**Charlotte Mason: Education Philosopher a hundred years ahead of her time.**
Hello- I’m Bruce McNeice – a former school Principal, Homeschool Dad, and education consultant. My passion is to impart courage to parents, and to equip and support parents in their God-given role of teaching and training their children to reach their full potential, and live an abundant life.

Before discussing how to implement the Homeward Curriculum, I want to introduce a profound thinker in education, and to share with you some of the principles that are positively transforming children around the world. We’ve seen the wise teaching of this person at work in our own homeschooling family and also in homeschool co-op groups and classrooms.

Charlotte Mason (1842-1923), was a British reformer and pioneer in the field of education. Her concept of ‘living books and real-life experience’, as a foundation for educating, shaped many of the schools of Great Britain in the early 1900's.

She stood against the tide of education systems based on the Prussian model, where the purpose of education was economic and pragmatic. The real goal of the conventional education system of her day (as it still is today), was to create a compliant workforce. Whereas Charlotte Mason advocated a *'liberal education for all'*.

What does that mean? In antiquity, the term 'liberal arts' meant the education befitting a free man, rather than a slave. The education befitting nobility, which was quite different from the education for the masses.

In the late 1800s, it was the powerful industrialists who funded and controlled the politics behind the compulsory mass education system, and in their view, it was most beneficial for the sake of the economy, that the masses should receive a basic education – reading, writing and arithmetic, while only those in the ruling classes received a high quality broad cultural education, entering into what is called 'the great conversation' with the leading thinkers, the great cultural minds of the past. These elite students would become the thinkers and leaders of society (mostly taught at home by tutors) whereas it was good for the rest of the masses to just get the basics, to be taught to sit in rows, and work to the bell. Then through the manipulative power of competition, grade-scores, and prizes – they would grow to be most concerned with performing for the test, rather than to learn for interest's sake and to develop one's powers of mind, heart, and spirit. Even amongst the commoner’s education, there were class divisions, so that those who did not show much academic ability were streamed into trade schools because industry requires both technical and clerical workers.

Charlotte Mason was abhorred by this practice of streaming (which is still very prevalent today). Her concept of 'a liberal education for all', meant that she wanted all children to have both a practical training and a broad cultural education, to be able to think and problem-solve, to grapple with ideas; for ideas have consequences. Great ideas can lead to great outcomes, and flawed ideas inevitably lead to less than great outcomes. The Christian philosopher, Francis Schaeffer explained that our ideas and basic presuppositions about life have a profound effect on what we do, the choices we make, and how we live our lives.

Through studying hundreds of children and how they learnt, and through understanding how the human brain works, Charlotte Mason devised education methods that allow every child to succeed. Rather than a class system designed for economic purposes, she had a vision to help every child grow to all round excellence in head, heart and hand. She believed that the tradesman could also be cultured and academically proficient; and the cultural academic student should also develop practical abilities, moral character, and a down-to-earth common sense. Mason also trained her teachers in outdoor education, nature study and survival skills using General Baden Powel’s army manuals, and she influenced the General to start the Scouting movement.

Keenly interested in the latest science on brain structure, Charlotte Mason's conclusions were 100 years ahead of her time about understanding how the brain works and what that means for education. Her ideas have been confirmed by the latest brain research, only available because of high powered electron-microscopes and modern brain activity scanning equipment. Charlotte Mason never believed IQ was an unchanging set state, and she explained the concept of the brain's neuroplastic abilities a hundred years before the term was invented. She taught that a person's thoughts, mental pictures and attitudes could physically alter the structure of the brain, so that through mental exercise developing new habitual lines of thought, even a person with a dull, fuzzy, broken brain can be helped to mend and improve in intellectual ability. She foresaw what scientists have recently discovered, the whole field of 'neuroplasticity' – i.e. the brain's ability to morph and renew itself by building new nerve pathways through specific mental exercise.

In the early 1900s, through her organisation, the Parents National Education Union (or PNEU), there were schools, individuals, parents, and others who adopted her principles of education, not only in England, but in several other countries around the world. Newspaper Archives show there were at least two of her PNEU schools operating in Australia in the 1930s, plus a number of families learning by correspondence.

Beside the legacy of the students themselves, Charlotte Mason left behind a six-volume set of books covering all aspects of her educational ideas. It also covers pertinent issues of moral, intellectual and physical development. During Miss Mason’s early training as a teacher, she was forming her own unique ideas of how to put into practice her understanding of the Christian concept of children being valued as precious 'persons' (never to be despised) because they are 'made in the image of God'. From the 1870s onward, she worked tirelessly to inspire others in how to help children fulfil their potential.

Whereas the British nobility employed highly trained educators to tutor their children at home, Miss Mason became increasingly aware of the generally poor standard of education provided by untrained governesses in middle class households, so she wrote a book called 'Home Education' which was published in 1886. She was really the first home-schooling or home-education consultant, and went on to publish a regular newsletter called *The Parents’ Review*, by which she trained parents, nannies, and governesses how to educate children at home.

Although her methods were widely assimilated in both public and private schools in Britain and in the United States, schools eventually abandoned the Christian principles on which they were founded. Her many books and methods of teacher training were forgotten (in the public-school system) primarily because they were openly Christian in viewpoint. By the 1960’s, education had become increasingly secular, and her extraordinarily effective methods of education began to be overlooked in favour of more ‘progressive’ forms. However, her ideas have had a resurgence amongst home-educators and Charlotte Mason Schools have been established again in a number of countries around the world.

It is encouraging, though not surprising, that there is a growing body of contemporary research showing that Charlotte Mason’s methods line up with research from the top performing education systems in the world (such as in Finland's school system, the Ron Clark Schools, and until recently, some of her principles have been seen in Australia’s highest performing school – the Sydney Grammar School); and yet it is based on age-old truths and common sense that unfortunately do not seem to be very common.

So, our Homeward Education Program has been inspired by Charlotte Mason’s methods. In the upcoming sessions, we will explore how to implement her methods to ensure a successful home-education journey.

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But before you go – I would like to briefly pray a blessing over you.

Lord God - awesome creator of the universe, you came to set the captives free; and to give us abundant life. So, I ask your blessing over these dear folk as they launch out on their learning journey. Help them to comprehend the breadth and depth of your love for them, and open their eyes to this amazing learning journey in pursuit of all goodness, truth and beauty. Bless them, in Jesus name amen.