teaching and training our children? No. She was saying that sometimes common sense isn't enough. We need to continue learning all we can.

The problem lies in “forgetting that common sense must be at the pains to instruct itself in the nature of the case.”

We cannot presume to already have all the knowledge and answers we need for every situation we may encounter. Educating our common sense will give us a great advantage. Certain principles are universal, yes, but learning more about specifics is wise.

Think about areas such as nutrition, first aid, safety precautions, dyslexia, the Internet, and allergies. We parents do well to educate ourselves rather than to rely wholly on the bits of common sense we possess.

*Common sense
must instruct itself.*

Good Intentions

We might have the best intentions to help our children, but if we are inadvertently working against the way God made them or against the way He has set up natural laws, we won't get very far.

“Well-intended efforts come to little if they are not carried on in obedience to divine laws.”

In Charlotte's day, many new and exciting discoveries were being made about how the mind and body work. Charlotte wanted to encourage parents to research those discoveries, to educate themselves, in order to apply that knowledge in providing the best possible education for their children.

We have so many opportunities and resources available to educate ourselves today! Just the fact that you have been reading and thinking about the chapters in this book shows where your heart is.

So keep your common sense and good intentions, but add in a heaping teaspoon, no, *tablespoon* of self-education. Your children will benefit from your commitment to keep learning, praying, and educating yourself as you seek to educate them.

For more see Volume 1, pages 37–41.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“In nine cases out of ten, sensible good parents trust too much to their common sense and their good intentions” (Vol. 1, p. 38).



“Common Sense; that is to say, everybody, or nearly everybody, agrees that certain ways of doing certain things are the best ways” (Vol. 4, Book 1, p. 59).



“Common sense must be at the pains to instruct itself in the nature of the case” (Vol. 1, p. 38).



“Well-intended efforts come to little if they are not carried on in obedience to divine laws” (Vol. 1, p. 38).

Chapter 17

Profitable Lines of Thinking

Don't you just love acrostics? Okay, so maybe "love" is an excessive word in this situation. But I really like acrostics! For some reason, the act of summarizing my thoughts on a selected subject, and having the added challenge of starting each line with a particular letter, is fun! (Those of you who would rather draw than play with words, work with me here.)

As this book comes to a close, I thought it would be helpful to finish in true Charlotte Mason style: with a narration. So I have taken the phrase "Thinking Love" and created an acrostic that summarizes the main concepts we've been thinking about throughout this book.

Here is your assignment. Jot down the key ideas that you recall about each statement line. (You artists can sketch the ideas, if you would rather draw than write.) Or, if you would like a real challenge, create your own acrostic that summarizes what you

have thought through and learned.

Approach this narration however it works best for you, but please take some time to solidify the ideas and the personal relations you have formed with them.

Keep Thinking

Obviously, in these short chapters we can only scratch the surface of what a thinking love should think about. But hopefully, the thoughts contained in this book have been beneficial. As Charlotte said, “Any sketch I can offer in this short compass must be very imperfect and very incomplete; but a hint here and there may be enough to put intelligent parents on profitable lines of thinking with regard to the education of their children.”

As you move into the future, I encourage you to continue down those profitable lines. “Mothers owe ‘a thinking love’ to their Children.”

A Thinking Love

The job of raising children is most important.

Help yourself do your job better by thinking things through.

In dealing with living beings, a method works better than a system.

Notice what may be causing your child to stumble, and remove it.

Know the meaning of *must*—both you and your child.

In physical matters, keep an eye on exercise, rest, meals, and fresh air.

Naturally educate by atmosphere, the discipline of good habits, and living ideas.

Guard against favoritism in the family.

Let your children have the best of Mother.

Oversee any care-givers, and deal with your child's character faults immediately.

Value your child's relationship with God.

Educate your common sense.

For more see Volume 1, pages 1–41.

Charlotte Mason Quotes

“Mothers work wonders once they are convinced that wonders are demanded of them” (Vol. 1, p. 44).



“There is nothing which a mother cannot bring her child up to” (Vol. 1, p. 105).



“It is necessary that the mother be always on the alert to nip in the bud the bad habit her children may be in the act of picking up” (Vol. 1, p. 118).



“Allow me to say once more, that I venture to write upon subjects bearing on home education with the greatest deference to mothers; believing, that in virtue of their peculiar insight into the dispositions of their own children, they are blest with both knowledge and power in the management of them which lookers-on can only admire from afar” (Vol. 1, p. 135).



“Mothers owe ‘a thinking love’ to their Children” (Vol. 1, p. 2).

About the Author



Sonya Shafer is married to her best friend, John, and lives near Atlanta, GA. With a passion to encourage moms in their homeschooling, she co-directs SimplyCharlotteMason.com and is a frequent [speaker at homeschool groups and conventions](#).

She has been using the Charlotte Mason method of homeschooling for more than fifteen years (two daughters graduated, two to go). One of her main goals in creating Simply Charlotte Mason and writing books is to communicate CM principles in a way that shows how practical and doable they are.

To minister to younger mothers and those dealing with special needs, Sonya shares her heart through [Intentional Parents](#) and her book [*This Anguishing Blessed Journey: A Mother's Faith Journal through Autism*](#).

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Teaching & Parenting



[Getting Started in Homeschooling](#)—A free e-book that helps you determine which approach to homeschooling will fit you and your family best, plus lots of practical tips for fostering a love of learning in your home.



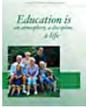
[Books & Things Seminar on DVD](#)—A close look at how good living books and the things around us help our children form personal relations and emotional bonds. And those bonds are what makes learning stick. A 4-DVD set with a 60-page seminar notebook that digs deeper into living books and narration.



[Smooth and Easy Days](#)—A free e-book that looks at Charlotte Mason's common-sense ideas and practical tips for cultivating good habits in your child's life. A great introduction to the concepts in [Laying Down the Rails](#).



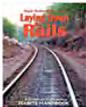
[The Early Years: A Charlotte Mason Preschool Handbook](#)—Charlotte’s sensible, gentle, and practical counsel to mothers of preschool children, presented in bite-size chunks with modern-day examples.



[Education Is . . .](#)—A free e-book that explains the basics of a Charlotte Mason education, one that includes the atmosphere of your home, the discipline of good habits, and the life-giving ideas that come from great books and methods.



[The All-Day Charlotte Mason Seminar on DVD](#)—Learn how to teach each school subject using Charlotte Mason methods. A 4-DVD set with a 64-page seminar notebook designed to give you the confidence and encouragement you need.



[Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook](#)—Here, compiled into one volume, are all the habits Charlotte mentioned in her writings with her thoughts and suggestions for cultivating each one. This work also includes Charlotte’s help for breaking bad habits, hundreds of inspiring quotes, and lots of practical tips.



[Laying Down the Rails Workshop](#) (DVD or CD)—The quick-start, how-to habits workshop that gives you the basic principles and quick overview of instilling good habits. Available with the *Laying Down the Rails* complete reference book or sold separately.



[Planning Your Charlotte Mason Education](#)—Takes the guesswork out of planning for your Charlotte Mason homeschool. In this book and DVD you'll find clear instructions and examples that walk you through 5 simple steps, from determining the Big Picture all the way down to planning your day.



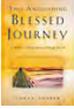
[A Charlotte Mason Education](#)—A short, practical overview of the Charlotte Mason Method written especially for the homeschooler. This is the book we learned CM from.



[Reaching Your Child's Heart](#) (Audio CD)—A mommy-to-mommy challenge about priorities in your homeschool. Draws six principles from Luke 1 that we can use to help us reach our children's hearts.



[Looking Past the Fear](#) (Audio CD)—Discusses five fears that most homeschooling moms face and gives practical, encouraging ideas to help them look past the fear and look to the Lord.



[This Anguishing Blessed Journey: A Mother's Faith Journal through Autism](#)—Sonya's spiritual journal recording how the Lord walked with her through the first year after diagnosing her daughter with autism. Filled with encouragement for anyone walking through a valley in life.

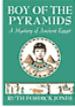


[Masterly Inactivity](#)—A free e-book that explores the freedom that can be found when we set boundaries and then allow our children to discover and learn within those boundaries. Discusses the Charlotte Mason principle of “wise and purposeful letting alone.”

History, Geography, Bible



[Genesis through Deuteronomy & Ancient Egypt: A Family Study Handbook](#)—This handbook walks you through the accounts of Adam to Moses, including a study of Ancient Egypt. It details Scripture passages, living books, Book of Centuries entries, narration ideas, geography ideas, additional assignments for older students, and optional hands-on activities for the whole family.



[Boy of the Pyramids](#)—The best living book we have found for younger children studying Ancient Egypt! This gentle mystery teaches so much about Ancient Egyptian culture, but in a way that is appropriate for children in grades 1–3.



[Letters from Egypt](#)—A fascinating living geography book from 1879 that will touch your mind, your imagination, and your heart.



[Jashub's Journal: An Old Testament Law Story](#)—A living Old Testament law story combined with a Charlotte Mason-style Bible study. Both designed to highlight God's wisdom in the laws He made.



[Joshua through Malachi & Ancient Greece](#)—Another helpful resource in our popular Family Study Handbook series, this handbook walks your family (grades 1-12) through the accounts of Joshua to the end of the Old Testament events, including a study of Ancient Greece and the geography of the Middle East.



[Wisdom for Life: A Proverbs Bible Study](#)—A CM-style Bible study that walks your student (grades 7-12) through discovering the wisdom in Proverbs about eight important topics.



[Matthew through Acts & Ancient Rome](#)—The third module in our popular Family Study Handbook series, this handbook walks your family (grades 1-12) through the accounts of the Life of Christ and the Early Church, including a study of Ancient Rome and the geography of the Mediterranean region.



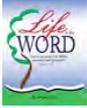
[Foundations in Romans: A Romans Bible Study](#)—Teaches your 7–12 grade student how to do an inductive study of a Bible book. Your child will read through the book of Romans chapter by chapter, identifying main ideas, defining key words, looking for comparison and contrast, narrating each paragraph, and more.



[Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation & Epistles: A Family Study Handbook](#)—This handbook walks you through the famous men of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation, including the geography of Europe and Asia, as well as several Epistles. It details Scripture passages, living books, Book of Centuries entries, narration ideas, geography ideas, additional assignments for older students, and optional hands-on activities for the whole family.



[GOAL Bible Study Journal](#)—Walks your family through many of the epistles of the Bible with an emphasis on application.

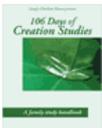


[Life in the Word](#)—Teaches your older students the principles of inductive Bible study and how to accurately and effectively do a word study, a topical study, a book study, a character study, a narrative study, and more.



[Discovering Doctrine: A Personal Bible Study](#)—Another CM-style study that helps students (grades 7–12) discover what the Bible says about ten major doctrines.

Math & Science



[106 Days of Creation Studies](#)—All the details of the living books, nature study, science experiments, Bible verses, and additional assignments that one family used to study creation with all their children (grades 1-6) together.



[Hours in the Out-of-Doors: A Charlotte Mason Nature Study Handbook](#)—Explains all about nature study in Charlotte’s own words. Full of inspiring quotes and lots of practical tips!



[Jack’s Insects](#)—A classic living science book used in Charlotte Mason’s schools for grades 4-6. Learn fascinating facts about insects as you follow Jack and Maggie’s adventures inside Jack’s new insect book.



[Outdoor Secrets](#)—A delightful collection of nature stories for the young and young at heart. Discover the secrets that may be hiding in your own backyard.



[The Outdoor Secrets Companion](#)—Additional learning ideas that correspond with the stories in [Outdoor Secrets](#). Includes nature study, additional living science books, beautiful poetry, and nature notebook suggestions.



[Your Business Math Series](#)—Children practice their math skills while running a pretend pet store, book store, or sports store. Great “living math”!

Language Arts



[Hearing and Reading, Telling and Writing: A Charlotte Mason Language Arts Handbook](#)—Tells you exactly what Charlotte said about good literature, vocabulary, teaching your child how to read, narration, composition, English grammar, and more.



[Delightful Reading](#)—A complete reading curriculum kit that faithfully reproduces Charlotte Mason’s method of teaching reading. Uses sight words and word-building, rich reading selections, word and letter tiles, creative sentences, a word notebook, and more. Now reading lessons can be delightful!



[Spelling Wisdom](#)—Our CM-style spelling curriculum that teaches today’s 6,000 most frequently used words presented in the writings of great men and women of history. Available in both American and British spelling versions!

Physical Education



[The Swedish Drill Teacher](#)—A free e-book that illustrates the technique of Swedish Drill that Charlotte Mason used in her schools for physical education, just in case you’re curious.



A Thinking Love
Not an indulgent love.
Not a lazy love.
A thinking love.

A thinking love isn't content to follow the crowd and do what is easiest.
A thinking love considers, contemplates, and intentionally does
what is best for her child.

Charlotte Mason stated, "Mothers owe a 'thinking love' to their children."

Nurture your thinking love by considering

- *how goals shape methods;*
- *the best ways to teach a child the meaning of must;*
- *which priorities help Mother thrive;*
- *how to respect a child's relationship with God;*
- *the importance of common sense and consistency.*

Filled with encouraging wisdom and inspiring quotes,
this book is sure to keep you thinking and loving
in your calling as a mother.

Simply
Charlotte Mason
.com